

*NEW CHRIST:
PRIESTLY CONFIGURATION*

CHARLES ANANG

Cover art: *The Crucifixion*

Fra Angelico (1387-1455)

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To our Blessed Mother, St. John Vianney,
St. Pio of Pietrelcina, and St. Josemaría Escrivá

Nil Obstat

Rev. Fausto Bailo

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Preface & Acknowledgements

The impulse to write this book came first from my spiritual director, but subsequently also from my seminary rector. I pray that this be simply the work of the Holy Spirit, attempted “because of the confidence I have in the Lord, confidence that he will help me to say *something*, on account of the great need of many people...”² I am simply sharing what has been passed on to me from spiritual directors and learned from retreat conferences, books read, and experience gained from guiding others, and from many mistakes made.

In writing this manuscript, the author’s initial sense was that this book should be addressed to laity, consecrated persons, and priests, especially as it was derived from talks originally given to laity and religious sisters. A wise mentor counselled that each book should have a specific readership, and an initial discernment pointed to priests, given their important role within the Church, as the primary audience. Then a deeper Ignatian discernment led to a key insight that included the first discernment: that the first half of this book applied to everyone as a child of God by Baptism, which also serves as a foundation for the second half, applied more specifically and intensively to seminarians and priests.

Thus, there are two volumes to this work: *New Christ: Divine Filiation* is the foundation for this second volume, *New Christ: Priestly Configuration*. Let us review this baptismal priesthood foundation of the first volume (*Divine Filiation*) for our discussion of the ministerial priesthood. The first volume addresses the recovery of one’s identity as a child of God, with a filial relation with the Father through the Holy Spirit; perfecting the two levels of human and divine and living the three loves of the Church, Mary, and the Eucharist (the two Mothers give birth and the Eucharist assimilates us to Christ); and finally living the dispositions of Christ (the human virtues; peace of heart and the present moment to be led by the Holy Spirit; joy, a sign of presence of the Holy Spirit; and the Trinity’s spirituality of communion).

² St. John of the Cross, Prologue to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* 3, quoted in Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God: Soundings from St. John of the Cross*, London: Hodder and Staughton, 1995.

This second volume, *New Christ: Priestly Configuration*, now addresses primarily priests and seminarians. Yet, much of this second volume applies to all baptized and consecrated persons. It describes the deeper configuration to Christ the High Priest and Shepherd, to become “another Christ,” in three Parts. *New Christ: Priestly Configuration* differs from most books currently published for the priesthood. First, as mentioned, it builds upon the baptismal identity as a child of God (*sons in the one Son*), which sets the goal of becoming, as St. Josemaría Escrivá teaches, “another Christ, Christ himself” (*alter Christus, Christus ipse*). Second, the themes treated here have not generally been covered in books on the priesthood: a comprehensive prayer program, the Eucharist in the life of the priest, the importance of spiritual direction and linking it to the sacrament of Confession, spiritual warfare (discernment of spirits), the interior journey into God, seminary years, priestly years, new evangelization, and three chapters on the last things and angels. The goal of this book is to facilitate the assimilation to Christ, already objectively at Ordination, but subjectively in a life-long configuration to take on the mind and heart of Christ.

Sources

Three notes should be made regarding the sources to which this book has recourse. First, this book in certain sections has relied heavily on sources (e.g., Timothy Gallagher, Thomas Dubay, Francis Fernandez-Carvajal, Carmelite authors, Yves Congar, Jean Danielou, Bishop Attila Miklósházy, etc.) and *I wish to emphasize strongly that, where indicated, these are their insights and not mine, to give them their due credit.* Second, as Hans Urs von Balthasar teaches, it is important to address the contemporary divorce between theology and spirituality-mysticism. Thus, while this book does include some theological scholarship, it seeks to interpret it through the lens of our living mystical tradition, especially the saints, whose lives Pope Benedict XVI calls “theology in action.” Third, while this book seeks to discern the Holy Spirit in the voice of contemporary authors or sources (e.g., Pope Benedict XVI, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jacques Philippe, Vatican II documents and the International Theological Commission), it would be gravely remiss to neglect the perennial legacy of Augustine, Aquinas, Teresa of Jesus, Newman, or Jordan Aumann, because they are of earlier eras.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted above all to my spiritual directors, as well as to friends, especially Maria and Therese De Manche, Joan Tardif, and Yvonne Kam, all of whom have followed this process with their loving prayers and support. Within this group, Linda Beairsto has opened my eyes to a vast new readership audience I had not considered and supported the publishing work, especially by introducing me to John O. Burdett, and, above all, Karla Congson, who supervised the self-publishing process. I would like to draw attention in particular to five persons or groups. First, Fr. Timothy Gallagher encouraged me to proceed towards publication, and gave his invaluable direction to do this along with suggestions for key changes to the manuscript. Second, I am also indebted to the archdiocese of Toronto for its imprimatur (Thomas Cardinal Collins and Fr. Ivan Camilleri) and its theological censor, Fr. Fausto Bailo, for his kind work. Third, I also owe a debt of gratitude to a number of authors who have kindly reviewed sections summarizing aspects of their works or thought (Cardinal Ouellet, Fr. Timothy Gallagher, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa) and knowledgeable authorities on St. John of the Cross and the Eucharist. Finally, I wish to thank Katheryn Trainor for the immense labour of reviewing the manuscript twice, along with her many excellent suggestions and her competent editing. I also wish to acknowledge a debt I cannot repay to my two theses directors, Karl Cardinal Becker, S.J., and Fr. Gilles Pelland, S.J..

Outline

This book is directed towards the formation of the priest as “another Christ” (*alter Christus*) by looking to the paradigm of Christ. As mentioned, a first volume elaborates upon three main aspects that prepare for His ministry: Trinitarian origin and background, incarnational form, growth, and interior dispositions. The three main Parts in this volume are: (I) Growth in Christ— Five Tools; (II) Priestly Mission in Christ: seminary years; priestly years; apostle in the new evangelization; and (III) New Christ’s Horizon of Eternity: restoring the eschatological vision of Paul and John, review of various last things, and the work of the good angels and the attacks of the fallen angels.

Part I: Nazareth: Growth in Christ (“He grew in wisdom and stature”). First, Raniero Cantalamessa argues that prayer to the Father is the heart (centre of gravity) of Christ, that we find in the Gospels that Christ puts into practice during the day what He is given at night. So, the heart of the new Christ’s life too is prayer, being so foundational that this chapter presents a program of prayer for the priest (Chapter 1: The New Christ at Prayer).

Second, the priest’s life and ministry must have strong order, with guidelines and especially a plan of life, and we have added a section on concretely living the Eucharist (Chapter 2: Priestly Order and Living the Eucharist).

Third, combined with prayer, we understand that God normally guides us through others (mediation), and spiritual direction therefore is a privileged gift for those who have good spiritual directors. Experience also manifests the great power for spiritual growth by maintaining strongly the twin pillars of the Eucharist and Confession (Chapter 3: Spiritual Direction and Confession).

Fourth, besides the basic components of good order, a prayer program, and regular spiritual direction and Confession, two other great tools in the Western Church are worth highlighting. First, Christ faced the enemy and priests experience spiritual warfare. Knowledge of the Ignatian charism can be very fruitful for daily life, as it guides us in varied ways: discernment of

spirits and the Examen Prayer (Chapter 4: Discernment of Spirits (Ignatian Charism)). Fifth, some knowledge of the stages of the interior life, especially as elaborated by St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross, offer us something of the path, pitfalls, and destiny of each soul (Chapter 5: The Interior Journey to God (Carmelite charism)).

Part II: Priestly Mission in Christ (“I have come to cast fire upon the earth”).

The first chapter in Part II deals with the preparation for Ordination, a first step towards configuration to Christ the Shepherd during seminary formation (Chapter 6: Preparation: Seminary Years (Christ forming the apostles)). Then we look at deepening that configuration subjectively (*ex opere operantis*) in the post-ordination years of ministry (Chapter 7: Ministry: Priestly Years (Christ’s mission)). Both chapters are drawn from the author’s personal experience in formation and in the priesthood, and are thus intended to be very practical and concrete. It is completed by the priest’s role in becoming an apostle of the new evangelization that is spear-headed by the Holy Spirit (Chapter 8: Crown: Apostle of the New Evangelization (Christ’s new apostle)).

Part III: Horizon of Eternity (“I am the Alpha and the Omega”).

There is an urgent need to restore what Yves Congar calls a lack of “*le sens eschatologique*” (the horizon of eternity). We are inclined to regard eternity as an appendix to our lives, when it is both the surpassing goal and dynamism that drives history. Thus, the new Christ must set anew his mission against the horizon of eternity, with a supernatural outlook (Chapter 9: The New Christ’s Mission in the Light of Eternity). Second, the new Christ also discerns anew Christ as the “Alpha and Omega,” as the goal of all eschatology. He sees Christ as the key to both eschatology at death and at the Eschaton, for He is the “Last One” (Chapter 10: The New Christ and the Last Things). Third, the new Christ recognizes that the good angels have as second mission the assistance of man in creation and redemption, and joins him in spiritual warfare against the fallen angels (Chapter 11: Ministry of Good Angels and Warfare with Fallen Angels).

BACKGROUND

ADDRESSING CRISIS:

RECOVERING PRIESTLY IDENTITY AS *ALTER CHRISTUS*

Pope Francis recently enunciated a well-known principle: a renewal in the Church begins with a renewal in the priesthood. Earlier, in an inspired act, Pope John Paul II called for, and then set, the Church firmly on a course for a “new evangelization.”³ And it is generally understood that any renewal of the Church, including the new evangelization, must find its impetus in a renewal first in the priesthood; hence, after the Second Vatican Council, the 1971 Synod on the Ministerial Priesthood (and Justice in the World), the 1990 Synod on the Formation of Priests, and the 2009-2010 Year for Priests.

But signs of a malaise in the priesthood have abounded in our times. The period following Vatican II saw a mass exodus of priests from the priesthood, along with a plummeting of priestly vocations, and even now the new *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (document on seminary formation) was revised in part because of the continuing large number of applications by priests for laicization. Even the good measures taken to address the current clergy sexual abuse scandal are only addressing the symptoms and not the cause. While steps are being taken to renew the structure (e.g., transparency in clergy abuse and a new *Ratio Fundamentalis*), there is need to address the very foundations— theological, spiritual, and pastoral. For this crisis in the priesthood naturally has consequences on the Church at large.

Above all, there is need to recover priestly identity. The 2013 edition of *The Directory on the Ministry and Life of the Priest* reiterates the assertion of the centrality of priestly identity, quoting Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI’s words to the Congregation of the Clergy in 2012, “the theme of priestly identity is

³ Pope John Paul II first employed the term, “new evangelization,” on March 9, 1983 to the bishops’ council of the Latin American churches in Haiti, and the apostolic exhortation *Christi laici* (1988) summarizes many of his ideas on it. The theme is spelled out in greater detail in two major papal documents, including his encyclical on the Church’s missionary activity, *Redemptoris missio*. See Avery Dulles, “Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization,” *Church and Society* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 87-102.

crucial to the exercise of the ministerial priesthood, now and in the future.”⁴ But this centrality of priestly identity raises the question, what is the identity of the priest? It appears that some today ask whether the commonly-held paradigm of the priest as “another Christ” is archaic, if not already passé. Robert Cardinal Sarah expressed this conviction on May 25, 2019, in Paris:

My dear friends, I am convinced that at the heart of the crisis of the Church is a crisis of the priesthood, a crisis of priests. If the cathedral is collapsing, it is because priestly identity has collapsed first. We have taken priests’ identity away from them. We have made them think they must be businessmen, efficient workers, active and present everywhere at every minute. But the priest is fundamentally a continuation among us of the presence of Christ. He is essentially an adorer, a man who holds himself constantly under God’s gaze. He must not be defined by what he does but by what he is. He is ipse Christus, Christ himself.⁵

It is proposed here that two primary elements are needed for addressing the crisis in the priesthood: I. Recovering priestly identity as *Alter Christus*; and II. Understanding that recovering this priestly identity is only the beginning; it must be completed by attaining a subjective assimilation to Christ: that beyond the objective priestly powers received at Ordination (*ex opere operato*), there must also be subjective, continued assimilation to Christ (*ex opere operantis*). III. We also include three traits that characterize the priest who is truly configured to Christ the High Priest.

I. Responding to the Loss of Priestly Identity as Alter Christus

A concrete illustration of the consequences of the obscuring of priestly identity can be found after Vatican II, when during the period of 1964 to 1997, there were 60,126 defections from the priesthood and a sharp decline in vocations.⁶ Sparked by the mass exodus of priests, a theological

⁴ Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in the Conference Organized by the Congregation for the Clergy, March 12, 2010, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100312_clero_en.html.

⁵ Robert Cardinal Sarah, Conference, May 25, 2019, *The Catholic World Report*, accessed June 24, 2019, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/06/21/cardinal-sarah-we-must-rebuild-the-cathedral-we-do-not-need-to-invent-a-new-church/>.

⁶ *Osservatore Romano* 13/20 August 1997; *Seminarium*, XXXIX (1999), No. 4, 646.

examination of priestly ministry was undertaken at the beginning of this crisis by the International Theological Commission through a subcommittee, whose report was approved by the plenary session in 1970 as a working document to be transmitted to the Synod of Bishops.⁷ The study concluded that this crisis that consisted of numerous defections from the priesthood, the fall in the number of vocations, and the conflicts between bishops and priests,⁸ had to do with the very concept of the priesthood; with the identity of the priest. While it notes that this crisis of identity in the priest arose in part from a number of sociological causes, such as changes in mentality (e.g., a shift in emphasis to the common priesthood), it insists that “the study of the *theological reasons properly so-called* for the crisis of priestly identity is much more decisive and instructive.”⁹

Fr. Thomas McGovern, in a chapter in his fine work, *Priestly Identity: A Study in the Theology of the Priesthood*, entitled “Priestly Identity— other Christs,” gives a substantial analysis of the elements that make up the identity of the priest as “*alter Christus*” (“another Christ”): he is called personally by Christ as were the apostles; he has a sacred character by which he acts in Christ’s power; he continues the work of God the Father in generating spiritual children; he is configured to Christ such that he can act “in the person of Christ.” Christ Himself is offering cult to the Father and gathering the Father’s children; the priest images Christ as an icon, as the incarnate Christ images the Father; all this objective configuration must be completed by a subjective assimilation to Christ. This configuration allows him to act “in the name of the Church,” for he too is the bridegroom of the Church; and this configuration should be expressed in his prayerfulness, devotion in the liturgy, and love of the people.¹⁰

⁷ *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents, 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 3-87.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. This first document, however, despite its contributions as an historical survey and restoring the connection to Christ, does not prove to be as suitable an instrument for the purposes of fostering spiritual renewal of the identity of the priest.

¹⁰ Thomas J. McGovern, *Priestly Identity: A Study in the Theology of the Priesthood* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 68-96.

A. Criteria for a Fruitful Priestly Identity for Renewal in the Priesthood

To avoid repeating errors that led to the post-Vatican II exodus, and so that we follow a path that leads to a renewal that truly nourishes God’s flock, let us establish criteria based on lessons drawn from the path taken after Vatican II. Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger both identified some errors. John Paul II found the sources of the “defections” from the priesthood in “anaemic spirituality, theological dissent, and deficient formation”:

The causes of this painful phenomenon are multiple, and it will be necessary to face up to them with vigour, especially those that can be traced back to a process of spiritual atrophy or to an attitude of corrosive dissent. Vocations are not born in these environments. We should also keep in mind that it is not by diminishing the formative and qualitative requirements of the apostle that a more effective and incisive evangelizing action will be realized, but quite the contrary. The “memory” of the Church, regarding, for example, the patron Saints of Europe, constitutes a significant lesson in this regard.¹¹

Cardinal Ratzinger, at the opening of the 1990 Synod of Bishops, attributed the post-Vatican II crisis in the priesthood primarily to old Reformation arguments: “The old arguments of the sixteenth-century Reformation, together with more recent findings of modern biblical exegesis— which moreover were nourished by the presuppositions of the Reformation— acquired a certain plausibility, and Catholic theology was unable to respond to them adequately.”¹²

We suggest, in summary fashion, four criteria for a true path of renewal. First, in light of Cardinal Ratzinger’s distinction of a false “principle of discontinuity” (or rupture) from the true renewal that promotes the “principle of continuity,”¹³ we seek to maintain continuity with Tradition

¹¹ John Paul II, Address, 11 October 1985, quoted in McGovern, 9.

¹² J. Ratzinger, Address, 1 October 1990, in *Osservatore Romano*, 28 October 1990, quoted in McGovern, 10.

¹³ In his 2005 talk to the Roman Curia, Pope Benedict XVI most notably decried the “hermeneutic of discontinuity,” but he had already begun doing so much earlier, as in the *Ratzinger Report*, where he distinguished between the true spirit of the Council from false

and the Magisterium for a true “development of doctrine.” As St. Vincent of Lérins teaches, doctrine is like a living organism, such that its essence is already there in embryo, but develops to its full stature while remaining what it always was.¹⁴

A second criterion to underscore in light of recent trends is that of the path of faith. We strive to see the divine dimension of the mystery of the priesthood, analogous to the Church that “cannot be comprehended through sociological, psychological or historical methods” but requires faith to see her mystery:

As supernatural mystery, the Church can be accepted only through faith. An act of faith is needed to approach any understanding of the Church. Since its deepest essence is a matter of revelation, one will accept it only because of God’s authority. It is not evident, it cannot be comprehended through sociological, psychological or historical methods....

The customary scandal in the visible Church usually manifests a certain lack of faith. Happy are those who are not scandalized in the kenosis of the Incarnate Lord who continues His kenosis in His Church (cf. Mt 11:6). On the other hand, those who take into account only the invisible Church, do not have the right faith, or do not take the Incarnation seriously. In other words, to believe in God means to look for Him in the Body of Christ.¹⁵

Cardinal Ratzinger proscribes one such case, the sociological model of the Church, such as the middle-European *wir sind Kirche* (“we are the Church”), that emphasizes the democratization of the Church’s structures and analyzes Church participation in political rather than spiritual terms.¹⁶

Third, beyond the failure to incorporate faith is a failure to incorporate the mystical dimension. Hans Urs von Balthasar diagnoses the fundamental

interpretations (J. Ratzinger, *Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1975).

¹⁴ St. Vincent of Lérins, First Instruction, Cap. 23: PL 50, 667-668; Friday of 27th Week in Ordinary Time, OOR, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, New York: Catholic Publ. Co., 1975, 363-364.

¹⁵ Attila Miklósházy, “The Church as Mystery” (Handout for *Ecclesiology* Course, Toronto School of Theology at University of Toronto, 1996), Ch. 4, p. 1.

¹⁶ Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88-91.

crisis of contemporary theology as arising from the impoverishing divorce between theology and sanctity-spirituality during the Middle Ages. The neglect of the mystical and spiritual dimension makes of theology a pure scholarship of the mind that does not give fire and light.¹⁷ He prescribes a full approach, based on scholarship, but one that incorporates the mystical dimension.

A fourth criterion is to find an image or identity of the priest that truly inspires the priest to follow Christ and give his life for his flock. James T. O'Connor's critique of Karl Rahner's eschatology is instructive. He believes that, Karl Rahner, to protect the transcendence of God and thus avoid a "naïve realism," made eschatological realities like heaven so vague and "amorphous" that we can neither relate to them in our imagination and intellect, nor provide sufficient motivation for our will.

A danger of all such spiritualizing tendencies... is that they deprive the imagination and the conceptualizing intellect of any object upon which to focus and nourish themselves. This deprivation ultimately influences the will. Since the intellect has nothing concrete to offer the will as a motive for action, the volitional faculty will lack motivation sufficient to move it toward the future. As a result, it will be directed even more naturally toward what is immediate and tangible. Likewise, the virtue of hope is attenuated since it is given as a goal something that can only be indistinctly apprehended. This impoverishment of the imagination, intellect, and ultimately of the will becomes, in its own way, a subtle form of Gnosticism. It calls into doubt the value of the specific, the concrete and the material, thus running counter to the Biblical tradition that depicts the future in attractive material as well as spiritual images.¹⁸

What is required instead is a concrete image that can truly galvanize the imagination and the desires of the heart of the priest. The author can think of no greater identity than "another Christ," the Beloved of the Father, to be Christ's other self.

¹⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology: The Word Made Flesh*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 181-209.

¹⁸ James T. O'Connor, *Land of the Living: A Theology of the Last Things* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1992), 37.

B. Ecclesial Documents Employ or Presuppose “*Alter Christus*”

When we examine the recent documents of the Church on the priesthood, it is evident that they presuppose or employ the identity of the priest as *alter Christus*, which we find captured, for example, in Pope Benedict XVI’s *The Priesthood: Spiritual Thoughts Series*.¹⁹ An examination of the documents by the recent Popes and the Congregation of the Clergy clearly confirms this fundamental identity, whether by actual use of the term, *alter Christus*, or by the content of that term (e.g., configured to Christ the High Priest, sharing same thoughts and sentiments, acting in the person of Christ, sharing the same mission, representing Christ).

There is no question that the identity of the priest as “another Christ” is either directly taught or often presupposed in the Church’s documents on the priesthood. Cardinal Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, captures this teaching succinctly: “... the priest is not only an *alter Christus*, another Christ, he is truly *ipse Christus*, Christ himself. By the Eucharistic consecration, he is totally configured to Christ, he is so to speak “transubstantiated,” transformed, changed into Christ.”²⁰

In summary, we need a priestly identity that is in continuity with the deposit of faith, not divorced from faith and mysticism, and that can inspire. To attain these characteristics and avoid deviations of the post-Vatican II years, let us again heed Vatican II’s call to “return to the sources” to find a priestly identity that is capable of renewing the priesthood, hereby starting out once more from the three pillars enunciated in *Dei verbum* (Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium). This examination presupposes accepted terminology by the

¹⁹ “The relationship of the priest with God, remaining in his truth, binds him to the Truth who is Christ (see Jn 14:6)... In virtue of the sacrament [holy orders], he is able to enter into contact with the person of Christ and to speak and act in his name, representing to the world this power of love through which the priesthood of Christ finds expression. Since he carries out his ministry *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ), the priest continues the saving actions of Christ, “breaking the Bread of life and remitting sins” (Homily, May 3, 2009)... As an *alter Christus* (other Christ), the sacrifice that the priest celebrates and the absolution he gives are grounded on this Otherness that passes through him, by means of the sacrament, and makes him “a humble instrument pointing to Christ, who offers himself in sacrifice for the salvation of the world” (Address, March 18, 2009, emphasis added). Pope Benedict, *The Priesthood (Spiritual Thought Series)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2009), x-xi.

²⁰ Robert Cardinal Sarah, Conference, May 25, 2019, *The Catholic World Report*.

Church's Tradition and Magisterium: the priest acts *in persona Christi Capitis*— in the person of Christ the Head— objectively through ordination (*ex opere operato*), and subjectively through holiness (*ex opere operantis*).

II. Recovery of the Ex Opere Operantis Assimilation to Christ

A first manuscript, *New Christ: Divine Filiation*, has depicted the Holy Spirit (promised Gift of the Old Testament) leading Jesus and being “collected” in Him to be released to the world. As the Holy Spirit guided Christ and was collected in Him, the Holy Spirit guides the priest to daily holiness (*ex opere operantis*) and His powers are “collected” in the priest by virtue of his priestly sacramental powers (*ex opere operato*). That is, as Jesus' Baptism had a permanent change as well as a continued subjective growth, like that of a seed, so too the “incarnating” of a priest has a one-time permanent configuration at priestly Ordination and a progressive sanctification (*ex opere operantis*).²¹

The terms *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis* derive from sacramental theology. The meaning of these Latin terms becomes easier if we think of the etymology of “opus” (e.g., as a musical work), and “operate” (to do or accomplish). Then *ex opere operato* is literally translated as “from the work having been done.” This means that any validly ordained priest, by the very “act of celebrating a Mass,” even if he has been laicized or is in a state of mortal sin, does so *validly*, and this enables the people of God to receive graces no matter the state of the priest. But *ex opere operantis* is literally translated as “from the work of the one doing the work,” referring to the spiritual and moral state of the priest. This means that the *fruitfulness* of the effects of the Mass on the people depends significantly on the holiness of the priest. The distinction is between the “validity” and the “fruitfulness” of the sacraments. In sum, the assimilation to Christ is a two-fold assimilation: objectively through a one-time priestly Ordination, and subjectively through growth in a life-long conformation to Christ.

²¹ We use the word “incarnate” in an analogical sense, justifying this “license” because of the parallel being made between Christ and the *alter Christus* (including analogous Trinitarian origin, growth in Christ, etc.). Theologically, we say there is one, and only one, Incarnation, the Word becoming flesh. The very word, *alter Christus*, of using “Christ” to denote the priest, employed by the Church, suggests that this license is permissible.

Greatest Problem is Exclusive Reliance on Ordination Powers (ex opere operato)

But the temptation within the priesthood is to rely solely on the years of seminary formation and on priestly ordination, and to carry on through the priesthood without serious desire for continued growth, what we call “ongoing formation.” As “another Christ,” the priest has to see that there was continued growth throughout Christ’s life: the Holy Spirit formed Him in virtue during the Nazareth years, led Him into the desert for forty days of preparation, fortified Him by an intense prayer life, until He was led to his ultimate sacrifice. Concretely, this continued growth can be retarded when the priest struggles without a spiritual director, an ordered prayer life, an intensely Eucharistic fervor, “frequent and regular” Confession, continued theological study or deepening his knowledge of spirituality (e.g., Ignatian, Carmelite charisms, lay charisms), or, in general, a desire to grow to become a saint. Relying solely on priestly ordination (the *ex opere operato* dimension) is to stunt one’s spiritual growth. Priestly ordination is but a beginning, and the priest must then focus on the *ex opere operantis* dimension, his subjective holiness. The priest’s example should be able to inspire, his words anointed by the Holy Spirit should touch hearts, and people should be seeking him out—a holy priest, a latter-day apostle, should not be the exception to the rule, but should be the rule itself.

To understand fully the two-fold work of the Holy Spirit in the “incarnating” of the *alter Christus*, let us further explain each of these categories of *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis* in terms of the goal of becoming “another Christ, Christ Himself” as a priest.

A. “Christ Himself”—Objective Assimilation (*ex opere operato*)

What dominates in the discussion of *ex opere operato* (“by the very fact of the action being performed”), independent of the human agent, is the efficacious power of Christ’s sacrifice and His high priesthood. What is the core identity and the secret power of the priest, the “new Christ?” It has to do with his priesthood being a participation in the one high priesthood of Christ, accomplished by the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, it is the *Letter to the Hebrews* that explains Christ’s sacrifice as the heart of history that the world waited for. It is a fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrifices, which were but “shadows” of the one, true sacrifice of Christ: the sacrifice

of animals could not take away sin; only the sacrifice of God in His humanity could take away sins. And Christ's sacrifice fulfilled the annual sacrifice of the high priest in the "Holy of Holies," by entering the "veil" of His own flesh that separates this inner sanctuary from the rest of the temple, and entering the true "Holy of Holies," that is, heaven, now being seated at the right hand of His Heavenly Father. The right hand of God is the position of power and therefore of intercession, as He presents His wounds to the Father to intercede for us.

Thus, there is only one high priest, Jesus Christ, and only one sacrifice that reconciles us with the Father, the once-for-all sacrifice on Calvary.²² The ministerial priest, through the Holy Spirit, acts through that one efficacious mediation.

If the power of the priest is his participation in Christ's one efficacious priesthood, the incredible consequence is that it is Christ Himself who acts in and through the priest; hence the use of *ex opere operato*. As "another Christ," the priest acts "in the person of Christ the Head" (*in persona Christi Capitis*).²³ This signifies that the priest becomes an instrument of Christ, an extension of Christ in history and in the world. To act "in the person of Christ the Head" is an honour not accorded even to the angels; the priest must ask for the grace to understand the great dignity with which he has been gratuitously entrusted.

The priest has been configured to Christ the High Priest and Shepherd. When he absolves the penitent, it is not the priest who remits sin, for no man can take away the least sin. That only Yahweh can remit sin is a truth with which the Israelites were deeply imbued, which conviction was the primary motivation for the Hebrew authorities' persecution of Jesus. For not believing Him to be God's Son, they were scandalized by His words to the paralytic and others, "Your sins are forgiven."

²² See *Letter to the Hebrews* 9:11-10:25. For a theological commentary on Christ's sacrifice in the *Letter to the Hebrews*, see Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest: According to the New Testament* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1986). Former Secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, created Cardinal in 2006 in recognition of his theological contributions, this Jesuit exegete gave the 2008 Lenten Papal and Curial Retreat.

²³ *Pastores dabo vobis* n. 21, "Configuration to Christ, Head and Shepherd, and Pastoral Charity."

Thus, while the priest in Confession makes the actions of the raising of the hand, recites the formula of absolution, and makes the intention to do what the Church desires, it is Christ and His power that remits sin. Likewise, when the priest celebrating Holy Mass “perpetuates” or “re-presents” the one sacrifice of Calvary and, with the words of consecration, makes present Christ in the sacrament— again it is not the priest who makes it happen— which he does so “instrumentally.” It is again the power of Christ in him, the priest acts “in the person of Christ.”

B. “Christ Himself”— Subjective Assimilation (*ex opere operantis*)

Complementing the objective transformation, the priest must also have Christ’s holiness, namely, the Holy Spirit. That is, besides the objective assimilation to Christ *ex opere operato*, there ought to be a complementary subjective assimilation to Christ, *ex opere operantis*. The latter, “from the work of the one doing the work,” indicates that the *fruitfulness* of the action of the sacraments depends on the holiness of the minister (as well as of the recipient), that is, the degree of union with Christ, the degree of being “transubstantiated into Jesus.”

For St. Gregory of Nyssa, Paul represents an outstanding model of this subjective assimilation to Christ (Gal 2:20).

No one has known Christ better than Paul, nor surpassed him in the careful example he gave of what anyone should be who bears Christ’s name. So precisely did he mirror his Master that he became his very image. By a painstaking imitation, he was transformed into his model and it seemed to be no longer Paul who lived and spoke but Christ himself. He shows his keen awareness of this grace when he refers to the Corinthians’ desire to prove that Christ was speaking in him; as he says: It is no longer I who live: it is Christ who lives in me.²⁴

The International Theological Commission explains this transformation:

... this identity of office and love in the supreme and unique priesthood of Christ can only be shared by succeeding pastors on a twofold

²⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *From a Treatise on Christian Perfection*, quoted in OOR, Monday of 12th week of Ordinary Time, *The Liturgy of the Hours* (New York: Catholic Book Publ. Corp.), vol. III, 391.

condition: on the one hand, there are an office and objective power based on an objective “*configuratio Christo Sacerdoti*”; on the other hand, an order... requiring as close an assimilation as possible to Christ’s attitude in giving his life out of love. All priestly spirituality is governed by this postulate inherent in the ministry and made possible by the grace of the Lord... He shares in the “expropriation” of the Son of God, which gives him his being-for-others. By expanding this fundamental idea, we can discover the elements of a priestly spirituality.²⁵

The International Theological Commission highlights two key subjective aspects beyond the objective: the assimilation as “requiring as close an assimilation as possible to Christ’s attitude in giving his life out of love,” and which entails an expropriation of himself in “being-for-others.” We shall develop this more in the next section (section III).

The Key to Evangelization is the Fruitfulness that Flows from the Priest’s Holiness

But one might validly question, why is the subjective dimension of *ex opere operantis*, the holiness, so vital when we have the *ex opere operato*, when every Mass is valid and offers the same grace, irrespective of the subjective state of the priest celebrant? The key distinction lies between the “validity” and “fruitfulness” of the sacraments. Employing an everyday biological image, the *ex opere operato*, the objective validity of performing the sacramental rite by an ordained priest can be compared to the heart of a person, which, when healthy, can pump blood with all its nutrients and oxygen, while removing waste from the body. The *ex opere operantis* can be compared to the aorta, the largest artery in the body that takes the oxygen-rich blood to the body; it is the “transmitter,” so to speak.

In this analogy, the *ex opere operato* is like a robust heart that never fails, but a weak *ex opere operantis* is like having plaque build-up in the artery, (plaque is a sticky substance that accumulates on the walls, and causes the artery to stiffen and weaken). If the plaque build-up is heavy, it can cause an aneurysm or even a stroke, but, at the very least, it limits the blood flow from the heart. Applying the *ex opere operantis* to the priest, while the Mass is valid and “contains” infinite graces, if the priest is not corresponding to his

²⁵ International Theological Commission, *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents, 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 81.

vocation by not living up to his call to holiness and faithfulness, then this constitutes a “plaque build-up” that limits the outflow of grace through him to the Church.

To illustrate the point, Fr. Solanus Casey, an American Capuchin priest who was not allowed to preach or hear Confessions because of intellectual limitations, received over two hundred visitors each day, while priests commonly have difficulty reaching out to those who no longer practice the faith. Put simply, with holiness, people come seeking the priest and his influence radiates outwards into the world. The priesthood remains the same for all ordained, but holiness is what set some priests apart.

The reason for the priest’s holiness (or lack thereof) impacting the spiritual life of the parishioners, like the flow of an artery affects the body, derives from the priest being a “spiritual father.” We see this principle of the power or parenthood in the transmission of the effect of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, to all their children in original sin and concupiscence. Rom 5, “Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men,” teaches that the influence of the head, Adam or Christ, is critical for the state of the body.

We experience daily examples of this dynamic of influence, as we see that the example of parents has lasting effects on their own children. What is especially striking is the difference a school principal can make. In a school that lacks structure and discipline, a good incoming principal can change the entire culture of a school. In many examples in the world, it is the “head” that influences the children or body or institution. Similarly, because the priest is constituted by Christ as “mediator” and “spiritual father” of the family, because all sacramental graces flow through him, his spiritual state helps to determine the impact of the graces on his flock. Hence, the saying, “If the priest is holy, the parishioners too become holy.” This follows upon the well-known principle, “No one gives what he does not have” (“*Nemo dat quod non habet*”). The holiness of the priest influences the reception of sacramental grace for both himself and for his people. St. John Chrysostom confirms the truth of this key influence of priests in addressing Christ’s disciples:

Do not think, he says, that you are destined for easy struggles or unimportant tasks. *You are the salt of the earth.* Consider the numerous and extensive cities, peoples and nations I will be sending you to govern.... *If others lose their savor, then your ministry will help them regain it. But if you yourselves suffer that loss, you will drag others down with you.* Therefore, the greater the undertakings put into your hands, the more zealous you must be.²⁶ (emphasis added)

Chrysostom notes two key points: the immensity of the task (“to be teachers not simply for Palestine, but for the whole world”); and as the salt of the whole earth, “if you yourselves suffer that loss, you will drag others down with you”— this is the dark side of having so much power and influence.

We see an outstanding illustration of the power of the *ex opere operantis* (fruitfulness) in the life of the patron of priests, St. John Vianney.²⁷ The following example reflects his sanctity and victimhood for the sake of his flock. To a priest who complained about the indifference of people in his neighbouring parish, St. John Vianney answered: “You have preached, you have prayed, but have you fasted? Have you taken the discipline? Have you slept on the floor? So long as you have done none of these things, you have no right to complain.”²⁸

That Vianney, a diocesan priest, without a developed spirituality from a religious founder, forced to leave the seminary because of failure in his studies, relegated to a poor country hamlet parish and living in austere poverty, was chosen to be patron of, and a model for, all priests suggests that it was Providence and divine inspiration that moved Pope Benedict XVI to act to expand his patronage (from parish priests). In the document given in preparation for the “Year of the Priest,” the pope presented a fine

²⁶ St. John Chrysostom, “From a homily on Matthew,” quoted in OOR, 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. IV, 120-121.

²⁷ One of the finest biographies in English on this saint is Abbé Francis Trochu’s *The Curé d’Ars: St. Jean-Marie Baptiste Vianney* (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1977; French orig. *Le Curé d’Ars*, 1927). This 583 page book is based on the acts of the process of his canonization.

²⁸ L’Abbé Bernard Nodet, *Jean-Marie Vianney, curé d’Ars, sa pensée, son cœur présentés par l’Abbé Bernard Nodet* (LePuy: éditions Xavier Mappus, LePuy, 1958), 193, quoted also in Mgr. Ancel (auxiliary bishop of Lyons), “Pastoral Spirituality of the Curé of Ars,” Conference in Ars for the 100th Anniversary of the Death of St. John Mary Vianney, September 4, 1959.

summary of salient points in St. Vianney's life.²⁹ The same humble background likewise suggests that divine inspiration was also at work with Pope John XXIII in writing the encyclical on St. John Vianney, *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*.³⁰

III. Identification with Christ in Three Traits

After the laying on of hands by the bishop by which the priest becomes objectively an "another Christ" who acts "in the person of Christ" (*ex opere operato*), especially through the sacraments, the fruitfulness (*ex opere operantis*) depends on his holiness, and specifically on his identification with Christ in three ways: A. Identification with His activity, so that he is pure "instrument"; B. Identification with Christ's merciful Sacred Heart so that he is a good shepherd who loves with Christ's own heart; and C. Identification with Christ on His cross so that he is a victim with Christ.

A. One with Christ as an Extension of Christ, as His Pure Instrument

To be another Christ, Christ has to take over in the priest so that he is pure "*instrument*," an extension of Christ, a mystical incarnation. John the Baptist summarizes this principle succinctly: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30). An even more precise formulation of what "another Christ" is to do is given by Paul, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). To the degree that the priest depends on Christ and unites himself to Christ through the Holy Spirit, to that degree will the priest be holy and have great efficacy in his ministry. For example, after all the exegetical and other preparations, before going to lectern to give his homily, a priest can confess his utter helplessness and plead to the Holy Spirit, "I cannot touch hearts. I, your poor instrument, will simply open my mouth and utter words. You go and touch hearts and work your miracles."

To illustrate the power of dependence on the Holy Spirit, consider the humble example based on Mother Teresa of Calcutta's description of

²⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the 'Dies Natalis' of the Curé of Ars," June 19, 2009.

³⁰ See Vatican.va website,

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_19590801_sacerdotii_en.html.

herself as a pencil in God's hand. Imagine a contest between Leonardo da Vinci, given an inexpensive *Roundedge* pencil, and a person without any drawing skills, but given an exorbitantly expensive *Cross* pencil, with a panel of art experts representing various galleries around the world as judges. In the final evaluation, they would throw out the latter's drawing and would be jostling to bid for da Vinci's predictable masterpiece. All can see the inevitability of this scenario, *in spite of the immense advantage the unskilled person has in the quality of the Cross pencil*. As long as the pencil moves with the hand, ultimately, the pencil's quality is not a significant factor; the instrument is secondary here. In the overall picture, what really matters is "who" is holding the pencil. As long as Leonardo da Vinci is wielding the pencil, a masterpiece will be the inevitable result; as long as God wields the priest, great fruitfulness will follow. The docility of the priest in God's hands is all that is needed, not his wonderful human gifts (e.g., eloquence, being well-informed, popularity).

B. One with the Merciful Heart of Christ

Second, as "another Christ," the priest must have the heart of Christ. And Christ is the Good Shepherd, whose Sacred Heart abounds and overflows with love and mercy. This must be especially so in the confessional, what St. Faustina calls, "the tribunal of mercy." There, above all, the penitent must meet the merciful heart of Christ. In addition, the priest is not simply "ministering" to parishioners, but shepherding his family, for he is "spiritual father." He must learn to carry their burdens in his heart and in his prayers, especially at the Holy Eucharist and before the tabernacle, he rejoices in their joys and weeps in their sorrows. As a shepherd, he must know his flock, and must seek out the lost sheep: those who have left the Church, those married outside the Church, children who have not been baptized, and so on.

But the merciful heart of Christ does not mean "niceness," for the shepherd is a "watchman" who protects his flock (Augustine). As such, he must preach "charity in truth," which is the title of Pope Benedict XVI's document on social doctrine. John Cardinal O'Connor, the late Cardinal Archbishop of New York City, had as his episcopal motto, "There can be no love without justice." "Justice" here can be seen as the manifestation of

truth. Love manifestly cannot be true love unless justice is served; but love includes justice, or transcends justice. “On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice.

On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving.”³¹ Yet, as the priest does not shy away from preaching the hard truths (e.g., sin, the Four Last Things, moral issues that pertain to our time, like protecting the unborn and family life), he remembers that at the end of day he is preaching the “Good News.”

C. One with Christ as “Priest and Victim”

The culmination of Christ’s life, including His ministry, is the cross,³² and the culmination of the priest’s work is the perpetuation of the cross, the Mass. Sacramentally, this means that the priest is ordained to offer sacrifice, namely, the holy Mass. One seminary professor taught that if a priest has celebrated Mass, then he has fulfilled his ministry that day. While this is a slight exaggeration, the professor in the main is correct. The Eucharist, as *Sacrosanctum concilium* teaches, is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (LG 11; cf. SC 10, CCC 1324).

The principal work of Christ at Calvary means that the priest too has to go on the cross with Christ: he too is priest and victim, a personal immolation. The priest is more likely to focus on his priestly ministry, such as preaching and the administration of the sacraments. He has forgotten the truth that the New Testament priest is a “priest and victim.” Yet it was on the cross that Christ saved us, and there, out of obedience and love to His Father, He did two dominant things: He suffered and He interceded for us (prayer). Likewise, Christ’s priest performs many important tasks in his ministry; but the heart of that ministry is the ministry of the cross and intercession. The priest does not simply pray for his people, he “carries” them— their cares, burdens, and troubles— in his priestly heart.

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n. 6.

³² *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 13: “Jesus brought his role as mediator to complete fulfillment when he offered himself on the cross, thereby opening to us, once and for all, access to the heavenly sanctuary, to the Father’s house (cf. Heb. 9:24-28).”

Much more important than what the priest can preach at the lectern is his intercession at Mass and before the tabernacle. The priest's Mass must be "populated" with his flock and the whole world, with a universal and crucified love like that of the Discalced Carmelite Sisters of the St. Joseph Carmel at St. Agatha, Ontario, who describe their consecration (as found in their Constitutions and printed within their pamphlet) thus: "Love is the keynote which explains the hidden cloistered life of prayer and sacrifice wherein the Carmelite nun embraces the Crucified Christ and, with Him the entire world."³³ He must be like Pope John Paul II, who had before him on his prie-dieu a long list of requests for intercession printed out for his morning holy hour.

One dimension of the cross and our consecration is celibacy. In our time of confusion and lack of understanding of its value following the Second Vatican Council, the International Theological Commission makes a clear distinction. On the one hand, the "historical connection between celibacy and the apostolic ministry is not a necessary one. The ministry is possible without celibacy, just as celibacy is possible without ministry." The distinction is that there is no *dogmatic* necessity but that it is rather "suggested by a practical pastoral judgment." The document confirms that renouncing marriage to serve Christ is "better," and that "The successors of the apostles are right when they favor this form of Christian existence witnessed to and recommended by the writings of the New Testament, as the most perfect and best adapted form of the apostolic ministry. They cannot but encourage it."³⁴ Celibates are the "most fit" disciples, and their witness "gives credibility to the Gospel." The early Church presented Paul as the exemplary type of apostle.³⁵ The documents and experience of the Church and of the saints validate this path for the Latin Church.

³³ Pamphlet, Discalced Carmelite Contemplative Sisters, Carmel of St. Joseph, St. Agatha, Ontario, Canada.

³⁴ International Theological Commission, *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents, 1969-1985*, 73.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

PART I

GROWTH IN CHRIST

“He grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man”

(Lk 2:52)

CHAPTER 1

THE NEW CHRIST AT PRAYER

This is the glorious duty of man: to pray and to love. If you pray and love, that is where a man's happiness lies. Prayer is nothing else but union with God. When one has a heart that is pure and united with God, he is given a kind of serenity and sweetness that makes him ecstatic, a light that surrounds him with marvelous brightness. In this intimate union, God and the soul are fused together like two bits of wax that no one can ever pull apart. This union of God with a tiny creature is a lovely thing. It is a happiness beyond understanding....

My little children, your hearts are small, but prayer stretches them and makes them capable of loving God. Through prayer we receive a foretaste of heaven and something of paradise comes down upon us. Prayer never leaves us without sweetness. It is honey that flows into the soul and makes all things sweet. When we pray properly, sorrows disappear like snow before the sun.... Some men immerse themselves as deeply in prayer as fish in water, because they give themselves totally to God. There is not division in their hearts. O, how I love these noble souls! Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Colette used to see our Lord and talk to him just as we talk to one another.¹ (St. John Vianney)

Why pray? Given how busy priests are in the current shortage of priests in many dioceses in the world, can we not argue that the priest's work is "his prayer"? This was the explicit argument of a busy pastor who felt that setting aside significant periods for formal prayer was unrealistic in his busy context. Let us turn to our model and High Priest, Jesus Christ. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, after examining the various Gospel appearances of Jesus at prayer, concluded that His centre of gravity, despite not having sufficient time to eat and rest in the constant demands for His time, was His prayer—He moved from what the Father revealed to Him in those quiet hours of prayer at night (centre of gravity) to His work during the day.² Experience shows that the priest who becomes overwhelmed by his work and leaves prayer to whatever time is left over at the end of day quickly abandons

¹ St. John Vianney, Catechetical Instructions, Memorial of St. John Vianney on August 4, OOR, *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. IV, 1269-1270.

² Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 52-53.

prayer (as Fr. Bob Bedard, founder of the Companions of the Cross, admitted was the case in his early years of priesthood).

And experience also confirms that such a priest draws from his limited human gifts, and, while he can do some good (e.g., building community), lacking supernatural power, he fails to *sanctify* the faithful, to raise them to holiness, to live deeply as sons and daughters of the Father. Pope John Paul II captures this incisively in his 1979 *Holy Thursday Letter to Priests*— it points to perennial temptations as well as to what is likely the secret of his own powerful influence on the Church and the world.

In a certain way prayer is the first and the last condition for conversion, spiritual progress and holiness. Perhaps in these recent years—at least in certain quarters—there has been too much discussion about the priesthood, the priest’s “identity”, the value of his presence in the modern world, etc., and on the other hand there has been too little praying. There has not been enough enthusiasm for actuating the priesthood itself through prayer, in order to make its authentic evangelical dynamism effective, in order to confirm the priestly identity. It is prayer that shows the essential style of the priest; without prayer this style becomes deformed. Prayer helps us always to find the light that has led us since the beginning of our priestly vocation, and which never ceases to lead us, even though it seems at times to disappear in the darkness.³

Let us seek inspiration by looking at two striking examples, the first regarding the power of the Mass. There was a bishop in the Middle Ages who was also chancellor of his country (possibly St. Thomas Becket) who had the habit of celebrating daily morning Mass. When questioned by his aide as to why he would take time away from the important task of governing the country, the bishop’s reply was that it was precisely the dire needs of his country that led him to offer Mass daily to obtain blessings for it.

The necessity of daily Mass also extends to daily prayer. The logic is the reverse of the good priest mentioned earlier who claimed he was too busy to pray: the busier we are, the more we need to pray for God’s help.

³ Pope John Paul II, *Letter to All Priests on Occasion of Holy Thursday 1979*, n. 10.

The second example comes from Bishop Fulton Sheen. He perceived the vital need for prayer, as evidenced by his famous appeal to pray a daily “holy hour” before the Blessed Sacrament. He points to Jesus’ own injunction to the apostles in the garden of Gethsemane, “Can you not pray one hour with me?” As a seminarian, Bishop Sheen himself was inspired to begin this lifelong practice after hearing from a missionary the story of a heroic young girl in China. The communist soldiers had put the priest of a parish under house arrest in the rectory and had desecrated the Blessed Sacrament by throwing the consecrated hosts on the floor. Day after day, the priest witnessed this young Chinese girl stealing quietly into the church to venerate the hosts for an hour, after which she reverently consumed one host with her mouth. After consuming the last host after thirty days, she made an inadvertent noise on leaving and a soldier found her and clubbed her to death. Inspired by these heroic and devout acts, Sheen resolved to spend one hour each day before the Blessed Sacrament, and he acknowledged that throughout his priestly life he had been faithful to this promise made on his ordination day.

1. The Primacy of Prayer

A. God first!

It is hard to overestimate the importance of prayer. This can be gleaned from a critical area in the Christian’s life— spiritual warfare. It is common knowledge among those involved with deliverance and exorcism ministry that our greatest enemies, the evil spirits, in order to bring a good person down, seek to stop that person from praying. One exorcist revealed that, once a good person stops praying, the flow of God’s grace and light and strength into his person and life diminishes, so that the person is now much more vulnerable to the attacks and temptations of the evil spirits.⁴ We recall too Jesus’ words, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer” (Mk 9:29).

St. Alphonsus Liguori, a doctor of the Church, is very emphatic on the importance of prayer, pointing to St. Teresa of Jesus’ saying: “I am

⁴ Livio Fanzaga, *The Deceiver: Our Daily Struggle with Satan* (Fort Collins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 2000; Italian orig. from sugarco edizione, Milan), 168.

convinced that the Lord will lead to salvation the soul that perseveres in prayer no matter how many sins the devil will urge against her.”⁵ He too tells us that about the primary goal of the devil: “And so the devil wishes above all else to prevent souls from devoting themselves to prayer. So strongly did he feel about prayer that he insists that “confessors” (spiritual directors) “should demand from their penitents an account of their mental prayer and specifically if they were faithful to it.”⁶ St. Teresa declares that the devil knows he has lost the soul who perseveres in prayer”⁷; and that on the other hand, “One who, by deliberate choice, abandons prayer is heading for hell without any need for the intervention of the Devil.”⁸

We can perceive the underlying reasons for the power of prayer that, according to Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, have to do with reality. In commenting on the words of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, “your words were heard,” Cardinal Ratzinger teaches us that “whatever God does is always a response to this kind of appeal in prayer by men and women.” And the reason for this is because of the fundamental nature of things:

... because it is only when man becomes someone who prays, when he transcends himself, when he surrenders himself, when he perceives and accepts God as reality and opens himself to him and for him, it is only then that the door of the world opens for God and the space is created in which he can act for us men and women and on us. God is indeed always with us, but we are not always with him, says St. Augustine. It is only if we accept his presence, by opening our being to him in prayer, that God’s activity can really become action on us and for us men and women.⁹

This is a profound truth about God’s dealing with us, that He only intervenes when we make space for Him in ourselves, and thus make space for God in the world: “it is only then that the door of the world opens for God and the space is created in which he can act for us men and women and on us.”

⁵ St. Teresa of Jesus, quoted by St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Alphonsus de Liguori: Selected Writings, The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 167.

⁶ St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Alphonsus de Liguori*, 168.

⁷ St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Alphonsus de Liguori*, 167.

⁸ St. Teresa of Jesus, quoted by St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Alphonsus de Liguori*, 168.

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Ministers of Joy* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1989; German orig. *Diener eurer Freude*, 1988), 40.

Going more deeply into the same commentary, Cardinal Ratzinger gives a description of progressive failures in regard to the interior life. A hang-up that can hold us back from praying is that it is sometimes hard for us to believe that God does hear us. Cardinal Ratzinger reminds us that St. Augustine, from his own experience, teaches us that it is the opposite that is the case: “God is indeed always with us, but we are not always with him.” Cardinal Ratzinger uses the example mentioned of the archangel Gabriel’s words to Zechariah that “your words were heard” to emphasize that God always hears our prayers, and that our prayers do not go into a vacuum. In fact, the argument for God always hearing our prayers is His greatness: “God therefore is someone who has the power, the ability, the will and the patience to listen to people. He is so great that he can be present even for those who are small.”¹⁰

On the other side, through his experience especially as a bishop, Cardinal Ratzinger has discerned why vocations that start off with so much enthusiasm have gradually collapsed: “what emerged was always the same—at some time silent prayer came to a stop” (perhaps because of all the work that was needed to be done), but the “keenness had become just a shell because its inner impetus had been lost.”¹¹ He adds that “At some point Confession too had come to a halt and with it a contact with challenge and forgiveness, a renewal from within in the face of the Lord that is indispensable.”¹² The conclusion here is that the principal source and symptom of failed vocations is a loss of personal prayer and a neglect of the Sacrament of Confession, a salutary warning.

On the positive side, prayer draws down fruits that come to our assistance in many ways. For example, when St. John of the Cross had to deal with difficult people or situations, he dealt with difficult people with meekness and with unjust situations with courage, but only after having spent a long time in prayer and conversation with the Lord.¹³ It is to prayer that we turn when means fail us. His basic advice is to ask God, but with faith.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹² *Ibid.*, 87-88.

¹³ Eliseus de los Mártires, “Dictámenes,” 15-19 (printed in John of the Cross, *Obras*, 1125), quoted in Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 136.

In all our needs, struggles and difficulties, we shall find no better, no surer way forward than *prayer* and to hope that God would provide in the way *he* desires... When means fail us and we see no way of dealing with our difficulties, it only remains for us to lift our eyes to You, so that *You* might provide as You see best.¹⁴

But the need for prayer at the most fundamental level has to do with the fact that we are created for God, and that we run into problems in life because we fail to fill that “inner abyss.” Our inner hunger and ache have to do with this dignity of being made in the image of God to become spouses of Christ.¹⁵

This last point of the longing for God raises a deeper point: we are made to have constant union with God, to be contemplatives. Fr. Timothy Gallagher notes that this is quite evident in the lifestyle of the one-time soldier, Ignatius of Loyola: “Ignatius prays upon rising, prays as he prepares for Mass, prays throughout the Mass itself, prays again after Mass... a prayer in which Ignatius meets the God ‘who loves me more than I love myself.’”¹⁶ Fr. Gallagher takes note of the key fruit, that habitual times for prayer lead to “ongoing communion with God”: “From the richness of that communion with God in habitual times of prayer, the desire for ongoing communion with God throughout the day is born.”¹⁷ And here lies the response to the pastor who does not have time for formal prayer but makes his work his prayer: it is rather our regular formal prayer times that bless our work, prepare for the culmination of our day in the Mass, foster our communion with God, and irrigate our entire interior life. We can administer a little test to ourselves to see what priority prayer has for us. Prayer, the mystics tell us, should be like water for fish and air for us, as was taught by a desert father in a well-known episode:

A young man comes to the Desert Father and asks him to teach him how to pray. The Desert Father takes him by the arm and leads him down to the river. They enter the river and then the Desert Father pushes the head of the young man under the water and holds it there. The man struggles

¹⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book 2, 21:5, quoted in Iain Matthew, 136.

¹⁵ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 136-137.

¹⁶ Timothy Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 117.

¹⁷ Ibid.

to get up, but the Father keeps tight hold of him. Finally, he lets him go, and the young man springs up desperately gasping for air. “What are you trying to do?” he shouts. “Drown me?” The Father calmly answers him: “When you want to pray as much as you wanted that breath of air just then, then you will know how to pray.”¹⁸

If prayer becomes secondary, then, when we go to pray, we will feel as if we are taking time away from our primary work, our ministry, and then leave prayer to whatever time is left-over at night. In contrast, when we learn to “breathe” prayer, then we begin to perceive prayer and dialogue with God as the dominant milieu or horizon, always moving from prayer to work and working in God’s presence. The first approach is working “outside-in,” going from the outside inwards; the second is “inside-out,” from the interior to the exterior: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Lk 12:34; cf. Mt 6:21).

How to Approach Prayer

There are two principles that can assist us. First, how can we overcome the lapses in fidelity? The first is having *fixed times* for prayer. When parishioners lament that they have good intentions but also inevitably fall away from prayer, perhaps the most helpful response is to suggest a fixed time for prayer. Just as our meals are so important that we have three fixed times for them each day, so our prayer times should also be fixed. Thus, the first principle is to establish a regular prayer schedule.

The second is the principle of putting God first by giving prayer priority in our day. If we fall behind in our prayer program on a particular day, as soon as we get back from our apostolate or meetings, perhaps after having a meal, before we try to clear the backlog of emails, phone messages, and other “priorities,” we immediately catch-up with our Divine Office, meditation, and spiritual reading; only then do we look to other things—*God comes first!*

Likewise, if we return at night and have not yet celebrated Mass because we were travelling, we immediately celebrate Mass first, have something to eat,

¹⁸ Fr. Bob Wild, *Restoration* (Madonna House), accessed June 10, 2015, http://www.madonnahouse.org/restoration/2012/02/do_you_want_god.html.

and then catch up with our prayers. When we are travelling, the heart of our day must still be the daily Eucharist, and whether we arrange to do it early in the morning, or at the airport, or as soon as we arrive at our destination— it takes first place. The example of Bishop Fulton Sheen is very inspiring. It was related how, as National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies, when he arrived at a parish in Africa late at night, he would first seek out the Blessed Sacrament to do his holy hour before retiring. There can be a temptation to not complete the Divine Office if it is already late and if we are tired. But, skipping Vespers and Compline can be compared to not giving our spiritual children supper. The Divine Office is being prayed not primarily for ourselves but for our people, and we have made a solemn promise to be faithful to it daily until the end of our life.

In seeking to “connect” with God during prayer, two points from St. John of the Cross can be helpful for seeing its mystical dimensions. First, it is God who seeks to meet us, ardently desiring union with us. Prayer is predominantly an action of God, our part consists in opening ourselves up to Him, principally to be “receivers.” It is to allow the loving light of the spiritual “Sun” to bathe us, to allow ourselves to be immersed in this ocean of love. For prayer is not primarily about method and form or being esoteric or sophisticated (in contrast to New Age practices); it is being present to Christ through the principal agent, the Holy Spirit.

When Christ is as risen as that [pouring out the Holy Spirit], *he* has to be the way of prayer, and any method is good so long as it engages with him.... His [John of the Cross] intention is not to draw up a scale of excellence, and rivalry between methods and movements would be for him an irrelevance. When “the Master is here and wants to see you,” most differences are relativized.¹⁹

Second, it is heart-warming to see, with the mystics, prayer as union between Bridegroom and bride (it is understood that Christ is the spouse of each soul— not just of the Church— as Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit). The mystics progressively come to see this spousality as they draw closer to God: “Prayer is most prayer when it simplifies into ‘a work of love.’”

¹⁹ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 145.

It is that touch of vitality which inspires John's description of prayer in *Canticle*: "Desire him there, adore him there." It implies a meeting of persons, and suggests a growth in prayer where those persons are allowed to be more themselves. John's God is an active God; so prayer is deeper where God acts more. John views the person as an openness to God; so prayer would be more "prayer" the more in touch with my need I am. He regards the two as bridegroom and bride; so prayer is most prayer when it simplifies into a "work of love."²⁰

There is an astounding grace being given in prayer according to John of making man God's "equal": "With God, to love the soul is to put her somehow in Himself and make her His equal."²¹ God's loving gaze reaches out to us as Jesus' gaze reached out to Peter and others and through them to Him. Iain Matthew writes, "This meeting of eyes, hidden and spiritual, is what is taking place when we pray in faith and love."²² Prayer seen in this light attracts the heart and draws us to communion with God.

B. Prayer Leads to Mission

The work of Christ is salvation of the world, or evangelization, and it is precisely prayer that is the fire that can enflame the world. The misconception that prayer removes us from the world and is wasting time is possibly a major cause of neglecting prayer.

Let us turn once more to the Carmelite charism, specifically, John of the Cross, known for his contemplation, for insights about prayer leading to mission life. The insights discovered go far beyond mere "praying."

First, David Perrin points out emphatically that among the major misconceptions concerning the spirituality of St. John of the Cross is the view of his spirituality as promoting "flight from the world," with a negative view of creation and of relationships as well. He points out that John teaches the opposite, a "*flight into the world*," a loving of God, others, and creation. God is at the centre of man's heart, like the embrace of groom and bride, and thus also at the centre of the world.

²⁰ Ibid., 144.

²¹ St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle* 32.6, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 536.

²² Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 140.

It is the presence of God in the world that causes the life of an individual to be transformed into the *new self*. . . . God's presence in the human heart transforms the soul and converts it into a *living flame* of love. John's symbol of the *living flame* speaks of a life that is vibrant and full of energy. It speaks of the human soul enjoying its full potential, giving forth light, warmth, and love. *God, by residing in the heart of the human person, resides in the heart of the world. God, the center of uncreated reality, chose to become the center of created reality. . . .*

John uses "earth tones" to describe the presence of God in the world, and God's attitude toward it. He uses the image of the bride and groom enjoying their nuptial banquet as the kind of enjoyment God lives in the world. John uses this image to describe the kind of relationship God enjoys with the world and with people when God gifts Godself to the world. *God's abiding presence in the human heart is described as a bridegroom tenderly in the embrace of his bride.*²³ (emphasis added)

St. John of the Cross valued relationships, as he loved his own mother tenderly, loved St. Teresa of Avila, and had a special place in his heart for the nuns he directed. For John, God is "fully involved with the world" for love of the world, but He enters the world through entering us in a spousal love:

John of the Cross speaks of God in the world, a God enjoying life along the "highways and byways" with the pleasures of people at a "common table in the world." John is captivated by a God who is fully involved with the world as it stands and who passes no negative judgement on that world. The climax of God's activity in creation is seen in the Word becoming flesh in the Incarnation. As Richard Hardy puts it, "the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus meant the consecration of the world and its history."

The Incarnate God takes on all the conditions and passions of a world set in time and space. The Incarnation radically dislodges any discontinuity that may have existed between the created and the Uncreated orders. God experiences human delight, as well as human frailty, within the confines of the finite order. If the setting of creation is good enough for God, and it is, then it is also a suitable dwelling place for the human soul. John says

²³ David Perrin, *For Love of the World*, 98-99.

that the soul should not be surprised by such an intimate presence of the Divine in creation. God chooses to bestow lavish gifts on creatures.²⁴

Second, God's presence and delight in the world implies the same for His disciples. We can see this continuity of thought among the Carmelites in the discovery of one of the spiritual daughters of the Carmelite Reform, Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta a Cruce), as seen from the Vatican website.

During the time immediately before and quite some time after my conversion I... thought that leading a religious life meant giving up all earthly things and having one's mind fixed on divine things only. Gradually, however, I learnt that other things are expected of us in this world... I even believe that the deeper someone is drawn to God, the more he has to "get beyond himself" in this sense, that is, go into the world and carry divine life into it. She worked enormously hard, translating the letters and diaries of Cardinal Newman from his pre-Catholic period as well as Thomas Aquinas' *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*.... Erich Przywara also encouraged her to write her own philosophical works. She learnt that it was possible to "pursue scholarship as a service to God... It was not until I had understood this that I seriously began to approach academic work again."²⁵

In direct contrast to flight from the world, St. Teresa Benedicta realizes that "the deeper someone is drawn to God, the more he has to 'get beyond himself... go into the world and carry divine life into it.'"

2. Prayer Program

What could constitute a full spiritual program in the daily life of a priest? We find one such example in the spiritual classic, *The Soul of the Apostolate* of Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard— one of the very best books available to root in the reader a deep-felt conviction of the primacy of the interior life. Here

²⁴ Ibid., 97-98.

²⁵ Teresa Benedict of the Cross Edith Stein (1891-1942), Vatican.va website, accessed June 9, 2015

(http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_19981011_edith_stein_en.html).

we present Dom Chautard's "daily program" as norms for a Plan of Life.²⁶ Holy Mass and Confession are discussed in other chapters and the Divine Office, which is very familiar to all priests, requires more specialized treatment than this general introduction can offer.

- Mass and Liturgy of the Hours
- Mental Prayer (using Scripture: *video, sitio, volo*)
- Particular and General Examens
- Sacred Scripture and Spiritual Reading (including lives of saints)
- Spiritual Communions and Aspirations
- Weekly Confession
- Yearly and Monthly Retreats

The list above is fairly comprehensive and covers the main areas. Not mentioned are several norms which would supplement this list: regular spiritual direction, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, daily Rosaries, Stations of the Cross (especially on Fridays and in Lent), and pilgrimages.²⁷

The need for a more comprehensive spiritual program finds an analogy in the need for a good and complete food diet. While the "Cast Away" movie's main character (played by Tom Hanks), marooned on an uninhabited island, could make do in the short term with a daily diet consisting mainly of fish, dieticians and parents know the value of having a full diet with a good balance of meat and fish, vegetables, fruit, dairy, fibre, all of which enable us to get sufficient protein, carbohydrates, and required vitamins.

²⁶ Jean-Baptiste Chautard, *Soul of the Apostolate*, 195-196. See also Jordan Aumann, "Grades of Prayer" & "Aids to Spiritual Growth," *Spiritual Theology* (New York: New City Press, 2000), 316-398.

²⁷ Like Cardinal Vaughan, Dom Eugene Boylan also teaches that priests need a weekly schedule. He suggests having some fixed pillars each day: fixed time to go to bed; fixed time for getting up (promptness of good mortification), such that they be ready to celebrate Mass; mental prayer; office; spiritual reading (in the morning if mental prayer is in the evening, to supernaturalize); Rosary; two hours to God before breakfast (meditation, Mass, thanksgiving, office); he also recommends that the priest pray in the Church (see *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*, 131-132). Dom Boylan is very adamant about this: "Admittedly, it is a fairly high standard; but there is no room for mediocrity in the priesthood. Mediocrity is only the beginning of laxity and is, therefore, fatal to the priest. We must never forget what God told St. John to write... 'Because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot...'" (*The Spiritual Life of the Priest*, 133).

A full and balanced “spiritual diet,” retaining not just spiritual “meat” but also spiritual “vegetables” and “fruit,” enables the spiritual organism to blossom. Where someone without formation can get by with a daily Rosary, the witness of the saints and the Tradition of the Church have uncovered the power of a fuller diet.

A. Possible Prayer Structure: 2 Main Pillars, 2 Smaller Pillars

Following Bishop Sheen, one can begin by praying a daily holy hour. Within that hour, it is good to have a set structure: e.g., a half an hour for mental prayer, fifteen to twenty minutes for Morning Prayer and Office of Readings, and perhaps another fifteen minutes for spiritual reading. One spiritual director taught the wisdom of giving God our best hour, the first hour, the first fruits of our day. This means that, instead of having breakfast, doing exercise, watching the news, and other activities, we give God the first hour— *God comes first!* For the priest can more easily protect the morning holy hour (relative to prayer during the busy day and evening) when the parish activities have not yet begun, and the priest can expect to pray uninterrupted in the church, notwithstanding the presence of parishioners— if, that is, “father” makes it clear that prayer is the first priority and that he should not be disturbed for any trivial reason that can wait until after his prayer or after Mass.

Since a priest’s spiritual “energy” gained from the morning period of prayer tends to dissipate by mid-afternoon, it would be helpful to schedule a second period of prayer before supper. A second period before the Blessed Sacrament gives the priest a spiritual boost that enables him to sanctify the hours of the evening, filled with various evening events (such as marriage and baptismal meetings, RCIA, Marriage Preparation, wakes). And it is the experience in parish ministry that the hours between 4 p.m. through 6 p.m., after many parish activities are completed (visits to school, hospitals, and seniors homes, along with Holy Communion calls, funerals), generally tend to be a quieter time, and the priest can therefore make another period of prayer. This second period could consist of a half-hour for meditation, Vespers, some devotion, especially if the Rosary has been recited during walks or commutes.

We recommend that, for the busy parish priest, that most of his prayer program be completed by supper time, before the evening program begins. Given that there can be many administrative obligations to complete, it may seem excessive to pray a second period in the later afternoon. But we remember that the fruitfulness of our ministry is a function of our union with Christ, which is cultivated primarily through prayer.

Two smaller pillars, each lasting about ten minutes, can be conveniently added to the program: one before lunch, and another before retiring. Before lunch, we could leave our work ten minutes early to visit our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, to pray a Particular Examen, Angelus, Midday Prayer, and make a spiritual communion— thus, accomplishing five “norms” (includes visit) in that brief time. Before retiring at night, it is a praiseworthy and devout action to bid Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament “goodnight” by praying our Compline and our general Examen Prayer. Incorporating two major and two minor periods of prayer into our day would give a schedule that looks like this:

6-7 am Holy Hour (Meditation, MP-OOR, Sp. Reading)

11:30 am Visit (Midday Prayer, Angelus, Sp. Communion,
Particular Examen)

5-6 pm Holy Hour (Meditation, Vespers)

9:00 pm Visit (General Examen, Compline)

The practice of two main pillars of prayer, morning and evening, mirrors the horarium (rule of life) of religious communities, who have learned the time-tested wisdom of sanctifying the day with two hinges of prayer. As mentioned, this practice could fit in with the diocesan parish priest’s schedule.

Regarding fidelity, there is much wisdom in sticking with a set schedule for prayer. Instead of trying to find time and energy to pray, a regular routine or schedule will “carry” the priest and seminarian. When he feels dryness in prayer, the structure prevents him from just giving in to laziness, and the priest and seminarian recalls that love is expressed first by action, by his fidelity, just by “showing up,” the way mothers just “show up” day after

day, looking after their children, even in the dryness of illness. One specific help to fidelity to prayer is the cultivation of personal love for Jesus: going to prayer, not just from the motive of duty, but out of one's love for Jesus. Finally, the priest must also do what he can to avoid distractions, and not let distractions that do come along disturb him. As one spiritual writer puts it, he treats them like flies, which he brushes away, but does not focus on them. At all costs, he must not give up prayer.

B. Meditation/Mental Prayer

In the Prayer Program given above, it is suggested that the priest can do one or two meditations a day. While Discalced Carmelite contemplatives are required to pray two one-hour meditations a day, spiritual writers recommend for those in active ministry the staple half-hour meditation. For that half-hour, St. Teresa of Jesus recommends that we always take a book with us for our mental prayer. This was the discovery of a novice in a men's religious congregation. After praying for some time *ad libitum* without a book during the community's two daily required mental prayer periods, at the recommendation of a confessor, he began to use a book for his meditations with much fruit. The book of choice is, of course, sacred Scripture, the word of God. The Church's entire Tradition witnesses to the primacy, efficacy, and depth derived from reflecting on the word of God. More recently, the Second Vatican Council has reiterated its importance, not only for private prayer but also for theology: Scripture is the "soul of theology." And from accounts given by participants, many fruits have appeared deriving from the 2008 Synod of Bishops on the Word of God (and the apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*). This primacy of Scripture does not, however, exclude the use of the many good religious books for mental prayer (e.g., religious communities often use texts of their founders).

Spiritual writers also recommend lending a structure to our period of mental prayer. As mentioned, the ideal length for those in active ministry is a half-hour. St. Francis de Sales in his *Introduction to the Devout Life* recommends that we make our mental prayer in a structured way. Meditation is prayer, "heart speaks to heart," with its structure of *lectio*,

meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio.²⁸ We can compare the overall framework to the three main elements of an essay: introduction, main body, and conclusion. In the “introduction,” we can preface our mental prayer by: humbling ourselves before Almighty God in our unworthiness with words like, “God, have mercy on me a sinner”; placing ourselves in the presence of God the Father (St. Ignatius recommends imagining the Father looking down at us lovingly for the length of time it takes to recite the Lord’s Prayer); and imploring the assistance, for example, of the Holy Spirit, our Lady, St. Joseph, our guardian angel, and patron saint; asking for a particular grace. In the “conclusion” of the meditation, perhaps in the last five minutes, we can thank God (and angels and saints) for the grace received, make a resolution to apply that which we have learned, and conclude by praying the Lord’s Prayer, as was the practice of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

In the “main body” of the meditation, we can read the text in one of two ways. There are two primary methods commonly used in prayer: *lectio divina* and prayer with the imagination (e.g., Ignatian contemplation). In the *lectio divina* style, we take a short Scripture text and read the entire text, out loud if this helps, at the beginning of that session. Some read the text the night before or draw out three points at the beginning, but we can simply read and reread a particular section as often as is necessary, or if we prefer, read over the whole text. But generally, we read the text attentively and reverently, stopping whenever we alight upon some point that is “sweet” or draws our hearts. We allow the Spirit to move us in any way He wishes (silence, dialogue, contrition, gratitude, etc.). We stay with this point until we suck it dry, until there is no more sweetness, then we read on further until we can alight on another point that draws us. This latter approach appears to be the one taken by Chiara Lubich, the recently deceased foundress of the *Focolare* movement. The general wisdom is three steps after reading: what is the text saying; what is it saying to me; and what is my response.

The second method of prayer— with imagination— is the one employed by St. Ignatius, St. Escrivá, and many others, who point to the great

²⁸ St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1989; orig. *Introduction à la vie dévote*, 1619).

fruitfulness of use of the imagination to enter a scene and to identify oneself with a figure in that scene. St. Ignatius speaks of “composing the scene,” of entering the scene as if one were actually there. We attempt to reconstruct the scene in our imagination through the use of our five senses to make the scenes come alive, like imagining Mary at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem being able to smell the hay or to touch the coldness and wetness of the nose of the cow as she pushes it away when it draws too close.

Beyond the sense aspects, even more important is being able to identify oneself with one person in the scene. We must avoid hovering over the scene as if we were “angels” or disembodied spirits, which makes us disinterested observers who are not engaged in the event.

Let us look at two examples of identifying with a character in a scene with the imagination method: with the Resurrection through the eyes of St. Mary Magdalene, and with the Passion of Christ through our Blessed Mother.

First, if one were to identify oneself with St. Mary Magdalene at the tomb of Jesus (some saints believe that she is also the sinful woman who wept on Jesus’ feet in Simon’s house), one interiorly attempts to identify with the sense of her sinful past, with the deep gratitude and joy experienced from the forgiveness by Jesus and from His love, as well as the deep personal attachment she had to Him. Only then can we understand why she went to the tomb early before dawn, why she remained at the tomb even after the apostles Peter and John left, and why she blurted out to the “gardener” with such attachment and love, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away” (Jn 20:15).

Second, if we wish to understand something of what Jesus experienced on the cross, we could identify ourselves with our Lady at the foot of the cross. But to do this, we must try to enter her heart, and try to experience the love she had for the One who was her spiritual “Sun,” the light and love of her life. It enables us to see how much she loved Him as she welcomed Him into her heart at Bethlehem, how fearlessly she protected Him on the way to Egypt, and experience how she wept with a maternal heart over Him at Nazareth with the knowledge gained from Simeon at the Temple that He would suffer for His people.

Perhaps, we would feel how wounded she was by the ingratitude and indifference to, and even hate of, Jesus at Calvary (“Crucify him”); how, in her love for him, she could never consider absenting herself from the cross, even though it would cause her an interior crucifixion; how she “gave up” her Son for the sake of our salvation; and perhaps, we might feel how she longed to take the place of Jesus on the cross, if this were possible for her to do. The experience of deeply entering Gospel scenes like this enables us to be profoundly moved in our mental prayer, a method that can engrave experiences deeply into our memories.

Here is St. John of the Cross’ method of imagination that he recommended to novices within his order. It describes practically how this saint draws close to Jesus in prayer, how he enters Jesus’ sentiments, and how he unites himself to Jesus in love at prayer.

“The first thing is to summon up the mysteries [of Jesus] by imagining them.”

Be present to Jesus as he sits wearied at the well, hot, alone, waiting (John 4). “Imagine”, not in detail, but impressionistically, as entering, not observing.

“Then ponder in your mind the mystery you have evoked.”

Jesus is there, weary, for me... He demands no explanation; he wants to quench thirst with living water... He allows me to be with him.

“Third, attentiveness to God, in loving stillness: this is where the fruit of the other activities is plucked, and where the door of the mind is opened to God’s light...”

Attentive in love; desire him there; adore him there; be with him in faith.²⁹

The three steps he employs are very instructive: first, to use our imagination on the mysteries by entering into these mysteries; then, to ponder on these mysteries by allowing them to impact upon our heart; third, to apply “attentiveness to God, a loving stillness.” That is, we seek to unite our hearts to God by turning to Him in a loving stillness. St. John of the Cross points to the heart of both forms of meditation, which is the *affective*

²⁹ St. John of the Cross, in José María Quiroga, *Don que toro San Juan de la Cruz*, 1968, 511-512, quoted in Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 143.

element. Mental prayer has been compared to a miner digging for gold. The digging would be analogous to our discursive meditating on the points we alight on, but when the miner finds gold, he must stop digging to enjoy the gold. Likewise, the one meditating must stop when God lifts the soul upwards to Himself; it is not the digging, the discursive part, but the affective element or affectivity that is the whole purpose or goal of the meditation. According to the *lectio divina* approach, one re-reads the text until we feel embraced by God.³⁰

C. Rosary

The Rosary is presented ahead of other important elements because of its special place. It is the conviction of the author that the daily Rosary, especially for busy people, should serve as a staple prayer for various reasons: it comprises as its soul the meditation of the central mysteries of Christ; it is a Marian prayer, and one that saints have found to produce impressive fruits; and the experience of praying the Rosary slowly and devoutly leads to a contemplative spirit.

Today many appear to be unaware of the tremendous power of the Rosary, a truth known by the saints. St. Louis de Montfort, whose tomb at Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre was visited by Pope John Paul II on his last trip to France, reiterates many times in *The Secret of the Rosary* our Lady's insistence on the centrality of the Rosary within our personal devotional life. He goes so far as to say, as incredible as this may appear, that our Lady teaches that the preaching on the Rosary is the most efficacious way to obtain conversion of hearts in the parish. Popes have written documents on the Rosary, Pope John Paul II himself has often spoken on the Rosary and proclaimed 2002 the "Year of the Rosary."

Two twentieth century saints help us understand the importance of the Rosary. Padre Pio calls it his "weapon" against the evil spirits, and it is common knowledge that he reportedly prayed more than thirty Rosaries

³⁰ Jacques Philippe has a short section on the method of *lectio divina* at the end of his book, *Called to Life* (New York: Scepter, 2008), 109-117. Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, in his chapter, "Grades of Prayer," 316-357, covers some general aspects of prayer. The distinction in use of imagination between the Ignatian method and the Carmelite method is presented schematically on page 321. Two other helpful books on meditation or mental prayer are St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* and Dom Chautard's *Soul of the Apostolate*.

each day. Mother Teresa of Calcutta says that, in the vision of 1947 that summarized all her visions and her mission, Mary pointed to the Rosary as the key to help the poor in India: “Take care of them— they are mine.— Bring them to Jesus— carry Jesus to them.— Fear not. Teach them to say the Rosary— the family Rosary and all will be well.— Fear not— Jesus and I will be with you and your children.”³¹

Fr. Joseph Langford, co-founder of the Missionaries of Charity Fathers, relates Mother Teresa’s response, when asked why she held her Rosary in her hands when she was obviously not praying it: “She answered that this was her way of reminding herself that she was holding Our Lady’s hand, a hand she had never let go of since her vision of 1947.”³² This holding of our Lady’s hand was in view when she came to Toronto for the opening of their house there. As she arrived for the welcoming ceremony at the parish Church beside their new house, she was silently praying the beads, during the ceremony she prayed the Rosary, and as she was leaving the Church, she continued praying the Rosary. Immediately afterwards, from the veranda of the house, when she addressed the gathering throng waiting to see her, she spoke of Mary Immaculate and gave out Miraculous Medals.

We can understand the reasoning behind this if we consider the great importance that the Church and the saints have placed on the Rosary: that the soul of the Rosary is a meditation of all the central mysteries of Christ, and that it is understood to be our Lady’s prayer of preference (e.g., at Fatima and Lourdes). It is not unusual to see faithful Catholics in the last hours of their lives having recourse to our Lady, especially through the Rosary, and priests assisting the dying have discovered the efficacy of its recitation for restoring peace to the dying in their moments of disquiet.

It is strongly recommended that we try to slow down the recitation of the Rosary. A fellow seminarian used to parody the breakneck speed with which the parishioners in his home diocese would recite the Rosary. Though his imitation was humorously exaggerated, there is a tendency to recite the Rosary quickly and in a routine fashion. On the other hand, we

³¹ Brian Kolodiejchuk, *Come, Be My Light— The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta”* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 99.

³² Joseph Langford, *Mother Teresa: In the Shadow of Our Lady*, 30.

discover the great peace and sense of union with God when we learn to *slow down, as if to pray in unison with the beatings of our heart*, that is praying not only with the words but with our hearts. When beginning prayer, it is helpful, if possible, to remember that we are before almighty God, who is so infinitely above all created reality that we ought to pray almost as if the world does not exist, for we have before us the All Holy One, before Whom everything pales and falls away—we must learn to forget self and the world before His august presence.

A good time to pray our Rosary is during our commutes and walks, especially for lay people, who have to spend much time commuting to work each day. Sometimes, for some, it is hard to do a formal meditation while driving, yet they are able to pray the Rosary without difficulty. A good practice is, as soon as one starts the car engine, to take up the rosary beads and begin the recitation of the Rosary. Similarly, when travelling on the public transit system, we can quietly and gently recite the Rosary, with our fingers if necessary (as one priest said to schoolchildren, “God gave us ten fingers so that we can pray the decades of the Rosary”), and some use a finger rosary or a one-decade length Rosary when travelling.

D. Spiritual Reading

“My fondness for good books was my salvation,” so wrote St. Teresa of Jesus in her *Life*.³³ The three saints whose books were prominent in her reading were St. Augustine, St. Gregory the Great, and Saint Jerome. Reading the *Confessions* of Augustine, she described how she identified herself with his conversion.³⁴ The saints know its great value, and that it can partly fill the vacuum of one lacking a spiritual director, providing a “mentor.”

Spiritual reading, which complements our meditation, is distinct from it. Spiritual reading is not prayer in this full sense of “heart speaks to heart” with God, but a reflective reading, partly to instruct us, and partly to inspire and enflame our hearts.

³³ St. Teresa of Jesus, *Life*, 3.7, quoted in Fr. Tomás Alvarez, *100 Themes on Her Life and Work*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington: ICS Publications, 2011), 183.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

For many, spiritual reading can be the one spiritual exercise that is the easiest to neglect. If we find ourselves neglecting it, a helpful exercise is to move it earlier (from the late evening to after supper, or to the afternoon, or to the morning, if necessary), until we find a stable time that ensures that we never miss our daily spiritual reading. Experience shows that doing it later in the day can make spiritual exercises more burdensome, with that heavy feeling of catching-up. It is helpful to commit a fixed length of time for it, between ten to fifteen minutes daily.

A distinction should be made between material suitable for spiritual reading and for meditation. The following principle can be helpful: all good spiritual books are suitable for spiritual reading, but only some spiritual books are suitable for meditation. Since the goal of meditation is the *cor ad cor loquitur*, “heart speaks to the heart,” which is interior conversation and union with God, the spiritual book employed must be profound enough to inspire absorption or lifting up of the heart to God within a short text.

If we find that we are reading page after page during meditation, then we ought perhaps to consider using another book. A fine work like *Transformation in Christ* by Dietrich von Hildebrand, which is philosophical and scholastic, might be suitable for spiritual reading as it requires more intellectual ruminating, while the old classic, *The Imitation of Christ*, with its profound contemplative bent, requires but a short text to provide sufficient food for meditation.

Reading the lives of the saints deserves special mention. Pope Benedict XVI called the lives of the saints “Theology in action,” theology being lived. The lives of the saints reveal how important it is to read saint’s lives. St. Ignatius’ life changed when he began to read the only material available during his convalescence; a life of Christ and the lives of the saints. St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross was moved to conversion after spending all night reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Jesus, after which she exclaimed, “This is the truth.”

Many saints, like Blessed Frédéric Janssoone, associated with the *Notre Dame du Cap* Shrine in the Province of Québec in Canada, were nourished as children by having the lives of the saints read to them. In the Christian faith, we are moved most by example— we need true heroes and models. A

provincial of a religious community shared something of his brother's doctoral thesis on Nazi Germany to diocesan seminarians. The thesis essentially argued that, if Germany in the early twentieth century had had true models to whom she could look up, she would not have fallen under the spell of Hitler. For priests in particular, there are now a few books on model priests, including Fr. Thomas McGovern's *Generations of Priests*.³⁵

One final suggestion is that of having a small library. It is suggested that an ideal approach is to build a small library of outstanding and favourite books that one can re-read every few years. It might be better to have "too many" good books that one has acquired over time, rather than lacking good spiritual reading. To protect oneself from attachment to books, one could use the criterion of the buying the "best" or of "classics" quality, and consider whether they are worth re-reading.

E. Legacy of Rich Spiritual Tradition & Principle of Reading the Best

Our great Christian Tradition offers much rich spiritual fare. Jordan Aumann in his work, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, gives a survey of two thousand years of Catholic spirituality, East and West.³⁶

Two important charisms come immediately to mind: Carmelite and Ignatian. It behoves us to get to know the Carmelite spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross (stages of the interior life). One contemporary Carmelite claimed that St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Teresa Benedicta a Cruce, St. Teresa of the Andes, and Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, notwithstanding their few numbers, have been given a mission to pass on their charism to the Church and the world. Second, the Church has also come to know the great wealth of the Ignatian tradition, especially, though not exclusively, through the Society of Jesus, with its Spiritual Exercises, and important components like Discernment of Spirits and the Consciousness Examen.

³⁵ It details the lives of ten priests: St. John Chrysostom, St. John Fisher, St. Oliver Plunkett, the Curé of Ars, Cardinal Newman, Archbishop John Baptist Lamy, St. Pius X, Blessed Cardinal Clement von Galen, St. Josemaría Escrivá, Pope John Paul II. See also Michael S. Rose, *Priest: Portraits of Ten Good Men Serving the Church Today*.

³⁶ Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985).

But the rich legacy of the Church goes much further. There are the Church Fathers and the Desert Fathers, the rich monastic traditions of East and West, the whole Eastern Tradition that is largely unknown in the West, and the rich legacy bequeathed by the Medievals. In the twentieth century, we have witnessed the retrieval of the Church Fathers through *La Nouvelle Théologie* (Henri de Lubac, et al.).

We must take special note of the legacy of St. Thomas Aquinas and his theological system of analysis (and his twentieth-century interpreters, like Jordan Aumann or Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange), along with Dominican mystics (like St. Catherine of Siena), and renewal Thomistic schools.

The Holy Spirit speaks powerfully in our contemporary age, as we have witnessed the great fruitfulness of the work of the new lay movements, which are often in the vanguard of the new evangelization (e.g., Opus Dei for sanctification, Communion and Liberation with education for Christian maturity, *Comunità San Egidio* and the *Focolare* for unity).

Here we must take note of a critical principle to be applied to both theological reading and spiritual reading: “read the best.” The principle, “tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are,” also applies. What we read, that which influences us, is what we become (see Chapter 7, “Ministry: Priestly Years,” for a fuller treatment). We should add the important counsel of avoiding dangerous reading materials.³⁷

Let us immediately correct a possible misconception. What is being recommended here is not about becoming elitist, but allowing ourselves to be formed and mentored by the great saintly souls.

There are gradations of benefits. In secular reading, a priest can receive pleasure from reading John Grisham novels, or he can receive greater benefit from reading some good biographies or historical chronicles, and reap even greater benefits if his reading includes Dostoyevsky, Dante, and Christopher Dawson.

³⁷ For example, rather than read *The Da Vinci Code*, with all its errors, wouldn't it be more fruitful to read a book that refutes its arguments, so that the reader gets the essential elements while imbibing the antidote to the poison?

Similarly, in spiritual reading, we can read a good everyday spiritual writer, or we can choose to prefer the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, Pascal's *Pensées*, or solid contemporary interpreters of one of the greats, for example, interpreters of St. Ignatius, like Timothy Gallagher in his *Discernment of Spirits*, and of St. John of the Cross, like Benedict Groeschel in his *Spiritual Passages*. We find many examples of people who have been struck deeply by a great work or writer, as Augustine was by Cicero's *Hortensius* and Jacques and Raïssa Maritain by St. Thomas Aquinas, and an Evangelical minister by G. K. Chesterton (story presented in one issue of the *Coming Home Network*).

3. Examen Prayer

The Consciousness Examen, also called the Examen Prayer, can be a wonderful culmination exercise for the day, when we, as it were, go over the day with God our Father, and ask for light to see it as He sees it. For Ignatius, the Examen Prayer is the key to our daily prayer program. It is so important that those who follow the Ignatian charism, like the Jesuits and the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, spend up to fifteen minutes for their daily General Examen. One saintly Jesuit described the Examen Prayer as akin to “two people in love sharing their day with each other” (as a couple in love might do after a day of work). There is no need to go to great depth or detail on this area since so much has been written on this topic.

For a very recent and very accessible treatment on this subject, especially for the novice to the Examen Prayer, one could look to Timothy Gallagher's *Examen Prayer*. Let us highlight a few practical and concrete points. Fr. Joseph Koterski, a Jesuit teaching at Fordham University, has made a fine summarized “holy card” format with the acronyms (“Grace: **G**-Gratitude, **R**- Request for Light, **A**- Actions/Attitudes, **C**- Chart your Course, **E**- Enthusiasm) and the following summaries on the back:

GRATITUDE – *for something in your life— present, past, or some future prospect.*

REQUEST FOR LIGHT – *Ask for the grace to see yourself as God wants you to see yourself.*

ACCOUNT FOR ACTIONS/ATTITUDES – *Review in your mind the time since your last Examen. While not judging yourself harshly, take note of what happened and how you felt— how you acted or did not act. Note patterns and habits.*

CHART YOUR COURSE – *What, if anything, needs changing? Correcting? Challenging? Or should you continue on course with greater effort? Contrition? Confession?*

ENTHUSIASM – *Ask God for the grace to carry out your resolution with enthusiasm.*³⁸

The five steps in its original version as given by Ignatius are: gratitude, petition, review, forgiveness, and renewal. In a beautifully worded text, Fr. Timothy Gallagher sets it in the context of the Father’s love:

To know in a tangible way that we are loved (step one) is for Ignatius the foundation of all prayer. Rooted anew in this relationship, we ask God for light and strength (step two), and we review our response to that love (step three), a review that flows into the healing encounter of forgiveness (step four) and which, with the insight gained, seeks new growth in the future (step five).³⁹

This captures very succinctly the five steps taken in an examen. As mentioned, St. Ignatius had been “captivated” by God’s love, and everything that he did and prayed flowed from that experience. For those who are not accustomed to finding points of gratitude, doing this for the first time can be revelatory, an “eye-opener,” a step towards seeing God’s love in action in our daily lives. Nevertheless, while the first step of gratitude is the most important, we must realize that this is also a true examen of faults or sins, with true sorrow and desire for conversion.

Fr. Timothy Gallagher makes some very helpful suggestions. First, it is important to learn all five steps and in order. Only later on, after having

³⁸ Fr. Joseph Koterski kindly granted permission on June 16, 2015 to reproduce his card in this book. These cards are recommended for seminaries and religious communities, and they can be ordered directly: Fr. Joseph Koterski SJ, Philosophy Department, Fordham University, Bronx, NY 10458, USA, 718-817-3291, koterski@fordham.edu.

³⁹ Timothy Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer*, 104.

assimilated them, when one is able to do them instinctively, one might make adaptations (e.g., look for 5 points in each half) or have different emphases.

Second, depending on one's state, one might find oneself focusing more on a particular step— one looks to the Holy Spirit, our Guide and Director, to see if He is calling our attention to a particular point.

For example, when we lack clarity or discernment, we might focus on step two, asking for light; when given a special insight on one of our weaknesses, we may focus on step three, on the reflection of our actions; when trying to work on one of our weaknesses, one may focus on step four, our resolutions.⁴⁰

Thus, putting the first two points together gives us what Fr. Gallagher calls “creative fidelity”: fidelity to the general structure, creativity in terms of a style adapted to us and a principal focus to which God is calling us.⁴¹

Third, it is important to know that St. Ignatius teaches us to remain on one particular point as long as necessary: “in the point in which I find what I am seeking, there I will rest, without anxiety to move forward until my heart is satisfied’ (*SpiritEx*, 76).”⁴² If we are not feeling called to any particular point, then we can proceed along the five points as customary.

And fourth, it is important to focus on the experience (heart) and to not be going through the steps mechanically: “... ‘it is not much knowing what fills and satisfies the soul, but rather the feeling and tasting of things interiorly’ (*SpiritEx*, 2).”⁴³ This last point is extremely important, the experiencing the movements of the heart is key. St. Ignatius has modified the traditional “examination of conscience” by adding an examen of gratitude and of the movements of the heart.

Let us highlight a few helpful points. First, while we look at the movements of our hearts, the moods and feelings, both consolations and desolations, it is particularly helpful to make sure we examine any disturbance in our souls

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 107.

⁴² Ibid., 105.

⁴³ Ibid.

from our day. Timothy Gallagher gives a helpful example of a father, Ray, who, after brushing aside a request for attention from his young son in his haste to leave for work, began to notice an interior malaise in his day. He noticed that he was having difficulty praying on the way to work and that he was not as friendly or sociable with his colleagues at work. Finally examining (examen) during a break the reasons for the malaise, he perceived that it was because of his neglect of his son, and, once he phoned home and spoke and apologized to his wife, he recovered his habitual peace.⁴⁴

Fr. Gallagher has a deep conviction of vital place of Discernment of Spirits, that, when writing what would later be entitled *Discernment of Spirits*, initially desired to name his work, *Setting Captives Free*— he saw that the power of discernment of spirits can be applied during the Examen Prayer. He mentions that St. Ignatius of Loyola viewed the Examen Prayer as the most important prayer of the day. Second, though we may come to love the first step of thanksgiving, we must foster true and deep contrition for a failing (fourth step), seeing it as offending God’s love. Third, we must strive to have a clear resolution to overcome that failing, again in response to God’s love.

We might consider a variation of the Examen Prayer by Fr. Joseph Langford (co-founder of the Missionaries of Charity Fathers) that some have found helpful. While he maintains the general order and content, he suggests a variation in format with three steps. First, we look for five gifts or blessings received from God that day: “Doing this daily, we become more aware of God’s gifts, and of God Himself as a giver of gifts.... We begin to see his goodness where before we saw only his supposed absence.”

Second, Fr. Lanford teaches us to look to see moments when invited to give of ourselves, “five occasions in which grace was inviting us to generosity. We then thank God where we have succeeded, and ask for healing and forgiveness where we struggled and failed.”

⁴⁴ Timothy Gallagher, Rule 6 with example of “Ray,” “Discernment of Spirits, First Week Rules: Examples” (Annual Retreat notes, St. Augustine’s Seminary, May 2015, 6-7).

In the third step, Fr. Langford teaches the heart of this exercise: “As we take a few moments of time to ‘pray before praying,’ to seek God and the anointing of his presence upon all things, we move deeper into that presence and then rest there, stay there, learn to live there.”⁴⁵ Looking for five blessings and five invitations on a given day can be easier and more practical to incorporate.

Particular Examen

Let us consider briefly the Particular Examen, found in the first week of the Spiritual Exercises. The General Examen is what we normally do at the end of the day, though it can be done earlier, examining our relationship with God and our actions over the course of the day.

The Particular Examens are exercises that go more on the offensive, targeting some particular area, with frequent examinations for a period of time, like a week or a month. The goal is to strengthen some virtue or root out some weakness. The particular area should be very defined and that can be practiced such that we can say whether we did it or not.

Some spiritual writers see the Particular Examen as being more important than the General Examen, “because it enables us to run, one by one, by our defects and thus overcome them more easily. Besides, if we examine ourselves thoroughly on some important virtue, we not only acquire that virtue, but all the others related thereto.”⁴⁶ This means that to acquire humility, we have to “perfect the practice of obedience, of the love of God, of charity, since pride is the chief obstacle to the exercise of these virtues.”⁴⁷ Spiritual writers highlight rooting out especially our dominant defect, the “Goliath,” expressed in one’s way of thinking, judging, and reacting,⁴⁸ which will have a ripple effect on other virtues.

St. Ignatius suggests that we do a Particular Examen three times a day (morning to make resolutions, after lunch and after dinner with examens of

⁴⁵ Joseph Langford, *Mother Teresa: In the Shadow of Our Lady*, 66-67.

⁴⁶ Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (Rockford, IL: TAN, 2013), no. 468, 228.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves*, 189.

that fault). It is said that St. Ignatius would do several examens each day, partly to discern God's will and partly to foster the presence of God by seeing ever more clearly His work in our everyday lives.

One helpful approach is to divide the day into three segments, doing an Examen around noon, another examen around 5 pm, and the General Examen at night. One could also use the Particular Examen at any time as an exercise to restore gratitude, joy, and the presence of God, and to restore a positive frame of mind. One helpful older text is Fr. Luis de la Palma's *A Treatise on the Particular Examen of Conscience According to the Method of St Ignatius*.⁴⁹

Sr. Briege McKenna in *Miracles Do Happen* offers some key practical insights:

- The most important and yet most neglected element is the awareness of the presence of Christ. She herself uses an image of the Holy Face to intensify this awareness, and reminds us of St. Teresa of Jesus' way of prayer: "Only look at Him."
- She begins prayer with praise (through Gift of Tongues or Psalms), which helps with distraction. Praise is the first goal of prayer.
- She has a great love for Scripture, and carries with her a travel annotated Bible. She often uses the Mass readings of the day, she reads and rereads the text frequently, inserts herself into the scene, and sees what it may be saying to her.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Luis de la Palma, *A Treatise on the Particular Examen of Conscience According to the Method of St. Ignatius Spiritual Exercises* (Createspace, 2013). Luis de la Palma is the author of a beautiful meditation on the Passion, *The Sacred Passion*. For the text of Ignatius' words, one could look at Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Frowbridge, Wiltshire: Cromwell Press, 1998), 34-36.

⁵⁰ Briege McKenna, *Miracles Do Happen: God can do the Impossible* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant, 1987), 31-33.

CHAPTER 2

PLAN OF LIFE AND LIVING THE EUCHARIST

“Safeguard order, and order will safeguard you” (St. Augustine)

The “Background” in the front matter of this book depicts the critical need to recover priestly identity as *alter Christus*, “another Christ.” The loss of the sense of priestly identity was the main cause of the mass exodus of priests after the Second Vatican Council. But priestly identity as “another Christ” is built upon the priest’s primary identity through Baptism as a child of God, to become a new Christ, as Paul teaches in Gal 2:20 (the author has written a book on this important theme, *New Christ: Divine Filiation*). It is this earlier work that treats of the “Both... and” pattern present in our human life, corresponding to the two levels of the Incarnate Word, human and divine. This chapter develops the human need for a schedule or plan of life that is vital to give order, to sanctify the human level of each new Christ, especially for the seminarian and priest.

1. Plan of Life for the Priest

A. The Importance of Making a Schedule

David Allen’s main goal in his outstanding national bestseller, *Getting Things Done*,¹ was to remove all of those loose, amorphous, uncompleted obligations in our life, whose neglect drains our psychic energy, and to capture and have them all in controllable niches, while developing a system of regularly updating them. The importance of structure or order is captured in a quote from Allen’s sequel book: “It’s hard to be fully creative without structure and constraint. Try to paint without a canvas. Creativity and freedom are two sides of the same coin. I like the best of both worlds. Want freedom? Get organized. Want to be organized? Get creative.”² It has been the experience in one seminary that this book has greatly aided a

¹ David Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

² Idem, *Ready for Anything: 52 Productivity Principles for Getting Things Done* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 83-84.

number of seminarians and priests. Here are two examples. One seminarian who was considered the most organized among his peers loved this book so much that he called it his “Bible,” reading a small section of it every evening before retiring. Another priest who was stressed out by new demands of his early priestly life, after having been introduced to this book, with the aid of his spiritual director, arrived at the point where he had an established schedule that was running smoothly, the result of which was that there was very little daily upheaval in the order of his priestly life.

Many people do not recognize the vital necessity of structure, of having a schedule or plan of life. A man entering the seminary might focus on spirituality and prayer and be unaware of the strength that comes from fixed rising times or fixed times for studies or a defined weekly structure. Some believe that establishing structure or a schedule will be confining, and may not fit with one’s personal *modus operandi*. This was the case with one seminarian, struggling with some early childhood family issues and seeing a psychologist regularly for help, who told his spiritual director that he had tried but he just could not work with a schedule. Realizing that his state was more fragile and exceptional due to psychological wounds, the spiritual director allowed him to work without any structure, and in the manner and at a pace he was comfortable with.

However, after ordination, the new priest, when he met his former spiritual director for the first time two years later, admitted that implementing a structure through the guidance of a priestly fraternity, was greatly helping him in the priestly life, and, in hindsight, his not implementing a structure at the seminary was actually due to laziness and a lack of effort and discipline. St. Josemaría Escrivá teaches: “This tying of one’s life to a plan, to a timetable, you tell me, is so monotonous! And I answer: there is monotony because there is little love” (*The Way*, 77).

It gives a structure to protect against the danger of activism

In this period of shortage of priests, many priests may find themselves always going full tilt, and then using his leftover time, when he is already tired, to pray. This was the experience of the founder of the Ottawa-based “Companions of the Cross,” Father Bob Bedard. While directing a retreat for seminarians, he described how he had not been faithful to his prayer life

for many years as a priest. After a conversion, the catalyst being a conference he attended, his life changed and his ministry became manifestly much more fruitful, with young men started to gather around him, forming the beginning of his new ecclesial foundation.³

Besides the possible activism that can follow upon the busyness from the shortage of priests, the diocesan parish priest faces a second difficulty of not having a clear concept of what diocesan priestly spirituality is. Strong religious communities have built-in safeguards: community life and fraternity, a defined spirituality, and a schedule (*horarium*). A diocesan priest, especially if he is living alone in a parish, may not have any of these three. Most importantly, if he does not have priestly fraternity, it makes his spiritual life even more difficult. A plan of life should incorporate key elements, like monthly spiritual direction, frequent fraternal encounters with classmates, and regular recreation and exercise.

The Will of God

Everything depends on doing the will of God. The difficulty is putting it into practice in the priest's daily life. He can begin to seek God's will as he prepares his weekly schedule by asking, "What is God's will for me this week and in my daily regimen." A schedule prepared this way with God's will in mind is no longer simply a schedule— it becomes God's will, a sacred plan of life. We must seek the path of the grain of wheat falling and dying to ourselves by choosing to fulfill our Lord's wishes: by having no plans of our own, to go to whatever parish we are sent, to let our bishop choose our particular work, no matter what our skills are.

It is very easy to fall into the trap of seeking my will and not God's will. A priest with tremendous intellectual talents may be tempted to start planning a career in scholarship or writing; a priest with a deep concern for the poor may start planning ways to get into poor parishes or a ministry of serving the poor.

A diocesan priest once asked a seminary faculty priest how to go about studying Latin. When the latter, aroused by curiosity, asked why the interest

³ Fr. Bob Bedard, Lenten Recollection given to seminarians at St. Augustine's Seminary, 2002.

in Latin, the priest replied that he thought he might begin study of Canon Law during a sabbatical so that he could work in the Marriage Tribunal. Taken aback, the seminary priest recommended instead a different direction: to let go of all personal plans, and to be satisfied with whatever assignment given and allow the bishop to choose for him.

Now, we are not denying that God may desire a particular mission for a priest, but that path should be initiated and confirmed by his bishop. This is the way and the secret of Jesus, who said, “My food is to do the will of the Father.” Jesus did not seek any particular work, but only to please His Father in whatever mission the Father entrusted to Him: “His whole humanity was completely subordinated to the Holy Spirit; His human will completely subject to the will of God. He emptied Himself, laying down all initiative, all use of His own powers.”⁴

Priority in the Life of the Priest

A spiritual director, faced with a pregnant medical doctor’s question about what her priorities were, suggested the idea of concentric circles, beginning with the most important in the center, and to give up the outermost circles (God - Family - Work - Parish Ministry - Hobbies, etc.). Composing a similar priority of concentric circles can enable the priest to protect himself, do God’s will, and seek God first. Here is one possible structure for a parish priest, but this admits of exceptions:

- Christ (e.g., fidelity to prayer)
- Church (e.g., availability for confessions)
- Family (e.g., caring for aging parents)
- Personal development (e.g., reading papal documents)
- Work not assigned by Bishop (e.g., outside youth retreats)

It is obvious that the priest’s relationship to Christ comes before that of the parishioners (see St. Charles Borromeo, OOR), and his responsibility to his parish family comes before that of his biological family (he trusts that Christ will take care of them for him). The priest’s priorities come down ultimately to choosing Christ first, and his first love must unequivocally and manifestly be Christ: “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own

⁴ Eugene Boylan, *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*, 109-110.

father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26).

Our hearts cannot be divided, the preference must be clear. If the choice for Christ is made, then great fruitfulness will follow: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt 6:33). A venerable veteran pastor once advised his newly ordained associate not to imitate the example of the associate’s classmate who twice asked to be moved to a parish to be close to his mother’s residence—though a priest has duties to his aging parents, the dominant focus has to be on the spiritual family, the parish family. Without a clear sense of priority or hierarchy, the priest can easily take the wrong turn, especially if he feels that he is not getting support from his parishioners.

A priest who has big ideas, while lacking affirmation from his bishop and parishioners, may very well seek his affirmation in some outstanding cause, like Pro-life work, which, if it causes him to neglect his parish, may not be God’s will for him. Likewise, a priest who encounters criticism or opposition to his ideas for a parish project as proposed in a parish council, if he does not seek God’s will first, may take it “personally,” and may request of the bishop a reassignment to another parish.

Let us look at two concrete examples that may help us recognize the Holy Spirit’s voice. Sometimes, the Spirit speaks through the events of life. For example, a priest can desire to do some special work, perhaps missionary work with the poor, yet may find that his deteriorating health prevents him from doing this work. His poor health may be God’s way of telling him that this work is not God’s will, at least not at that time.

Another way of discerning God’s will is through the means of good “presumption.” For example, a diocesan priest may think that he should make a major change in his life, perhaps even a change to the religious or contemplative life. However, when he is following a particular course of life, he can presume that the present course of action is God’s will, and further presume that if God wishes him to change, God will basically “shoot him between the eyes,” and many accompanying signs will all converge in the same direction so that there is no question for such an important matter. A critical note of St. Ignatius should be added here: to

never make changes during desolation (fifth Rule). The author's recommendation on making significant decisions is to not do a generic discernment but to employ specifically one of the Ignatian discernment tools, and have it confirmed, if possible by a superior.

B. Creating a Schedule or Plan

Long Term Planning

(i) It is helpful to begin with the big picture, planning on a large scale in order: long-term, annual, semester, and then weekly. First, it is good to start with a *5 or 10 Year Plan*, and work one's way down to weekly schedules and daily "to do" lists. One can have a 5 or 10 Year Plan to begin the priesthood, to plan books that one would like to read (e.g., the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or Vatican II documents, Canon Law and Liturgy, read a certain author like Pope Benedict XVI, etc.); or plan certain summer activities, like a 30-day Ignatian retreat, or attend preaching conferences. Then, one can go to the next stage of *annual planning*. One can also plan the year ahead to match activities with goals from the 5 or 10 year plan. But the most important will be a *weekly schedule*, which is based upon regularly repeating events or activities for a semester. For many reasons, this is vital.

(ii) Second, after planning long-term goals, a second helpful step is to organize each year in advance. Looking at the practices of very organized pastors, we find that they prepare, not piecemeal as events come up, but ahead of time, perhaps even six or twelve month periods in advance. In this advance planning, the pastor can do all of the following at the beginning of the parish year: establish a rotation for preaching (e.g., for the pastor, visiting priest, and parish deacon), invite a guest priest to do the Lenten mission, set dates for the annual parish picnics, host principals and teachers, set up volunteer appreciation dinners, and organize confessions for Advent and Lenten Penance liturgies.

Weekly Schedule

(iii) Third, let us insist upon a fact learned from years of experience: making one weekly schedule for an entire semester has proven to be not very helpful; whereas making a schedule each week can help direct and enable

one to take control of one's life. In fact, (iv) it is recommended that the priest go to the fourth step of making a daily "to-do" list to supplement the weekly schedule (the to-do list is made the evening before, items are checked off as they are accomplished during the day). Some might prefer to use an electronic device (such as an iPhone or a Blackberry), the author's preference is to make a schedule on paper. Regarding calendars, an annual calendar in monthly format (vs. weekly format) has the advantage of providing a bird's eye view.

For schedules on paper, a very efficient and time-saving tool is to make semesterly templates. At the beginning of each semester, the seminarian or priest can make a template of all the events and activities that are fixed for the semester, and make photocopies of the template, so that he makes a master template only once a semester. The idea of a weekly template is that seminarians and priests operate on 3 four-month cycles (3 semesters), within which semester the schedule remains relatively constant: fall semester, spring semester, and summer months. Thus, at the beginning of every four months (Sept, Jan, May), the priest, asking God in prayer to reveal His will, composes a new template (which takes less than half an hour). The template for that "semester" is first filled in with high-priority activities: daily prayer program and priestly duties (Masses, Confessions, school visits, RCIA, hospital visits, etc.). This template is then completed with secondary-tier but important activities: e.g., day off, daily recreation and exercise, and priestly fraternity.

With a template filled in with events that do not change within that semester, he can make photocopies according to the number of weeks in that semester. Then, at the beginning of each week (e.g., Sunday morning), he can take a photocopied template, and, in prayer, complete the partially filled schedules with events and duties specific to that week (e.g., funerals, weddings, support group meeting, spiritual direction).

In making a weekly schedule, there are several helpful principles. First, aim for *fixed times on fixed days* for activities as much as possible: e.g., fixed rising and retiring times, fixed daily holy hours at 6:30 am, homily daily preparation time at 4 pm, weekly hospital and school visits, talks preparation at 9 am (e.g., school, R.C.I.A.), fixed day off each week.

Second, *clump* similar activities as much as possible. For example, a noon-day visit to the Church before lunch can “clump” several related norms: visit the Blessed Sacrament; Midday Prayer; spiritual communion; the *Angelus*; and even a particular Examen. This clumping makes it easier to fulfill the prayer program, while avoiding having to do these smaller norms on multiple occasions.

Third, it has been found to be very helpful to try to *set goals* for tasks. Setting goals, being goal-oriented, gives us more zip and energy and enables us, more often than not, to attain the goals set. For example, in RCIA preparation this week, he might insert, “Read CCC, nn. 482-495,” and in preparation for Holy Week, he might dedicate a period to “Organize Holy Week liturgies.”

Fourth, *set time deadlines* for every project— experience shows how ineffective our work becomes, with a loss of sense of priority, when we leave things “open-ended.”

There are clear benefits to preparing a weekly schedule, always with God in prayer. It allows the priest to look at the big picture and put down all the priority tasks, which effectively enables him to see God’s will more clearly, as these tasks are directly tied to the duties of his state of life. This weekly schedule can also allow him to set a rhythm of doing the same tasks at the same time and on the same days every week (e.g., preparing homilies and First Communion school visits or RCIA classes) and at the ideal times. For example, he might schedule mornings for more intellectual work, or dedicate or block certain “dead time” for catching up with emails and correspondence.

Finally, in his weekly schedule, the template enables him to inscribe details for each week, like feast days, the intentions of the Masses, and even goals, both spiritual and work goals. What we ultimately hope to do is to put everything down on paper (or electronic device), so that our minds are free to sanctify our work and live in God’s presence. It is our experience that, when we don’t write some idea or resolution down (paper or iPhone), then the thought comes back to mind over and over, and gives us no rest, and we are more likely to forget to do it.

The efficacy and power that comes from having the structure of a plan of life can be validated and confirmed by the peace that flows into our lives. St. Ignatius found that the testing of movements of the spirits within (discernment of spirits) enabled him to validate that which is of God. For example, when we are early or ahead in our tasks, there is a certain peace. In contrast, when we are even five minutes late for our holy hour, we can “feel” a disturbance: a certain uneasiness, lack of focus, sense of being unsettled. This applies to any looseness in our daily lives.

For example, a fine seminarian raised the issue during spiritual direction of dryness in prayer. The spiritual director, knowing a little of his struggle to rise on time and get the full period of prayer in, asked him about his fidelity in that area. As it turned out, during the two weeks leading up to spiritual direction, he was getting up late and his prayer periods were often shortened. Suggesting that he try to “tighten the screws” again in that area, the seminarian reported to the spiritual director two weeks later that the dryness had vanished. While one cannot be certain, the dryness he experienced could have been a call from God to return to fidelity to the rising time and to prayer. Being on time, or even early, brings a certain peace and the feeling of being on top of things.

A schedule prepared with, and before, God is no longer simply a schedule, it is, as it were, “God’s will,” the priest’s horarium.

A Practical Illustration:

From Ordination to the Priesthood

During the Christmas break a few months before his priestly ordination, seminarian John had personal doubts. His spiritual director assures him that, despite his defects, God is calling him to the priesthood and that he can proceed in peace. He recalls that the apostles too had human failings, and the Lord nevertheless called them, and later transformed them through the power of the Holy Spirit into great saints. With a great sense of generosity, John looks forward to giving his heart totally to Christ and to the people of God, Christ’s flock. But what can he humanly do to open himself to this transformation?

John starts by setting up a 10-year plan. In this plan, he begins by making a program of what he might read each year, starting with the more foundational books, such as Scripture or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or the Second Vatican Council documents; then moving to parish-related things like sacraments, liturgy, and canon law on Marriage; and finally to specific great twentieth century authors, like Henri de Lubac. Second, he looks for experiences that can help make him a better priest: World Youth Days and Eucharistic Congresses; Pilgrimages to sacred sites, like the Holy Land, Rome, Loreto or Lourdes; Conferences (e.g., Newman, Church Fathers, preaching); a “Life in the Spirit Seminar”; and above all, the 30-day Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. He thinks ahead and realizes that these activities could only be done during a sabbatical. Third, recalling an American seminary rector who associated himself with Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in New York, from whom he gained much spiritual growth and support, he hopes he will gain similar fruits with a spiritual community.

Next, John looks at the annual plan, the plan for his first year of priesthood, drawing from his larger 10-year plan. For his reading goals for the first year of priesthood, he decides to complete his reading of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and Pope Benedict XVI’s volumes on *Jesus of Nazareth*. For the first summer immediately after ordination, he decides that he will finally visit Rome, the heart of the Church, and for the following summer, he hopes to go to World Youth Day. He has attended the monthly recollections of a new lay movement and considers asking one of their priests to be his spiritual director. He also hopes to be able to find a classmate or fellow priest to accompany him in his travels or retreats.

Finally, John looks at the semester immediately before him. He makes certain resolutions for the priesthood, considering the following: perhaps, a structure to protect fidelity to prayer; to never walk alone but always have a spiritual director; to try to build fraternity with and be obedient to his pastor; to seek to become deeply Eucharistic, doing his meditations before the Blessed Sacrament; to read the new Church’s documents as soon as they are published; to dedicate Saturday Masses to our Lady and to go through her for everything; to be faithful to the annual retreats. He then looks to three pillars that will protect him: a good spiritual director, a good first pastor (God willing), and priestly fraternity.

Ideally, during seminary years, he has learned to establish a weekly schedule in the seminary that will mirror as much as possible that of the daily parish schedule (e.g., morning holy hour and a second period of prayer during quiet hours before supper), especially a prayer program, so that he can live the structure and develop discipline during the seminary years. On the eve of his ordination, he hopes to entrust his priesthood to Mary, ask special favours of Mary, and make a general Confession. At the end of each year, he reviews the year to recognize God's blessings as well as his failings, and plans to make a general Confession and to renew his consecration to Mary.

2. Guidelines to Protect the Priest

A. Guidelines and Boundaries

One form of structure that is perhaps more neglected in our contemporary priestly culture and situation is the passing on of wise counsels of older priests ("boundaries" in regards to relations to people and addictions are usually well covered at seminaries). In the past, there was more of the practice of passing on wisdom from the older experienced priests to younger priests. They used to teach guidelines, like making an effort to keep Confessions of women within the confessional, or if counselling women, to leave the door open or use a room with glass doors.

In addition to the structure in a schedule, the newly ordained priest ought to consider "guidelines" ("rules") for his ministry and life that would both protect him as well as allow him to grow in holiness. Cardinal Vaughan, in *The Young Priest*, represents that older priestly formation that prescribes the general need for a rule of life, with norms or guidelines that protect the priest.⁵ Many of these somewhat dated norms still apply to us today:

Many details of practical conduct ought to be considered and settled by a Priest for himself, upon some plain reason or principle, before he enters upon his career, otherwise he will expose himself to drift with whatever current he may get into. He will be happier if he has already made up his mind when questions arise, than if he is taken by surprise and has to act hastily or in doubt.

⁵ Herbert Cardinal Vaughan, *The Young Priest: Conferences on the Apostolic Life* (London: Burns & Oates Ltd., 1908), 335-336.

But he also offers the insight of having “immovable axioms”:

First of all, there are certain general principles which should be accepted as immovable axioms. Many things are permissible to and in a layman which ought not to be tolerated for a priest. The Council of Trent says: *Serva regulam et regula servabit te*; by which St. Gregory meant not merely the observance of hours, and of certain regular duties, but of a rule that should protect the priest against the fashions of the day and the special dangers to which he must be exposed.⁶

He mentions specifically a program of self-denial and mortification, and restraint in certain worldly gatherings, amusements, sports, and games (most apply to our times but can also be slightly adapted, e.g., include internet):

wearing clerical dress; societies and gatherings a priest ought to avoid; never gamble; don't sit for hours; prudence with women; moderation with alcohol; care with smoking; be careful not to censure older priests who have these practices; how the priest furnishes his room.⁷

Some recent documents by the Congregation of Clergy have treated more of these practical elements (e.g., *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 2013 New Edition).

Here is an example of a newly ordained priest coming to the awareness of the need for a guideline. After helping a woman asking for alms at the rectory door, upon her request, he agreed to drive her to a nearby train station so that she could return home. While driving the woman, it occurred to him that parishioners seeing him could misinterpret her presence in his car. Consulting his pastor on his return, the latter agreed that the associate pastor's concern was sound and suggested alternatives, like asking a parishioner to drive her or calling a taxi. Problems can arise, especially in today's climate of suspicion of priests, if we do not set guidelines or boundaries.

⁶ Ibid., 336.

⁷ Ibid., 335-347.

Having guidelines brings clear benefits. For example, when a priest has not established any boundaries and simply reacts to each situation as it arises, he tends to be more uncertain, and certainly more likely to fall; with guidelines, the priest instead is able to be more relaxed and at ease with women or situations, precisely because he knows where the boundaries lie and because he practices the discipline of order each day. A newly-ordained priest was invited to dance at a reception, and he politely declined, pointing to his seminary spiritual director's counsel that priests should not engage in dancing (because the proximity of a woman might prove to be a temptation).

B. Some Particular Guidelines

A few precautions or guidelines, drawing from the wise adage that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” can assist us to avoid common pitfalls. Seminaries today may already be discussing general “boundaries,” but not necessarily guidelines for priestly life. Perhaps one of the greatest helps is to cultivate practices that strengthen our priestly identity.

In this regard, one of the first and simplest is for the priest to wear his clerical collar, and so avoid a dichotomy between his interior identity as priest and his exterior vestment (*Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* n. 61). A priest can be tempted to look upon the collar as a uniform for work, to wear only when he is on duty, and thus fall into a certain schizophrenia. For in life, it is often doing the external things that cultivates the interior quality.

Wearing our clerical dress is also hearkening to Pope John Paul II, who set the example and asked his priests in Rome to give that example as well. It is recounted how one person suggested to Cardinal Wojtyla, while visiting Canada, that he both discard his cassock and be more gregarious (accessible), and he refused to follow either suggestion. Of course, being faithful to our priestly dress does not mean that we have to play hockey in our cassocks or not be able to relax in casual clothing at a cottage.

One particular area for vigilance and boundaries is with our hearts and women within priestly ministry. The priest has been entrusted with a great

gift of celibacy and serving His spouse the Church, and like a married man, must take precautions to protect his fidelity to his spouse. If a newly ordained priest comes to the parish with good intentions but no guidelines, he could easily enter a situation where he falls “in love” with a secretary, music director, or a parishioner. Once he has developed an inappropriate attachment, it might be very difficult to extricate himself, as his heart and his emotions are involved.

A female parishioner, to help protect a priest, once confided to him what another woman shared, how handsome she found a certain priest. When challenged about such inappropriate remarks, the woman responded that she did not care if he was a priest and was planning to “go after him.” This woman may be in the minority, but priests must be aware that their priestly state can make them attractive to some. The past experience of the falls of some brother priests can be a warning for us.

During a final meeting of a spiritual director with directees at the end of the seminary year, one seminarian asked the director whether he should dance if invited to do so at family parties. The witty response he received was, “Well, there is such a thing as *chemistry*.” Given the presence of this gift of *chemistry*, having specific guidelines can be very helpful: television sets in our rooms can pose dangers of wasting time and temptations to impurity, and thus in many cases it might be safer to have them in the common room; offering more temptation is internet access, which, for those struggling in this area might be better kept in the parish office and not in one’s bedroom; keeping company with attractive women can pose a danger— obviously, having candlelight dinners with women would be foolhardy. But even sharing personal attractions felt towards or becoming too close to someone we are counselling can bring us to that slippery slope, to which some priests who have left the priesthood can attest.

A particularly important area for vigilance at this first level is prayer, since prayer is the indispensable foundation for everything else within the spiritual life. Due to busyness, a priest can justifiably forget to recite his Evening Prayer (e.g., change of schedule), or be late in getting to his Divine Office because of illness that day. If he does fall behind in his prayer norms, then as soon as the opportunity arises, he should set aside all emails, letters,

phone messages, all of which can wait (except emergencies), and immediately put God first by catching up with all his prayers. And if he returns late from some function, he does not forego praying Evening Prayer and Compline, but fulfills his solemn promise made at his diaconate ordination to “feed” the flock entrusted to him. He must be faithful to these “little things” that will protect him, otherwise he can start on the slippery slope that leads to giving up his prayer life altogether, and that would spell disaster for his spiritual life, and, perhaps, also his priesthood.

To summarize, consider this image. A Russian Orthodox bishop addressing Catholic seminarians shared something of the spirituality as a monk. He compared the soul to a castle, and, as long as the enemy is kept outside the castle walls, the occupants remain safe. If there is only one breach, then the castle can fall. Thus, the key is to stop any incursion, and the enemy is thus kept at bay. Applying this to the priest’s life, it can be like Minas Tirith, the capital city of Gondor in the third of the movie series, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, which has a few concentric ramparts. Once the first rampart was broken through, it became easier for the enemy to breach the other ones, though with difficulty.

The priest’s plan of life is like a series of ramparts; the more he is able to protect the outer rampart, the little details of his life, the less likely that the other interior ramparts will fall. If the priest makes it a point to be faithful to clerical dress, maintaining preferably two daily periods of prayer (being faithful to the *Liturgy of the Hours* is not sufficient), fulfilling his responsibilities (e.g., Mass, meetings with parishioners), making priestly fraternity a priority, being faithful to frequent Confession and, if possible, regular times with his spiritual director, being obedient to his bishop, then it is hard for the outer ramparts to be broken through. With all this, the priest can still fail in running around in busyness, but a good spiritual director as well as his “rampart” of fidelity should protect him.

3. Practical Suggestions for Living the Eucharist

In *New Christ: Divine Filiation*, one chapter has been dedicated to the Eucharist in its three fundamental dimensions. Participation in the Eucharist is the objective source of assimilation to Christ, but how we open ourselves to it in self-surrender enables the subjective transformation.

Federico Suarez's *About Being a Priest* ⁸ offers helpful suggestions and Edward Maristany's *Loving the Holy Mass* provides a concrete method to follow the Mass. Here are several counsels to live this assimilation to or fusion with Christ.

A. The Priest Should Never Miss Daily Mass, Which must Become the Heart of his Day

Jean d'Elbéc's words summarize our intent: "As an apostle, never forget that your spiritual and supernatural fruitfulness will come always and above all else from the Mass, and then from your personal immolation united to that of the altar."⁹ We note here that he includes the priest's "personal immolation." Pope Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* teaches that the Eucharist has the same power as the sacrifice of Calvary—contemplating the power of Calvary being poured out into the Church and world is beyond consolation.

This purchase [Calvary's sacrifice], however, does not immediately have its full effect... Wherefore, that the redemption and salvation of each person and of future generations unto the end of time may be effectively accomplished, and be acceptable to God, it is necessary that men should individually come into vital contact with the sacrifice of the cross, so that the merits, which flow from it, should be imparted to them. In a certain sense it can be said that on Calvary Christ built a font of purification and salvation which He filled with the blood He shed... ¹⁰ (n. 77)

In addition, as this document teaches, the Eucharist is the one sublime means by which we are able to fulfill the four "ends" (*fines*) owed to God: giving glory to our heavenly Father, thanksgiving, satisfaction (expiation, propitiation, reconciliation), and impetration (entreaty, intercession).¹¹ Canon 941 of the *Code of Canon Law* teaches that "in the Eucharistic Sacrifice the work of redemption is continually being carried out," and therefore that "Daily celebration is earnestly recommended, because, even if it should not be possible to have the faithful present, it is an action of

⁸ Federico Suarez, *About Being a Priest* (Houston: Lumen Christi Press, 1979; Spanish orig., *El Sacerdote y su Ministerio*, 1970), "Offering Sacrifice" (69-82) and "Devotion to the Eucharist" (176-183).

⁹ Jean d'Elbéc, *I Believe in Love*, 245.

¹⁰ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical on the sacred liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, Nov. 20, 1947, nn. 77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, nn. 71-74.

Christ and of the Church in which the priests fulfill their principal role.”¹² This is also affirmed by Vatican II’s *Presbyterorum ordinis* (n. 13): “This celebration is an act of Christ and the Church even if it is impossible for the faithful to be present.” So vital is daily celebration for redemption that the Church permits us to celebrate Mass, though less than ideal, without the faithful present—it is still an action “of Christ and of the Church.” We have to see with great clarity what Bishop Attila Miklós-házy taught that, in celebrating the Eucharist each day, the priest has in a certain sense fulfilled his ministry; his entire ministry revolves around the Holy Eucharist.

This is supported by the *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*: “Consecrated in order to perpetuate the Holy Sacrifice, the priest thus manifests, in the most evident manner, his identity.”¹³ Pope John Paul II gives us the great example in his *Gift and Mystery* in which he revealed that he never missed celebrating daily Mass through his own fault in his fifty years of priesthood. The desire to never miss celebrating daily Mass flows from a deep understanding of the sublime meaning of the Mass. For the faithful too, participation in the Eucharist is “their chief duty and supreme dignity” (*Mediator Dei*, n. 80). And once the priest understands the nature of the Mass, he then understands that it has to be the heart of his day: each hour before Mass should be preparation for this awesome mystery, each hour following it should be thanksgiving. Mother Teresa of Calcutta understood something of the mystery as she had these words inscribed on a card in every sacristy of their Congregation’s houses: “Priest of God, celebrate this Mass as if this were your first Mass, your last Mass, and your only Mass.”

Thomas Aquinas teaches that the celebration of Mass is the key for our work with the People of God: “A priest exercises a twofold action: the one, which is principal, over the true body of Christ; the other which is secondary, over the mystical body of Christ. The second depends on the first, but not conversely.”¹⁴ Thus, the second body, the Church, depends

¹² *Code of Canon Law*, cn. 904: “Indeed, daily celebration is earnestly recommended...” It is helpful at times to have recourse to the *Code of Canon Law Annotated* (Montreal: Wilson and Lafleur Limitée, 1993).

¹³ Congregation of the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, n. 48.

¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, transl. English Dominicans (Westminster, MA: Christian Classics, repr. 1981), vol. 5, Suppl., q. 36, art. 2, ad 1, 2674.

upon the first body, the Eucharist. It is the sacrament of unity, the Eucharist, that gathers the children of God into His kingdom. All the sacraments and all his ministry and his prayers are directed toward this, what *Lumen gentium* calls “the source and summit of the Christian life.” If the Mass is what it is, then every aspect of the liturgy is sacred. This is not to promote a certain “churchiness” or being “traditional” or pedantic; it is rather to respect the awesome mystery that is taking place:

For if the Church has considered that what happens at Mass is so significant as to provide for every gesture... to ensure that everything is done with dignity and decorum, the priest should realize that attention to the liturgy, extreme care and obedience to the norms laid down, is not a luxury, but a basic duty. Therefore reading hurriedly, undue freedom in the gestures, carelessness in making the sign of the cross and other signs, rushing through everything without decorum, naturalness or even intelligibility in the prayers... are all clear signs of roughness toward God and of negligence. There is no liturgical ceremony in the Church that can compare with the Mass in greatness, none as sacred in character as the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ; therefore none demands more extreme devotion, more exquisite veneration or more profound respect. We cannot trifle with something as holy as the body and blood of Christ. It should never be used for liturgical experiments based on the whims or theories of some so-called theologian; much less should it serve as a pretext for testing out or trying out something not only differing from, but even opposed to, the Church’s sentiments or any norms she has explicitly laid down.¹⁵

While it is accomplished through human ritual actions, the liturgy is principally a divine action, that is sublime and exalted, and as such requires the greatest fidelity and care. The liturgy is not the personal playground of the priest, but governed by Christ through His Church. The best of vestments and furniture should furnish the Church, not luxurious but having “noble simplicity” that *Sacrosanctum concilium* prescribes. Priests, like St. John Vianney, have lived in great poverty while seeking only the very best of liturgical vessels, vestments, and furnishings.

¹⁵ Federico Suarez, *About Being a Priest*, 76-77.

B. Mass Requires Preparation and Thanksgiving¹⁶

But it also behoves us to prepare ourselves to enter this great mystery. In the Office of Readings on the feast day of St. Charles Borromeo, St. Charles teaches the importance of recollection before Mass:

Another priest complains that as soon as he comes into church to pray the office or to celebrate Mass, a thousand thoughts fill his mind and distract him from God. But what was he doing in the sacristy before he came out for the office or for Mass? How did he prepare? What means did he use to collect his thoughts and to remain recollected?¹⁷

It is helpful if the priest organizes the ushers and servers and lectors ahead of time, so that in the last few minutes before Mass, after he has warmly greeted everyone and inquired about their welfare, he now turns his heart to their and his Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, and to the eternal Sacrifice— everything else must take second place. St. Leonard of Port Maurice also underscores the great importance of preparation to enter the holy sacrifice.

Religious communities with strong prayer discipline usually prescribe periods of thanksgiving after Mass. A little misunderstanding once arose when a U.S. seminary faculty member complained about seminarians of a religious community attending the diocesan seminary staying back after Mass to pray while the rest of the seminary community went to lunch. One of their superiors had to intervene and explain that the brothers in formation are required to spend fifteen minutes after Mass in thanksgiving, notwithstanding the practices of other seminarians in the seminary that they attend.

The saints witness to the importance of this exercise. St. Teresa of Jesus teaches that thanksgiving after Mass is one of the most fruitful spiritual exercises.

¹⁶ Ibid., 78-79.

¹⁷ St. Charles Borromeo, OOR on Feast day of St. Charles Borromeo (Nov 4), *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. IV, 1544.

C. Implore our Lady to Act and to Receive Christ in the Priest at Mass

The priest celebrant can consider going one step further. We follow Pope John Paul II's lead in *Novo millennio ineunte*, and "Contemplate Christ in the Eucharistic Church with Mary."¹⁸ The priest, aware of his great unworthiness and aware that our Blessed Mother as a human being was the only one worthy of carrying Jesus, can ask her to once more hold Jesus and receive Jesus in the Eucharist; he can go even further and ask her to celebrate the Mass in the priest, for in a more general sense, she was the first "priest" to carry Jesus and to give Him to the world. The priest need not stop there. Alternatively, for all Christians, they can seek to present Jesus to the wounded heart of Mary in their hearts:

Each morning at Mass, the focal point of our days and of your life, put Jesus on the altar of the wounded heart of Mary, the Mother of the Church. Assist at Mass near her, with her, at the foot of the Cross, like St. John and St. Mary Magdalene.... I have told you, in speaking about Communion, that your heart is a heaven for Jesus, and this is even more so when Jesus finds Mary there. It is her heart which will reveal to you the intimate secrets of the Heart of Jesus, as it is the Heart of Jesus which will reveal to you the heart of Mary.¹⁹

As previously mentioned, there are four ends or purposes of the Mass: praise or adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and intercession. Because of the infinite magnitude of this immolative Sacrifice of the Mass, Catholic doctrine holds that the Mass is one and at the same time a sacrifice of praise, of thanksgiving, of propitiation (atonement, expiation, conciliation), and of impetration (petition). The priest can also ask Mary in his place to fulfill the four ends of the Mass: praise, adoration, thanksgiving, and intercession. Who better than the Mother of God, the one human being most beloved of God, to praise, adore, thank God and intercede for the Church and the world before Him.

¹⁸ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 6: "To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the "programme" which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization."

¹⁹ Jean d'Elbée, *I Believe in Love*, 265-266.

The document, *The Priest, Pastor, and Leader of the Parish Community*, supports this idea of employing our Lady to be the “priest” interiorly in the action of the ministerial priest at Mass.

In penetrating that mystery, the Blessed Virgin Mary, united with the Redeemer, comes to our assistance because “when we celebrate the Holy Mass, the Mother of the Son of God is in our midst and introduces us to the mystery of His redemptive sacrifice. Thus, she is the mediatrix of all the grace flowing from this sacrifice to the Church and to all the faithful.” Indeed, “Mary was associated with the priestly sacrifice of Christ in a singular way by sharing His will to save the world through the Cross. She was the first and perfect spiritual participant in His oblation as *Sacerdos et Hostia*. As such, she can obtain and give to those who share ministerially in the priesthood of her Son, the grace to respond all the more to the demands of the spiritual sacrifice which the priesthood demands: in particular she can obtain and give the grace of faith, hope and perseverance in the face of trials which stimulate a more generous participation in the redemptive sacrifice.”²⁰

For she “introduces us to the mystery of His redemptive sacrifice”; “is the mediatrix of all the grace flowing from this sacrifice to the Church and to all the faithful”; that originally “She was the first and perfect spiritual participant in His oblation as *Sacerdos et Hostia*”; and she can obtain great graces “which stimulate a more generous participation in the redemptive sacrifice.” All these suggest that Mary can have a very active role in the action of the ministerial priest. This is also supported by texts from Pope John Paul II’s *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*:

Mary, throughout her life at Christ’s side and not only on Calvary, made her own *the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist*. (n. 56) Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist. (n. 57)

A recommended section of Msgr. James O’Connor’s *The Hidden Manna* is “The Eucharist and our Lady.” There we find echoed and amplified the Church’s sentiments of our Lady’s role in the Eucharist.

²⁰ Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Pastor, and Leader of the Parish Community*, n. 13.

And because the bond between the Son and Mother is “intimate and indissoluble,” as the Council teaches, she remains with him— and because of him and after him— the chief offerer of that sacrifice that is made present in our earthly Eucharist. As it is the Lord who offers and is offered in every Eucharist, and who, in and with himself, offers the sacrifice of praise of his entire Body, so, in him and with him, Mary offers and is offered in each Eucharistic celebration in that utterly unique way that reflects her role in the redemption her Son achieved for her and for all of us.... It can be seen from the above that this offering by Mary totally transcends that of the ministerial priesthood.... Mary operates on the level of the *realities* that are made sacramentally present in the earthly Eucharistic celebration.²¹

D. Greatest Presence of Christ is in the Blessed Sacrament

The Church, in the Second Vatican Council, especially in *Sacrosanctum concilium*, teaches that Christ is present in many forms. In his manifold presence, the greatest incarnational presence within the Church is the Eucharist, the “source and summit of the Christian life.” If we recall that the Mass is the “perpetuation” or the “re-presentation” of the sacrifice of Calvary, then the priest is all-powerful. He has power to touch the entire universe.

Being the centre of the priest’s day means that the Mass is not just one of the things he does, nor even the most important thing he does, but almost everything he does— he is made priest to “offer sacrifice.”

For the priest, the Eucharist must occupy “the truly central place both in his ministry and in his spiritual life” because all of the Church’s spiritual good derives from the Eucharist, which per se is the source and summit of all evangelization. Hence, the importance of proper preparation before offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, of its daily celebration, of thanksgiving and of the visit to the Blessed Sacrament during the course of the day.²²

One tremendous application of this truth is that “the Eucharist... is the source and summit of all evangelization.” This is an astounding statement.

²¹ James O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 347.

²² Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Pastor, and Leader of the Parish Community*, n. 13.

The principal means of evangelization is not our preaching, not even our witness, but the Eucharist. As such, the document promotes proper preparation, thanksgiving, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament. According to Pope John Paul II, we must become “intensely Eucharistic.”²³ But besides the Eucharist as holy Mass, the Eucharist as Blessed Sacrament, as Paul VI in *Mysterium fidei* (n. 38) teaches, is the greatest presence of all Christ’s presences:

But there is yet another manner in which Christ is present in His Church, a manner which surpasses all the others; it is His presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is, for this reason, “a more consoling source of devotion, a lovelier object of contemplation and holier in what it contains” than all the other sacraments, for it contains Christ Himself...

The tabernacle thus must be in a prominent place in chapel; it must be foremost in our hearts when we are in the house. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, when receiving visitors, would say to them, “Let’s visit the Master of the house.” The presence of our Lord in the tabernacle is what constitutes a distinctive difference between Catholic and Protestant churches. A priest spending a couple of months in Asia admired the new and beautiful church at the parish of which he was a guest, yet felt a deep void in this large structure, even though the Blessed Sacrament was “stored” in a charming basement chapel. It lacked the spiritual warmth that one normally senses from Christ’s Eucharistic presence in the church. When a Catholic enters a parish church, what makes all the difference in the world is the presence of the tabernacle, that should rivet his attention. Jesus is a prisoner waiting for our visit.

Pope John Paul II himself teaches this truth in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. “The mystery of the Eucharist— sacrifice, presence, banquet— ... must be experienced and lived in its integrity, both in its celebration and in the intimate converse with Jesus which takes place after receiving communion or in a prayerful moment of Eucharistic adoration apart from Mass.”²⁴

²³ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (6 January 2001), 11; Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), 55.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 61.

E. Daily Holy Hour

Some may not be fully aware that, while “Eucharist” refers primarily to the Mass, it refers by extension to our Lord’s presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Though secondary to the Mass, it holds a vital place. The *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* has very clear recommendations for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament: that the priest be a model of adoration, dedicating long hours and doing meditation “whenever possible” there, leaving alone, and reserving “greatest attention and honour.”

The centrality of the Eucharist should be apparent not only in the worthy celebration of the Sacrifice, but also in the proper adoration of the Sacrament, so that the priest might be the model for the faithful also in devout attention and diligent meditation — whenever possible — done in the presence of our Lord in the tabernacle. It is hoped that the priests entrusted with the guidance of communities dedicate long periods of time for communal adoration and reserve the greatest attention and honour for the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, also outside of Holy Mass, over any other rite or gesture. “Faith and love for the Eucharist will not allow Christ to remain alone in his presence in the tabernacle.”²⁵

Bishop Fulton Sheen is known for his preaching on the importance of keeping the daily holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament.

First, the Holy Hour is not a devotion; it is a sharing in the work of redemption.... Our Lord asked, “Could you not watch one hour with Me?” He asked for an hour of reparation to combat the hour of evil; an hour of victimal union with the Cross to overcome the anti-love of sin.... Not for an hour of activity did He plead, but for an hour of companionship. The third reason I keep up the Holy Hour is to grow more and more into His likeness... Looking at the Eucharistic Lord for an hour transforms the heart in a mysterious way as the face of Moses was transformed after his companionship with God on the mountain.²⁶

If this is indeed the real presence of Christ, then the priest should be drawn to prayer before His august presence as prisoner for us in the tabernacle. Bishop Fulton Sheen loved to prepare his homilies before the Blessed

²⁵ Congregation of the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, n. 50.

²⁶ Fulton Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, 187-198.

Sacrament. Love of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament can intensify our love for the Mass. The priest might find benefit from reading the book, *In Sinu Jesu*, the dialogue between Jesus and a monk.

CHAPTER 3

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND CONFESSION

Yes, My child, I am replacing Myself with your spiritual director [Father Andresz]. He is taking care of you according to My will. Respect his every word as My own. He is the veil behind which I am hiding. Your director and I are one; his words are My words.¹ (Jesus to St. Faustina)

Christ Himself provides a model for the Church in regard to spiritual direction and Confession. To prepare the apostles for their task, He kept them close to Him so that He could personally form them for their task, essentially giving them spiritual direction. Similarly, Paul taught his followers that, while they had many teachers, they had only one “father,” himself, whom they should imitate. With regard to “Confession,” we note that Peter had to repent (threefold) of his denial of Christ, and this may have applied to Paul as well for his sins.

We note a helpful newer book on Confession by Fr. Michael Giesler, *Guidebook for Confessors*,² as well as a very fine new resource for spiritual direction in English by Fr. Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves: On Being a Spiritual Guide*³ (author of the influential meditation series, *In Conversation with God*). Most importantly, we note that the Congregation for the Clergy issued a document on the same theme as this chapter’s, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*,⁴ our primary point of reference here.

Let us begin by noting two pertinent overarching points from *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*. First, the Introduction to the entire document sets the goal in its title: “Toward Holiness.” That is, it specifies that the Church’s ministry is to lead the faithful “in the journey towards sanctification and apostolate” (n. 9). This in turn calls for holiness in the

¹ St. Faustina, *Diary*, n. 1308, p. 470. See also n. 979, p. 378; n. 215, p. 110.

² Michael Giesler, *Guidebook for Confessors* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2010).

³ Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves: On Being a Spiritual Guide* (New York: Scepter Publ., 2012). Fr. Francis Fernández-Carvajal is the author of the highly-regarded seven-volume meditation series, *In Conversation with God: Meditations for Each Day of the Year*.

⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors* (Città del Vaticano, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011). At this time, the document can be retrieved from various websites, but not yet available at Vatican.va but through clerus.org.

priest. Second, this may be the first Vatican document dedicated to Confession and spiritual direction together. In a time when spiritual direction and Confession can be viewed as optional, an official Church document setting them side-by-side for attaining holiness (for forming Christ in Christians, Gal 4:19) establishes a connection between Confession and spiritual direction and heightens their prominence for Christian life. The document attests to both as linked and necessary for holiness:

The relationship between reconciliation and spiritual direction is based on the urgency of love... (n. 3, 6). Thanks then to its individual character, the first form of celebration makes it possible to link the Sacrament of Reconciliation with something which is different but readily linked with it: I am referring to spiritual direction.... (n. 42, 20)

I. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Treatises on the art of spiritual direction abound. Presupposing these fine works, this chapter section seeks only to highlight key aspects drawn from three primary resources (Thomas Dubay, Francis Fernández-Carvajal, and the Congregation for the Clergy), along with practical elements from personal experience in receiving and giving spiritual direction.⁵

1. Some Fundamental Pillars of Spiritual Direction

Because of the confusion that existed in the Church in the post-Vatican II period, it is worthwhile, even necessary, to look first to Fr. Thomas Dubay's work, *Seeking Spiritual Direction: How to Grow the Divine Life Within*,⁶ as it is addressed to the neophyte, and therefore does not presuppose but establishes the fundamental principles and elements of spiritual direction. But we shall complement Fr. Dubay's vision with the new document, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, as well as the deep experience of Francis Fernández-Carvajal's *Through Wind and Waves*. Let us examine some foundational pillars.

⁵ For a summary overview, see Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 380-398. Priests and seminarians seeking training in spiritual direction might consider courses offered through the "Institute of Priestly Formation" in Omaha, Nebraska.

⁶ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction: How to Grow the Divine Life Within* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1993). He was a veteran spiritual director, retreat director, with knowledge of the Carmelite charism (author of *Fire Within*).

A. Necessity of Spiritual Direction for Spiritual Growth

The necessity of human assistance (mediation) through spiritual direction to attain holiness is captured well by the great Dominican, St. Vincent Ferrer:

A person who has a director by whom he allows himself to be guided, whom he obeys in all his actions, great and small, will more easily and quickly arrive at perfection than he ever could by himself, even were he gifted with an extraordinary degree of intelligence and supplied with books explaining the nature of all the virtues and the means of acquiring them. I would go still further and say that our Lord, without whom we can do nothing, will never bestow His grace on one, who having at his disposal, a man capable of instructing and directing him, neglects this powerful means of sanctification, believing himself to be self-sufficient and that, by his own powers, he is capable of seeking and discovering the things necessary for salvation. The way of obedience is the royal road leading men securely to the summit of that mysterious ladder over which the Lord seems to be leaning. It is the way trodden by all the holy Fathers of the desert. And, in general, all those who have tended toward perfection have followed this path.⁷

Fr. Dubay emphasizes the supreme importance of spiritual direction. First, he begins by giving key examples. This principle of mediation, of God guiding us through others, appears to be the common insight of saints, such as monastic founders like St. John Cassian (*Book of Institutions*) and St. John Climacus (*Ladder of Paradise*), and saints like St. Bernard (*Sermo VIII, 7*), and St. Francis de Sales. Pope Leo XIII is emphatic that “God in his infinite Providence has decreed that men for the most part should be saved by men; hence he has appointed that those whom he calls to a loftier degree of holiness should be led thereto by men, ‘in order that,’ as Chrysostom says, ‘we should be taught by God through men.’”⁸

Adolphe Tanqueray points to its normal necessity: “Direction, though not absolutely necessary for the sanctification of souls, is one of the normal means of progress.”⁹

⁷ St. Vincent Ferrer, *A Treatise on the Spiritual Life* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957), 92.

⁸ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 51-53.

⁹ Adolphe Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1945), 257.

Blessed Dina Bélanger tells us that Jesus shared His disappointment with many priests: “My priests should be other Christs... Many among them possess eloquence and human learning but they lack the fundamental science, holiness.”¹⁰ Simply put, without a spiritual director, it is difficult to make significant progress in the spiritual life, much less attain holiness. Fr. Dubay points to the difficulty of walking the path without help: “It is a narrow road that leads to life and only a few find it” (Mt 7:13-14).

Fr. Dubay offers support from the teachings of the saints. St. John of the Cross is very emphatic: “A disciple without a master to lead the way is like a single burning coal— he grows colder rather than hotter,” that he is like a blind person, who will take the wrong road and get lost.¹¹ St. Teresa of Jesus herself also counselled others to do everything they can to find someone who can give them light.¹² It is interesting to note that, while St. John of the Cross looked to St. Teresa of Jesus for all aspects regarding the foundation of the Discalced Carmelites, he expected her to allow him to guide her spiritual journey.

St. Francis de Sales, one of the great spiritual directors in the Church’s history, told Philothea that “finding someone to guide her in the spiritual life was the most important advice he could offer her.”¹³ Fr. Dubay mentions that St. Francis de Sales lists a number of saints who “practiced and advised obedience to a wise confessor-director” and who “considered a guide for one’s soul the biblical ‘faithful friend,’ one’s treasure who is a powerful defence (Sir 6:14-16).”¹⁴ St. Bonaventure held that those who have the gift of discernment of spirits did not need spiritual direction, but also that there were few such souls, and most need it at least in the initial stages.¹⁵ These few examples give a clear indication of the direction that our Tradition takes on the necessity of spiritual direction.

Second, citing St. Francis de Sales, St. John Newman, and John Paul II, Fr. Dubay then makes the most fundamental case for spiritual direction: it has

¹⁰ Dina Bélanger, *Canticle of Love*, (Québec: Religious of Jesus and Mary, 1945), 222.

¹¹ St. John of the Cross, *Sayings of Light and Love*, no. 11, 667.

¹² *Collected Works of St. Teresa of Ávila*, vol. 1, trans. K. Kavanaugh & O. Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976), 322.

¹³ St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 1:4.

¹⁴ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 51.

¹⁵ St. Bonaventure, quoted in Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 53.

to do with the incomparable dignity of each person made in the image of God and his destiny of communion with the Blessed Trinity:

In simple terms, the importance of spiritual direction flows from the unspeakable worth, the eternal treasure, that a human person is. Destined to be enthralled without end by gazing on the Father, the Son, and the Spirit and thus transfigured into divine beauty, one individual man, woman, or child is diocese enough— as St. Francis de Sales remarked when someone wondered how a busy bishop could give time to spiritual direction on a one-to-one basis. Newman was of the view that the most useful people in the church are not the leaders but the teachers, and the latter not so much due to their writings as to their instruction.... Pope John Paul II remarked that God in imprinting his own image on the human person thereby confers “on him an incomparable dignity.” It is a duty that deserves individualized custom-made attention.¹⁶

This aspect of individual attention is enormously important. There is a great temptation to think that leaders and administrators and those who publish, those who reach the masses, are the ones who accomplish the main work in the Church; but saints know that the truth is just the opposite. Cardinal Newman believed the “most useful are not the leaders but the teachers.” Pope Paul VI reminds us, in light of Christ’s example, of the importance of the “person-to-person” proclamation of the Gospel,¹⁷ and Mother Teresa also spoke to the effect that we have to convert souls one by one.

Third, Fr. Dubay finds the necessity of spiritual direction in the great need for special counsel and assistance. The long list includes: guidance in spiritual reading; detecting mediocrity or inner weakness; handling periods of difficult, dry prayer; doing penance; carefully moderating enthusiasm for extraordinary phenomena; discerning a vocation; detecting shadings among virtues and vices; identifying psychological problems; assessing progress or the lack of it; and providing support and accountability.¹⁸

The Vatican document, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, reinforces the insights of Fr. Dubay, drawing out further the historical background. It

¹⁶ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 61.

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1975), quoted in Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 62.

¹⁸ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 55-61.

refers to spiritual direction as an ancient and tested practice to holiness, and that the Fathers, Magisterium, spiritual writers, and norms of ecclesial life all speak of its need. It affirms a key insight: that spiritual direction always existed in the Church, beginning with Christ's direction of the apostles, and continuing in the history of the Church, highlighted especially in the lives of the saints (n. 65, 29-30).

But where the document really stands out is that it speaks of spiritual direction as a help for all, including laity, as well as the need to prepare priests to give spiritual direction to the faithful (n. 66, 30). It makes a striking call to priests, to set this as a *first priority* and to put the many other demands in second place: "Priests, for their part, should be the first to devote time and energies to this work of education and personal spiritual guidance. They will never regret having neglected or put in second place so many other things which are themselves good and useful..."¹⁹ St. Gregory Nazianzen states, "To direct men seems to be the greatest of all sciences" (*Apol.* I, 18). The document devotes a substantial section specifically to "Spiritual direction for the laity" (nn. 122-134).

We are now, through an official Vatican document, on a new clarified footing for the Church: the importance of priests giving spiritual direction, and the need for their preparation to give spiritual direction. The document strongly highlights the priest's own need for spiritual direction, especially if the priest is to give spiritual direction: "The ministry of the priest is linked to spiritual direction. However, he too has need of spiritual direction so as to be able to impart it better to others when asked to do so" (n. 110, 44).

Spiritual direction is necessary from the beginning at the seminary: "From the first moment in the seminary, spiritual direction is an essential part of the initial formation to the priesthood..." (n. 68, 30). The fruitfulness of priests receiving spiritual direction, beginning right after priestly ordination, is also highlighted:

By placing the formation of their souls in the hands of a wise fellow member, they will enlighten their conscience, from the first steps in the ministry, and realise the importance of not walking alone along the paths

¹⁹ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (25 March 1992), 4, quoted in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, n. 71, 31.

of spiritual life and pastoral duties. (n. 75, 33) The invitation to practice spiritual direction should always be an important chapter in every pastoral plan. (n. 115, 46)

This cannot be emphasized enough. Many priests today may not have recourse to spiritual direction. While there are always exceptions, it is likely that is not safe for most to “walk alone,” both for the priest’s own spiritual development and for ministry: “The Church is a complex of various ‘mediations’... We all have need of each other and especially in the field of spiritual counsel. This involves seeking out and accepting a counsel that comes from the Holy Spirit through our brothers and sisters” (n. 77, 34). In fact, the document links both Confession and spiritual direction, explicitly stating that the priest is called to be both confessor and spiritual director, while also a recipient of both:

The priest... is called to be a confessor and spiritual director, beginning from his own experience... just as he is, at the same time, a beneficiary of both of these means of sanctification in his own personal spiritual and apostolic renewal. (n. 5, 7) Along with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest must also exercise the ministry of spiritual direction. The rediscovery and extension of this practice, also in moments outside of the administration of Penance, is greatly beneficial for the Church in these times. (n. 73, 32)²⁰

It is important to highlight the document’s insistence that diocesan priests should dedicate themselves to giving spiritual direction.

B. Goal is Conformation to Christ through the Holy Spirit

Given the contemporary confusion about the nature of spiritual direction, we highlight first Fr. Dubay’s emphasis that it is a Christic concept. Let us begin with the problem in our times. Today there is much confusion from a loss of a sense of sin and a majority of people, irrespective of their moral condition, considering themselves assured of attaining heaven.

He notes the current trend: to psychologise spiritual direction, which psychology does have valid contributions to make toward the healing of

²⁰ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (31 March 1994), 54, quoted in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, n. 73.

human woundedness. Furthermore, no small percentage of current “spiritual direction” is pop psychology: feeling comfortable with one’s person and lifestyle; liberation from oppression; raising one’s consciousness; ridding guilt feelings; getting along in a group; managing difficult relationships.²¹ He acknowledges that psychology is valuable in many ways (healing wounds, fostering happy communities), but that there is far more to Gospel living than these benefits.²²

What then is spiritual direction? “St. John of the Cross saw his role as teaching an individual how to attain ‘nudity of spirit,’ removing all obstacles to the free work of the Holy Spirit.”²³ For Fr. Dubay, spiritual direction is thus the guiding of a person into a life truly under the dominion of the Holy Spirit, who is the primary director, to make him more docile, to identify and overcome impediments, to instruct and encourage living a life of virtue, and assisting the directee to advance on the path of prayer—the road of union to God. In addition, “the mentor shows the client how to live by faith rather than by mere human norms and responding to personal preferences.”²⁴

The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy affirms Fr. Dubay’s teaching and defines more succinctly the heart and goal of spiritual direction: to guide souls to identification with Christ, that includes the path of contemplation and discernment of the Spirit (n. 67, 30). It distinguishes it from “doctrinal consultation” but defines it as concerning “our relationship and intimate configuration with Christ,” which always gives it a Trinitarian context (n. 69, 30-31). “Spiritual direction is of special assistance in discerning the *path of holiness and perfection* (n. 77, 33).”

In addition, Fr. Dubay underscores an important aspect, the ecclesial character: the Church herself is reaching out to the individual through another individual and serving to enlighten, confirm, corroborate, and to

²¹ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 106.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36. Text of St. John of the Cross found in the *Ascent*, Bk I, Ch. 12, n. 6, in *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 101: “But the voluntary appetites bring on all three evils, and even more. This is why the chief concern of spiritual directors with their penitents is the immediate mortification of every appetite. The directors should make them remain empty of what they desire so as to liberate them from so much misery.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*

heal. The director takes the place of God Himself and is not merely a private adviser. This presumes that the guide accepts the Magisterium, otherwise the whole providential principle collapses.

The above already responds to the doubt that may arise, “How can someone dare take on the direction of an immortal soul?” One can do so because of the key principle of mediation: God is the spiritual director, and He employs instruments in His incarnational method of dealing with us and within His Church.²⁵

Clearly then the main protagonist in this vital work is the Holy Spirit, who is the real spiritual director. Here let us turn to St. John of the Cross, who has much to offer in this area. Iain Matthew opens some of this up for us. According to St. John of the Cross, the purpose of the spiritual life is not perfection but union. This prevents many errors.

For John, there is only one goal. His word for it is not so much “perfection”—as if it were only about me becoming myself; he prefers to call it “union”—“union with God,” the “union of love”.... His entire enterprise pounds along this relentless quest: that this person should be filled with God. Life remains dispersed till this God is at its centre.²⁶

The reason why spiritual direction can be so vital is that many people take wrong paths or have misdirected goals.

John lived in an age which was well-fed with religiosity. There was no shortage of religious material, but John did perceive a shortage of depth. His concern was not to add to the material, but to help people connect with the vitality concealed in what is already there. He writes of people who load themselves up with extraordinary practices, and get nowhere; “if they were careful to put half the effort” in the right place, it would yield more in a month than otherwise in years. That is the aim: not to extract more effort, but to open the path to what will genuinely meet the needs.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 19-29.

²⁶ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 17.

²⁷ Ibid.

C. Formation, Qualities, and Style of the Spiritual Director

What are the qualities of a good spiritual director? First, Fr. Dubay presents the description of exemplary priests given by *Presbyterorum ordinis* as a suitable starting description for a good spiritual director:

They live in this world but are not conformed to it; they know and love their people but are totally dedicated to the Lord's work; sincere, strong, and zealous; nourished by personal immersion in Sacred Scripture, have profound understanding of theology; are models of radical Gospel: gladly embrace obedience, celibate chastity, voluntary poverty, and above all, "abound in contemplation," and prize daily visits of personal devotion to the Eucharistic Master.²⁸

This is a rather unusual point of departure, beginning with a profile of exemplary priests. Yet, there is wisdom in this approach as it presupposes that the priest spiritual director is exemplary in life. It is not necessary to have a degree in spiritual direction to become a good spiritual director. The first thing a spiritual director should aspire to is to live what he teaches, that he "walk the walk." This was the model in the Christian East, where spiritual direction was not just instruction and advice, but close observation of the Abba's way of life, and the directee is admonished to

adhere to him with soul and body; observe his life, his walking, sitting, looking, eating, and examine all his habits; first of all, my son, keep his words, do not let one of them fall to the ground; they are more precious than pearls— the words of the saints.²⁹

Thus, the most important preparation for giving spiritual direction is not taking courses on spiritual direction, but one's own interior life: you cannot give what you do not possess. Perhaps the best formation for a spiritual director is to have been guided by good spiritual directors.

Second, having emphasized the characteristics of an exemplary life and to have been guided in spiritual direction, Fr. Dubay does highlight the need for extensive preparation of study and knowledge in a spiritual director.

²⁸ *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 3, paraphrased in Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 63-64.

²⁹ Cited by Bishop Kallistos Ware in his introduction to Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, x, quoted in Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 37.

This need derives from the wide variety of concerns or questions that Fr. Dubay has encountered as spiritual director: interpersonal problems (relationships); ordinary prayer questions; contemplative prayer; vocational issues; biblical, Ecclesial, and moral questions; psychological wounds and scars; types of conscience; questions about Oriental meditation; problems of evil and suffering; evangelical counsels; extraordinary phenomena; place of the saints; spiritual reading; putting it all together.³⁰

We can also look to Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross, as they greatly valued spiritual direction and were both guides to many. Besides emphasizing exemplary life, they point to learning as well. St. Teresa emphasizes exemplary elements, such as humility, a serious prayer life, and fidelity to the Church's mind, but also theological knowledge.³¹

... I have consulted many learned men, because for some years now, on account of a greater necessity, have sought them out more; and I've always been a friend of men of learning. For though some don't have experience, they don't despise the Spirit nor do they ignore it, because in Sacred Scripture, which they study, they always find the truth of the good spirit.... Devils have a tremendous fear of learning which is accompanied by humility and virtue.³²

In spite of her high regard for learning in a spiritual director, St. Teresa would emphasize that academic knowledge is not enough by itself, in which case it is better to go for counsel to a devout person (Sir 37:7-9,12). Obedience also ranks high on her list: "For Teresa one of the surest proofs of holiness is obedience to the Catholic Church and to one's superiors."³³ Her co-founder of the men's Discalced Carmelite Order, St. John of the Cross, offers similar thoughts, that a mentor "should possess theological competence, soundness of judgment, and experience of infused prayer" (i.e., learning, discretion, experience).³⁴ This understanding presupposes a knowledge of infused prayer and (dark) nights of purification and a guide who loves his disciples.

³⁰ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 65-75.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

³² St. Teresa of Jesus, *Ljfe*, Garden City (New York: Doubleday Image Book, 1960), Ch. 13, nn.18-19, 146-147.

³³ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 76.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

In sum, together with sanctity of life, we hope to find in a mentor “a genuine interest in and a real understanding of the client’s thoughts, feelings, and problems.”³⁵

Rather than go through all of the elements of a good spiritual director, we can turn to *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, which offers a fine summary of many key elements for the spiritual director. (i) The objective of spiritual direction is the discernment of God’s will. (ii) When there is a lack of desire for holiness, involving seeking God’s will, then spiritual direction has lost its objective and Christ-form (nn. 79-80, 34-35). (iii) Spiritual direction entails leading the directee to a personal relationship with Christ (n. 81, 35), and an awareness of His presence in contemplation, and (iv) presupposes knowledge of the stages of the interior life and (v) the spiritual masters, among others (n. 82-83, 35-36). (vi) It involves having a plan (principles, objectives, means), (vii) understanding of three moments in spiritual direction (beginner, progress and advancement, contemplation), and (viii) makes use of consultation of others and collaboration with medical experts, if necessary (nn. 87-97, 37-41).

Francis Fernández-Carvajal also offers a list of aspects of a good spiritual director under the title, “Qualities of a Good Guide”: “An Instrument of the Holy Spirit”; “Personal Sanctity: Care for One’s own Interior Life”; “Love and Detachment”; and “Respect for Souls.” He also elaborates on other aspects: “Rules of a Good Guide” and being “A Father”, “A Teacher”, “A Doctor”, “A Friend”, and “The Good Shepherd.”³⁶

What is condemned in a *bad spiritual director*? For Fr. Dubay, the qualities condemned include a lack of learning, a poor listener, disobedience to the Church and superiors, and not being devout. Basic errors common in spiritual direction mentioned include: overemphasis on methods and techniques; failing to use the Gospel norms as the yardstick; neglecting to weigh general norms against individual differences; scant knowledge of infused contemplation; misinterpreting the dark nights; minimalism; a clinging, unhealthy relationship.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves*, 1-57.

One appropriate reason for leaving a director is that he is found to be worldly or lacking in knowledge and judgment, or is not faithful to God's word and the mind of the Church.³⁷

Non-Directive Style is the Main Framework

Fr. Dubay notes the practice of two styles of spiritual direction: directive and non-directive. Let us begin with the merits of the non-directive style, which appears to be the primary framework for spiritual direction. The non-directive style does not initiate, does not express the director's views, but mainly "reflects back" to the directee what he says: "The idea is that reflecting back draws the client out to further insights and leads to eventual healing."³⁸

What has been said earlier about the Holy Spirit as true director and about dignity and freedom of the spiritual directee favours the non-directive approach: to see a conversation taking place between the Holy Spirit and the directee, and to try to enter that conversation, as one experienced spiritual director described it.

It is important to establish, as point of departure, the directee's freedom. *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy* affirms the aforementioned aspects. Spiritual direction is the work of discerning the movements of the Holy Spirit (n. 98, 41). What stands out is that it emphasizes the dignity and the freedom of the directee:

The spiritual director should always have a profound respect for the conscience of the faithful. He should establish a relationship with the person being directed so that there is a spontaneous opening. He should always act with respect and delicacy.... The authority of the spiritual director is not one of jurisdiction, rather it is of counsel and guidance. It commands basic fidelity, which can be a filial docility without, however, being paternalistic. (nn. 103-104, 43)

Fr. Carvajal develops this further by noting the dynamic between freedom and responsibility. He insists upon respect for the dignity of directees, made in the image and likeness of God and called to be children of God.

³⁷ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 79-86. See also 99-106.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

Souls are not puppets moved by pulling on strings. Each needs to act with autonomy and free decision. Spiritual guidance “should tend to develop men and women with their own Christian standards. This requires maturity, firm convictions, sufficient doctrinal knowledge, a refined spirit, and an educated will.”³⁹

Respect for freedom entails not trying to use the same mould or approach for every person, enabling them to “confront new experiences in life with a Christian spirit and aren’t paralyzed when the unexpected happens,” it should encourage the person to exercise personal freedom and see the suggestions offered as not taking away “spontaneity and freedom or weaken personal initiative,” to allow them to freely commit themselves to following the Lord because they want to.

Fr. Fernández-Carvajal notes that, on the other side, however, there is personal responsibility, taking responsibility for decisions made. Thus, he compares the spiritual director to the Magi’s star, to St. John the Baptist pointing to Christ, and a lighthouse: all three are images of pointing or showing, giving the directee the freedom to exercise his responsibility.

Therefore, the spiritual guide has been compared to the Magi’s star, which pointed out the way to them but didn’t spare them the arduous effort of following it. Similarly, St. John the Baptist pointed out to his disciples the One they should follow, but they themselves had to decide to seek out our Lord....

The lighthouse indicates where the harbor is, but the sailors still have to row vigorously or set the sails to take advantage of the wind and keep firm control of the rudder. Therefore, spiritual direction, far from suppressing the soul’s own response, should foster personal initiative and responsibility in making headway towards God in every circumstance.⁴⁰

Yet there has to be conformation to God’s will, and that is often given through a guide.

The suggestions received should be seen as signs of the divine will, which the soul makes his own. Responsibility comes down to being faithful to

³⁹ Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves*, 58-59.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

God's will: doing what pleases God and in the way that he wants. *One is truly free and responsible when one seeks God's will in everything.* Freedom by itself "is insufficient: it needs a guide, a North Star."⁴¹

The primary framework for spiritual direction is therefore seeking the lead of the Holy Spirit, and giving the directee his freedom, so that spiritual direction thereby tends to focus on listening and discerning and asking questions— and this is as it should be.⁴²

Fr. Carvajal reinforces this point by introducing as conclusion of his book the insight of a venerable, experienced friend. For this friend, there are two protagonists (God and directee), the director's role should be "scarcely noticed," and must avoid trying to own or take charge. The friend employs the analogy of the directee having a treasure box of which he is the owner. As owner, he opens up what he wants, when he wants, and never gives up his ownership. He comes to the expert (spiritual director) who understands the value of the contents, how to protect and make them grow. If there is lack of transparency, he should calmly and professionally seek ways to encourage it, but not "by adopting a cynical or wounding tone." If he thinks one of the objects is harmful and should be removed, he makes recommendations in a positive context, and sometimes may have to help remove it because the directee is unable to do so on his own.

While primarily emphasizing the principal role of God and the directee, he emphasizes, nevertheless, that the director himself is a "treasure," who "can assure us that the route we are taking is suited to the goal we seek and that we are truly making progress in the right direction."⁴³ Fr. Frederick Faber of the Brompton Oratory in London teaches that the spiritual director is not a "pioneer," but follows the lead of the Holy Spirit: the director goes behind as the Lord goes ahead, with the Holy Spirit leading the directee, and he steadies him as a mother would, keeps him in "the Blessed Footprints left behind," and spurs him on if he sees our Lord increasing the distance between Himself and the soul.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., 62.

⁴² Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 107-108.

⁴³ Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves*, 235-238.

⁴⁴ Frederick William Faber, *Growth in Holiness: or, the Progress of the Spiritual Life* (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1860), 341-342.

St. John of the Cross also takes this path. He takes us from where we are and leads us further.

... John was known as a listener. He was said to “disapprove of those masters who spend all their time lecturing their novices, instead of recognising their level and guiding them accordingly.” When he listened, he wished to learn, to share a journey; and so for him a favourite way of teaching was to ask questions and draw the person further along the line of their answers.⁴⁵

He also knows that each directee is a unique person with great dignity, and that growth is incremental and requires time.

... he says that “God carries each person along a different road, so that you will scarcely find two people following the same route in even half of their journey to God.” The flexibility is fundamental because it alone does justice to the dignity of each person, a “most beautiful and finely wrought image of God.” It does justice too to the laws of growth. Growth, though it has its crosses, is gradual. So John says that humanity, and each person, was wedded to Christ when he died on the cross, a wedding made ours at our baptism. But that all happens “at God’s pace, and so all at once.” It has to become ours at our pace, “and so, little by little.”⁴⁶

Directive Style Needed as Complement for Progress

But a purely non-directive style has limitations, and experience strongly suggests that it is necessary to complement it with directive elements. First, if such a style lacks awareness and discernment of the directee’s deeper problems, it may stall the directee’s progress.

These can be seen in the following two real experiences. One seminary spiritual director, in the first few years at the seminary as faculty, noticed that two of the spiritual directors were particularly aware of what was taking place at the seminary and what was happening in the lives of their directees (for example, if a seminarian was attached to alcohol). Being concerned that he might end up judging his directees if he watched them closely, this

⁴⁵ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 14-15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

seminary director raised this question with his own spiritual director. The latter taught a very helpful principle: the spiritual director must be like a good parent, who, to be able to help his children, must be aware of their needs as well as their difficulties.

A mother, for example, can tell by her baby's cry whether the baby needs feeding or a change of diaper; a good father seeks to notice if his son is being bullied or hanging around bad company at school. The spiritual director, like the good parent, then must be proactive and not be passive in this regard. One of the tragedies in seminary life is to watch seminarians rarely be challenged and basically guide themselves through seminary life, and end up causing problems for the people they serve. There is an advantage to having resident seminary spiritual directors, as it affords at least a daily limited but first-hand contact with seminarians.

The second experience of the need to incorporate elements of a directive style is the incompleteness of the non-directive style, as seen from this example. One priest was especially grateful for having had the example given by his saintly seminary spiritual director, who embraced a non-directive style. The spiritual director had introduced him to some basic elements of the Church's Tradition of prayer, including Ignatian meditation, Examen Prayer, virtue of diligence, the acceptance of his cross, the example of saints, and liturgical piety.

After his ordination though, he slowly began to realize that some things were not taught him: obedience, docility to the Holy Spirit, a plan of life, sanctification of one's daily life and work, human virtues, abandonment, sacrament of the present moment, discernment of spirits, discernment of God's will, stages of the interior life, approaches to chastity, preparing for spiritual direction, journaling, and other tools. In addition, as a priest years later, he was startled upon hearing a question, never encountered before, posed by his then spiritual director: "You are very faithful in prayer and your spiritual norms. But where is God meeting you now?" Furthermore, spiritual direction by the seminary spiritual director was given only once a month and only for half an hour, which is probably insufficient for seminarians new to the spiritual life (the norm in that seminary is now an hour every two weeks).

The point here is that his particular non-directive style did not address the whole person and did not seek to systematically introduce basic tools and norms of the spiritual life. This is especially critical in seminary formation. It is suggested here that young seminarians, like young people in families, need much “education” and introduction to many tools, including in the non-spiritual areas: human virtues, fraternity, organization with a plan of life, encouragement to excel academically, learning the habit of theological reading, etc.

The Cross as Necessary for Forming the Spiritual Director and Encountering Christ

Perhaps the greatest formation we can have for guiding others is to experience the cross. Without going through “limit” situations, crises, and spiritual darkness, allowed by God or even the ones caused by ourselves, we will not be able to lead others. We find this confirmed in the experience of St. John of the Cross, who himself matured greatly through nine months of imprisonment, with endurance of cold and heat, being whipped, and the darkness of doubts and apparent abandonment by God. Out of this dark experience he composed sublime spousal poems, and his works (books) were essentially “commentaries” upon these mystical experiences. The dark night he experienced was “the crucible that forged them [works].” This period was a blessing and brought him to the other side of the Paschal mystery, to the “top of the mountain,” changed forever.

Three days in the belly of the earth: that was the meaning he gave to his imprisonment. He was being granted a share in the dying and rising of Jesus.... The poetry he composed in prison is a sign that something was released in him there which had not been available to him before.... When years later he wrote about his *Canticle*, he called it the fruit of “love, in mystical understanding.” His poems were born not just of genius, but of encounter—of encounter, he says, with Christ, and of what Christ gave him there to “know” and to “feel” and to “desire.”⁴⁷

The greatest fruit of this experience was his discovery of a presence within:

What kind of visitation? John can speak of an encounter with the divine which takes one’s breath away. But he relishes more a presence that

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

emerges from within, from behind; as if one entered a dark room, and sat there on one's own... then, after some minutes, yes there is someone there, has always been, a silhouette becoming clear. There, "in the midst" of obscurity, John speaks of "a kind of companionship and inner strength which walks with the soul and gives her strength..."⁴⁸

2. The Exercise of Receiving Spiritual Direction

Here are some suggested helpful practices for receiving spiritual direction.

(1) Goal is Trinitarian Communion (i.e., Union, not Perfection)

Pope John Paul II wrote in *Novo millennio ineunte* that the goal of parish ministry is to lead the People of God to sanctity, and each spiritual directee must ask whether he truly seeks this goal. For the great prize to be attained in life is Trinitarian communion through assimilation to Christ, and this entails scaling heights toward the Infinite One and Three, passing through what St. Teresa of Jesus calls the Mansions of the Interior Castle. It is difficult to climb this path on one's own.

(2) Regularity and Length

It is suggested for priests that the minimum frequency for spiritual direction visits be once a month; more frequent visits can be of help for those starting out. The length of time for a session of spiritual direction is typically about an hour, though one experienced spiritual director recommended that one receiving frequent and regular spiritual direction should aim to do it within half an hour. The concern here is that the spiritual directee can focus too much on solving issues in his life, and not seek Christic transformation. Experience shows that irregular visits can lead to falling away from spiritual direction. One spiritual director has the habit of scheduling his directees for monthly visits for the entire calendar year, and giving them ways to easily remember the day of the month, e.g., every first Friday.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

3) *Preparation and Follow-up*

Preparation is needed. As we make preparation to go to the great sacrament of Confession, the directee should prepare himself for spiritual direction, since it is a privileged moment and gift. Likewise, he might consider “journaling” the insights received, perhaps summarizing them in one to three main points. This enables the directee to synthesize the session in his heart and to more easily put the insights into practice.

(4) *Approaches in Spiritual Direction*

Three approaches to spiritual direction are noteworthy. First, there are two fundamental directions that a directee can take to spiritual life and spiritual direction. The first is to focus on strengthening his weak areas, akin to being a Michelangelo and the marble being sculpted at the same time. The difficulty here is that he ends up focusing more on himself.

There is another and more fruitful approach, to have as the general horizon and goal the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbour. The first approach lends itself to constantly taking one’s spiritual temperature, while the second lends itself to self-forgetfulness, recognizing that the barometer of progress is love. Even before he died at the tender age of fifteen, St. Dominic Savio learned this lesson from his teacher and mentor, St. John Bosco. When coming to the Oratory for the first time, he went directly to see Don Bosco, and upon entering the ante-room that led to the latter’s room, Dominic saw a sign over the door of that first room that read, “*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle.*” St. John Bosco came in and, seeing Dominic looking at the sign, was anxious that he understand it, as it was his life’s programme chosen at Ordination. The text was a saying of St. Francis de Sales and is translated, “Give me souls, take away the rest [everything else].” It emphasized that saving souls was everything for St. John Bosco, for which he was willing to lose everything and suffer poverty, persecution, and loss of reputation. Dominic did not fully understand the words, but a great desire burned in his heart, “This is what I want, this is what I want!” With time, his life began to mirror that motto with a great zeal for souls.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ St. John Bosco, *St. Dominic Savio*, trans. Paul Aronica (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publns., 1979), 53.

Second, in terms of format within spiritual direction, one can consider presenting *three periods*: before (what was discussed at the last session), the present (where God is meeting the directee at this time), and after (what resolution he can practice until the next session). This way, he does not just bypass or ignore the fruits of the last session, but attends to where God is leading him in the present, and also makes concrete resolutions to apply that which God is revealing to him for the future.

Third, in terms of content, the directee can approach sessions at *two different levels*: basic norms and inspirations of the Holy Spirit. It is good that, every so often, he discusses the basic norms that form the foundation of our spiritual life, such as prayer, purity, plan of life, fraternity, and dominant defects. To neglect these would be to not live in reality (not addressing the foundation of the building).

A deeper level is asking, “where is God meeting me?” Presupposing fidelity to one’s plan of life, we may find that the Holy Spirit may be calling us to conversion, to remove a particular obstacle or temptation, for more generosity or self-forgetfulness, or greater fidelity to work.

Fr. Carvajal’s work provides a comprehensive list that covers many key areas of spiritual life: “Prayer”; “Life of Faith”; “Purity, the Entrance Way”; “Vocation”; “Mortification: An Encounter with the Cross”; “Self-Knowledge and Examinations of Conscience”; “Charity and Apostolate”; “The Family”; “Joys and Sorrows”; “Love for the Church and the Communion of the Saints”; “Lukewarmness and Comfort-Seeking”; “Humility and Forgetfulness of Self”; “Poverty and Detachment”; “Work”; “Health, Sickness, Rest.”⁵⁰ Fr. Carvajal’s elaboration of these areas provides a good background and can perhaps also serve as an examination of conscience.

(5) Responsibility: Acting with Resolutions

St. Escrivá had a very helpful saying regarding the general approach to Confession: “Get to the point right away. Be *Concise, clear, concrete, and complete,*” which can be applied to spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is very different from a mere conversation or discussion. Bishop Fulton Sheen

⁵⁰ Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves*, 169-235.

once made this distinction as applied to counselling, emphasizing that counselling is about going in with the intention of making a decision to work on something. If one person's tendency in spiritual direction is constantly unburdening himself, crying on someone's shoulder, that person may not need a spiritual director but a good friend.

What Bishop Fulton Sheen described for counselling can be applied to spiritual direction as well. The spiritual directee seeks to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and thereby to *make a decision to work on something*—it is very proactive and not passive. Being docile to the Holy Spirit is not to take away the initiative, free will, or accountability that each one must have, for to do so would be to abdicate one's humanity and dignity. *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy* affirms the importance of taking responsibility within spiritual direction:

The Christian must always enjoy complete freedom and responsibility in his life and action. It is the task of the spiritual director to assist the individual to choose and to choose responsibly that which he must do in the sight of God, with Christian maturity. *The recipient of spiritual direction must freely and responsibly take up the spiritual counsel*, and if he were to err he should not offload the responsibility onto the spiritual director.⁵¹ (emphasis added)

The spiritual director only leads, points to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and at the end of the day, as Pope John Paul II used to tell people, “You must decide.”

(6) *Transparency*

We come to one of the most important points in life as well as in spiritual direction: *opening one's heart*. Possibly the most important thing is to open our deepest heart in sincerity and entrusting more and more to the spiritual director. The directee is really opening up to God, but through the instrumentality of the spiritual director, allowing God to guide him and also heal his wounds. We recall the great principle learned from God's approach to helping Adam and Eve: “Confession of sins leads to salvation.” This is one of the greatest principles of the spiritual life: like a child, to simply

⁵¹ *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, n. 109.

bring his problems to God as to a “father” or a “mother.” Seen this way, the directee must not allow shame to hinder transparency. A baby does not get embarrassed if he wets his diaper or self-conscious if his diaper falls off.

Finally, we can learn to gradually entrust more and more to the spiritual director, while maintaining his responsibility to act on that which the Holy Spirit is showing him. A priest in a foreign country for the summer asked an interim confessor about an inner prompting, whether he should raise the question of his significant financial expenditures (non-spiritual area) during his future spiritual direction sessions, so that he can begin to allow God to more fully direct his life. The confessor recommended the practice, and the priest on his return began to bring that and more and more aspects of his life to his spiritual director.

(7) Receptivity, Seeking Truth

What are the qualities of a good spiritual directee? Fr. Dubay points to a few qualities. The directee “seeks Christic transformation, not a mere naturalistic analysis or psychological enlightenment.”⁵² This presupposes receptivity, which is by far the key virtue or disposition in receiving spiritual direction.

But in Fr. Dubay’s experience, he finds that everyone assumes that they love and want truth, but “the evidence is overwhelming that most really love their preferences and pleasures, and their own agenda.”⁵³ This should give us all pause for self-examination. We should ask ourselves: “Do I want truth, all of it? Do I want holiness, or will I settle for a refined mediocrity? Do I covertly have my own agenda, rather than the Lord’s?”⁵⁴ The great danger is that the directee may end up directing himself: “One should honestly ask oneself: am I really seeking spiritual direction? Or am I merely looking for a soul-friend or a sympathetic ear, a sounding board— someone who is likely to affirm me or to agree with my own views?”⁵⁵

⁵² Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 89.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

There are degrees of receptivity, and “saints are disposed for maximal effort from spiritual direction, just as they benefit thoroughly from the Church’s proclamation of doctrine and morality.”⁵⁶ With such a receptivity, many humble people can make great progress: “I find in my experience that these open and receptive ones, these humble and docile ones, do make steady and often remarkable progress. God loves the humble and he gives them rapid growth.”⁵⁷

Thus, the first requirement for fruitful pursuit of God is honesty—intellectual, moral, and religious honesty. We notice that both the Old and New Testaments insist on truth and the love for it. St. Francis de Sales counsels “a complete openness of mind and heart, telling one’s guide everything pertinent, good and bad, hiding nothing and pretending nothing. This candour assures that what is sound in the directee will be confirmed and strengthened, what is unsound will be healed and corrected.”⁵⁸

(8) Obedience

In books on spiritual direction, there is much emphasis on the need for the spiritual director to recognize that the Holy Spirit is the true director and to uphold the inherent dignity and freedom of the directee; there tends to be much less said on obedience on the part of the directee. We mentioned earlier that God and the spiritual director respect the conscience of the directee, allow him initiative and to take responsibility.

But, from the other side, the directee’s perspective, obedience is central. We must avoid seeing the goal of allowing the Holy Spirit to take over in our lives, through the instrumentality of a guide, as demeaning our dignity or hampering our human functioning. There is a long history of obedience in the Church to one’s director: “... through the centuries writers have spoken of a directee’s obedience to his or her confessor or director.”⁵⁹ St. Teresa of Jesus said that once one has chosen a spiritual director, the second duty was obedience; she had a policy of never going against what her director

⁵⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 91.

⁵⁸ St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 1:4, 16-17, quoted in Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 95.

⁵⁹ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 96.

commanded or advised.⁶⁰ Fr. Dubay has a particular take on this matter, setting it in the context of spiritual direction:

Provided one's mentor is competent and remains faithful to the mind of the Church and to prayer, the disciple should ordinarily follow guidance given without disagreeing and objecting. There is a place for questions and representations of difficulties, but they should not be frequent. The directee who often objects to advice is hardly seeking guidance. Such a person is really pursuing a confirmation of self-will.⁶¹

While we can turn to different people for counsel (e.g., friend, parish priest), we must not put their words at the same level as those of the spiritual director: "The director's words have to be seen with a spiritual mind as coming from God and as being for one's good. And they must be heeded accordingly. Through obedience progress can be made but not otherwise."⁶²

We do not want to reclaim a distorted image of the spiritual director as an oracle of God, but rather to see the spiritual director as a privileged instrument of God. While it is not the obedience to a duly constituted authority, it is nevertheless an obedience of prudence or counsel, as exemplified in Blaise Pascal's notebook: "Total submission to Jesus Christ and to my spiritual director."⁶³ St. Philip Neri, known for his humanity and joy, himself loved to bring the various questions of his life to, and seek permissions from, his director. He viewed the spiritual director's blessing as a confirmation of God's will and a blessing of that project. While one may justifiably on occasion consult another (e.g., a retreat master, someone with specialized knowledge, etc.), it goes without saying that one should also not have two spiritual directors, as St. John of the Cross points out: "A soul should find its support wholly and entirely in its director, for not to do so would amount to no longer wanting a director. And when one director is sufficient and suitable, all the others are useless or a hindrance."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ St. Teresa, *Foundations*, Ch. 17, 80, quoted in *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶¹ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 97.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶³ Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées* (New York: Harper, 1962), no. 737.

⁶⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Letters of St. Teresa*, Letter 10 to Doña Juana de Pedraza, January 28, 1589, 691.

Obedience is so important that it needs to be developed further here. Within the private revelation of St. Faustina's *Diary*, we learn enlightening insights, since Jesus Himself acted as her spiritual director for a period. Dependence is key to the spiritual life, a principle St. Faustina tells us that Jesus taught her: "No action taken on your own, even though you put much effort into it, pleases me.' I understood this [need of] dependence."⁶⁵ In fact, Jesus taught that a oft-forgotten point, that it was a great grace to have a spiritual director: "Know that it is a great grace on My part when I give a spiritual director to a soul. Many souls ask Me for this, but it is not to all that I grant this grace" (n. 1561). Jesus also taught the importance of transparency and simplicity with her director, that He and the spiritual director were one, that the spiritual director's words were His will.

I want you to be open and simple as a child with My representative just as you are with Me; otherwise I will leave you and will not commune with you.⁶⁶ My daughter, tell him everything and reveal your soul to him as you do before Me. Do not fear anything. It is to keep you in peace that I place this priest between your soul and Myself. The words he will speak to you are My words. Reveal to him your soul's greatest secrets. I will give him light to know your soul.⁶⁷ Be obedient to your director in everything; his word is My will. Be certain in the depths of your soul that it is I who am speaking through his lips, and I desire that you reveal the state of your soul to him with the same simplicity and candor as you have with Me. I say it again, My daughter: know that his word is My will for you. (n. 979)

In one instance, Jesus taught her that her eating oranges, an act of obedience to her superior, was more pleasing than fasting from them.⁶⁸

You will receive a greater reward for your obedience and subjection to your confessor than you will for the practices which you will be carrying

⁶⁵ St. Faustina, *Diary*, n. 659, 274.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 494, 214. See also n. 269, 130.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 232, 116.

⁶⁸ "Today, I received some oranges. When the sister had left, I thought to myself, "Should I eat the oranges instead of doing penance and mortifying myself during Holy Lent? After all, I am feeling a bit better." Then I heard a voice in my soul: My daughter, you please Me more by eating the oranges out of obedience and love of Me than by fasting and mortifying yourself of your own will. A soul that loves Me very much must, ought to live by My will. I know your heart, and I know that it will not be satisfied by anything but My love alone." (St. Faustina, *Diary*, n. 1023, 390)

out. Know this, My daughter, and act accordingly: anything, no matter how small it be, that has the seal of obedience to My representative is pleasing to Me and great in My eyes. (n. 933)

To further highlight the centrality of obedience for our own time, let us look at Mother Teresa of Calcutta's example. When Mother Teresa received interior locutions on the train to Darjeeling on September 10, 1946 and after, she submitted them to her spiritual director, Fr. Céleste van Exem, her Loreto superiors, and the Archbishop Périer of Calcutta. Mother Teresa understood the presence of God in the ecclesial dimension: "To her, their blessing was not a mere formality but a protection and assurance that God's hand was in her undertaking. Only their permission would give her the certainty that this call was indeed God's will and not some delusion."⁶⁹

Her Jesuit spiritual director, Fr. van Exem, wrote this to Archbishop Périer, indicating how he was going to "test" her and that he expected obedience from her. "She is to leave the whole work to me and to Your Grace, and to put the whole affair out of her mind. She 'should drop it for all eternity'.... I insisted on obedience, cheerful, prompt, simple and blind. I assured her that she could never make a mistake if she obeyed."⁷⁰ That she gave permission to Fr. van Exem to share everything with the Archbishop of Calcutta gives some indication of her open and obedient spirit. She herself relates that Jesus Himself confirmed that the heart of the spiritual life is obedience:

People think you were sent here to teach, and you do well and [are] doing the work with the whole of your heart, but this was not the aim of My Heart— I brought you here to be under the immediate care of your spiritual father who will train you in the ways of My love and to prepare you to do My will. Trust him completely and without any fear. Obey him in every detail, you shall not be deceived if you obey for he belongs to Me completely.— I shall let you know My will through him.⁷¹

Here we find again confirmation of what our Lord Himself taught St. Faustina. Mother Teresa was not sent there to teach, but to be trained "in the ways of My love and to prepare you to do My will," but this requires

⁶⁹ Brian Kolodiejchuk, *Come Be My Light*, 45.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

that she “Obey him in every detail,” and that she will know His will through the spiritual director. At the end of the day, when things seem to be falling apart in one’s life and God seems to be absent, it is obedience that we can turn to, to find our way to God. Jacques Philippe teaches that listening to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit is the goal of the Holy Spirit, but that the first inspiration he gives is obedience.

(9) Patience with Progress

Ninth, we should try to be patient with our growth. We grow holier as we get older. St. Escrivá had a saying, “people like fine wine age slowly.” This is of help to both spiritual director and spiritual directee. For a spiritual director, when he is concerned about the directee’s lack of progress or about a particular deep problem, can be reassured that some of these difficulties would be overcome with time.

For the directee, he must avoid one of the great temptations in the spiritual life, of introspection. He need not be too concerned about his progress; in fact, it is better for him not to be concerned about taking his spiritual pulse too often, to allow God to take charge of his growth through the different spiritual stages of the interior life. Rather than be distracted by spiritual progress, his focus should be directed towards discerning the hand of God in each present moment of his life.

(10) If No Spiritual Director is Available

There is the difficulty of availability of experienced spiritual directors. This is especially the case for lay people, who may not have the same access as priests might. For many lay people, the best they might hope for is for some counsel within the sacrament of Confession, for Confession has been viewed as a “poor person’s spiritual direction.”

In addition, good books can become “mentors” in the spiritual journey: Fr. Thomas Dubay’s *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, for those lacking a spiritual director, can give spiritual direction pointers (see pp. 123-127, 112-115); works on St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross are helpful, both their original works and many fine commentaries; works on the Ignatian charism, which is particularly helpful for discernment of God’s will, discernment of spirits, meditation and the Examen Prayer. Besides books,

other significant helps include good retreats and conferences (e.g., Steubenville University), weekend programs like Cursillo, and affiliation with Third Order Communities (e.g., Carmelite Third Order).

II. THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

1. Recent Document: The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy

To enter this theme, let us turn once again to *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy* for prefatory remarks. It hearkens to Pope John Paul II's calls for a "vigorous revitalization" of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.⁷² It notes that John Paul II believes that the saints are the fruit of this great sacrament:

I do not hesitate to say that even the great canonized saints are generally the fruit of those confessionals, and not only the saints but also the spiritual patrimony of the Church and the flowering of a civilization permeated with the Christian spirit! Praise then to this silent army of our brothers who have served well and serve each day the cause of reconciliation through the ministry of sacramental penance.⁷³

This is a profound insight: that the canonized saints, the patrimony of the Church, and the flowering of civilization are generally the fruit of confessionals. As such, the document tells us that committed practice of this sacrament is an indicator of the level of evangelization in the parish and an "eloquent sign of our desire for perfection, contemplation, fraternal communion and apostolic mission" (n. 10).

The earlier document on Confession, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, also emphasizes that "The priest's spiritual and pastoral life... depends, for its quality and fervour, on the frequent and conscientious personal practice of the sacrament of Penance."⁷⁴ The document goes so far as to say that

⁷² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Motu proprio, Misericordia Dei* on Certain Aspects of the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance (7 April 2002), 29; *AAS* 94 (2002), 453, quoted in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, n. 7, 8.

⁷³ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984), 29, quoted in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, n. 14, 10-11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31, quoted in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, n. 17, 11.

Pastoral planning would hardly be efficacious were it to underestimate the importance of sacramental Confession: “The greatest pastoral concern must be shown for this sacrament of the Church... they [priests] have the duty to provide the faithful with the opportunity of making an individual confession.”⁷⁵

In sum, when the priest provides this sacrament generously and with dedication, he is fulfilling his ministry as the good shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, the good Samaritan who binds up wounds, the father who awaits the prodigal son, and the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful (n. 31). Consequently, “Frequent and regular celebration of the sacrament of Penance is therefore understandable and desirable” (n. 25).

Certain specific elements of this document are worth highlighting. First, it points to St. John Vianney, now the patron of all priests, as the model (n. 19), and that priests must imitate him in being *greatly available* for Confession: “The faithful will then realize the value that we attach to it, as did the *Curé of Ars*” (n. 20). Second, a common mistake is to see Confession as just for remission of sins, not understanding that it is also a means to holiness, to spiritual growth: “Frequent confession, even for those who are not in grave sin, has been constantly recommended by the Church as a means of progress in the spiritual life” (n. 19). Third, it notes that contradiction and conflict in society arise first of all from man’s heart, and that the conversion and renewal of his heart requires this sacrament (nn. 21-22). Fourth, it brings Christ’s presence:

The Sacrament of Forgiveness is an efficacious sign of the word, salvific action and presence of Christ the Redeemer. Through the sacrament, Christ prolongs his words of forgiveness in the words of the priest while, at the same time, transforming the attitude of the penitent... (n. 24).

Fifth, the effects of this sacrament include reconciliation—with the Father, with the Church, and with self (n. 32). If this sacrament brings forth all these fruits, Confession should not be just one of many pastoral duties—it should be a focal point of the priest’s ministry.

⁷⁵ *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, n. 18.

Adam and Eve

The fall of Adam and Eve provides the background and elements for the sacrament of Confession: temptation, fall, contrition, confession of sins, and the background of God's love. It also offers a paradigm of temptation. To fight temptation, it is imperative to understand the components that comprise temptation: the presence of evil spirits that can cause temptations (serpent in Eden); the danger of dialoguing with the temptation instead of rejecting it from the first moment (Eve dialogued with the serpent); the goal of temptation is to lead us to play god ("You will be like God"); the awareness of God's mercy in seeking out Adam and Eve to give His forgiveness ("Where are you?"); God's response was not condemnation but the promise of a Saviour, His own Son ("I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"); and the great tragedy of the multiplication of evil that ensued (Gen 4 onwards, e.g., Cain's fratricide). The background of sin should thus be set against God's love, who promised a Saviour, "rewarding" us for the sin of our first parents, "O, happy fault." Having reiterated basic principles from the new document, we will not develop a treatise on Confession, but move directly to concrete aspects of receiving this Sacrament.

2. Approach to Confession

A. Frequency

Perhaps the first aspect to address is *frequency* of availing oneself of this great sacrament. In this discussion, one should begin with its essential nature. Confession is a sacrament, a powerhouse of grace for our lives, and entails also an encounter with Christ, and causes a spiritual regeneration that even exorcisms cannot accomplish. Given these truths, the topic of frequency is seen in its true importance. The Church's Canon Law stipulates that the absolute minimum frequency is once a year if one has mortal sin on one's soul (1983 CIC n. 989; CCC n. 2042). As Christians, we do not aim for the legal minimum nor for mediocrity, but hearken to the Church's counsel to go "frequently and regularly." "Regularly" indicates that, Confession being so important, should be received at regular periods, just as meals are consumed at regular periods because of their importance.

Since “frequently” does not indicate precisely what that frequency should be, we can look to the example of the friends of God, the saints— usually weekly Confessions.⁷⁶ This apparently was the habit of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and now of all her spiritual daughters of her congregation, of the late Pope John Paul II, and of many flourishing religious communities. If a layperson were to ask a priest what he might do to grow in holiness, one of the best proposals to offer is going to frequent Confession, even weekly Confession. It is best for priests to recommend as minimum monthly Confession, otherwise the promotion of the vague, non-definitive “frequently” can cause Confession practice to fall by the wayside.

Frequent Confession can be viewed as sanctification through taking the path of little children, the path of “little steps.” St. Thérèse understood that “Little children always fall.” This is of great consolation to us, who are always falling, and will continue to fall for the rest of our lives. Jesus affirmed this path when He taught us, “Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” The Father desires only spiritual children—in heaven, there are no spiritual adults. Children know how to depend, to stay close to the Lord. St. Francis de Sales’ maxim synthesizes the approach: the child, in a garden, with one hand gathers flowers, and, with the other hand, holds the hand of the Father. Going to this sacrament frequently and regularly is one way of taking little steps, by turning often to the Father.

The experience of Confession is remarkable: we experience again peace of heart, renewed strength and light, strengthening against moral weakness, and healing of wounds. We feel as if we are walking on air as we leave the confessional, renewed as we return to our everyday lives. Each time after Confession, we begin again, seeking an embrace from our Father before we are sent out again.

B. Focus on Sorrow & Underlying Motives

The heart of the sacrament of Confession should be *sorrow for sins*. There is a tendency to focus instead on the *confessing* of my sins, that is, making sure that I confess all my sins and get them off my soul, cleansing my soul so

⁷⁶ We can find some indication of the importance of Confession in the lives of the diocesan priest saints in R. A. Hutchinson’s *Diocesan Priest Saints* (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1958, 146-147).

that I feel good again. The standard “Act of Contrition” can assist us in their three motives for our contrition, in ascending order of importance: first, “I have deserved your dreadful punishment,” which is a good thing to be aware of; second, “because I crucified my loving Saviour Jesus Christ” is a far superior motive for sorrow; and third, “and most of all, because I’ve offended your infinite goodness” is by far the best motive for sorrow, I have offended and betrayed God’s infinite love for me. In a sense, at the end of the day, this is the only reason that matters.

Going more deeply, it is helpful to discern the motives that underlie one’s sins, e.g., “Father, I have judged my colleagues at work, and it may have arisen from a sense of superiority, that is, pride.” The sin is the act, but the root or cause of the sin is what must be addressed, seeking, as we do for weeds, to pull out the roots.

C. Foster a Sense of One’s General Sinfulness

Related to sorrow for particular sins is the foundation in the interior life of having a sense of our general sinfulness. God has two dimensions: immanence and transcendence. In today’s focus on God’s love, on His immanence, we often forget or neglect His transcendence. To approach God, we must imitate Moses: “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5). When we make God all about “love” in a sentimental way, we tend to bring the Almighty One down to our level, to trivialize the holiness of the All-Holy One. It is when we maintain the sense of God’s almightiness and awesomeness, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10), that we can sense our own total misery and sinfulness.

In addition, as we leave our youth behind and gain experience in life and of the world, there is a tendency to think we know everything (“been there, done that”). We instinctively feel capable of surveying the world and making wise pronouncements about life and the world. We have forgotten how, when we were younger, to learn to look up at the world and see how much we have to learn. There is a concomitant, though unconscious, trap of seeing ourselves as advanced in the spiritual life, with the result that we also become impatient with our faults. We need to recover self-knowledge of our spiritual poverty.

Cardinal Ratzinger understands deeply the necessity of a sense of one's deep sinfulness, which he found in the apostles in both Luke 5:1-11 and John 1:35-42. He describes how in Luke 5: 1-11, after he had seen the miracle of the fish caught following Jesus' instructions, Peter moved from seeing Jesus as teacher or rabbi (*epistata*) to addressing Him as Lord, that is, God (*Kurion*), asking the Lord to depart from him a sinner. In reverse order in John, John and another disciple began with a sense of their sinfulness after they heard the words of St. John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."

But they moved to greater insight when they followed the Lord, and upon asking where He stayed, Jesus replied, "Come and see" (Jn 1:39). Coming to the Lord or staying with Him leads to "seeing." But this seeing began with a deep sense of their sinfulness:

When God is experienced man recognizes his or her sinfulness, and it is only when he or she really perceives and recognizes this that he or she really knows himself or herself. But in this way he or she becomes genuine. It is only when someone knows that he or she is sinful and has grasped the enormity of sin that he or she also understands the summons: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). Without repentance, without conversion one does not reach Jesus, one does not reach the gospel. This relationship is aptly summed up by a paradoxical saying of Chesterton's on how one recognizes a saint: "A saint is a man who knows that he is a sinner"... the disappearance of this knowledge distances people from God.... Wisdom, real understanding, begins with right fear of the Lord. We must learn this again in order also to learn true love and to grasp what it means that we can love him and that he loves us. This experience of Peter, of Andrew, and of John is also therefore a fundamental precondition for the apostolate and thus for the priesthood.⁷⁷

Thus the personal and deep experience of God naturally leads from a sense of the enormity of one's sinfulness to a proper "fear of the Lord." To reach the Gospel, one must learn the truth of Chesterton's saying, "A saint is a man who knows that he is a sinner." And this experience of the apostles of their sinfulness is "a fundamental precondition for the apostolate and thus

⁷⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Ministers of Joy*, 104-105.

for the priesthood.” Bishop Sheen distinguishes between the reaction of the apostles when Jesus told them that one of them would betray him. Ten apostles asked, “Is it I, *Lord?*” (Mt 26:22); Judas asked, “Is it I, *Master?*” (Mt 26:25). Only when we know we are before divinity and have reverence for it can we say, “*Lord.*”⁷⁸

D. Sincerity: Begin with Grave Sins

It is helpful to begin with our serious sins. It is good to approach the sacrament the way we approach a doctor, beginning with the serious health issues: the possible heart condition or a lump that could be cancerous, and not be too concerned about a little cold or rash. Likewise, in Confession, we begin with our serious sins, if there are any, and then proceed to our venial sins. Let us reiterate certain general facts. If there are serious sins, they must be confessed, along with their frequency, so as to give the confessor some sense of the gravity and duration. The gravity of one act of adultery committed in a moment of weakness is much less than an adulterous affair clandestinely carried on for seven years.

It is very helpful to begin Confession with the most shameful sins and to be very sincere, holding nothing back. Sometimes people, out of shame, may hide a certain sin, which might constitute a sacrilegious Confession. We forget that God forgives all, and that what matters is that we present our wounds to God so that He may heal them. We see the importance of this in the example of how God helps Adam and Eve after they sinned. God already knew they had sinned and yet he asks delicately, “Adam, where are you?” Step-by-step, Yahweh leads Adam and Eve to reveal their sin. For as the principle goes, “Confession of sins leads to salvation.” Confessors are more likely to be edified by those who have serious sins and yet are childlike and sincere in baring their souls, than those who sometimes are clearly unaware of many failings and come to Confession thus: “It has been six months since my last Confession, and I was angry a few times.” We must accuse ourselves fearlessly and in an honest way, not seeking to mute anything or to make our confessor think better of us. Above all, we must not fall into the trap of “confessing” the sins of others (make Confession about a diary of others’ sins and not focusing on our sins).

⁷⁸ Fulton Sheen, *A Priest Is Not His Own* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 224.

If there are no serious sins, all that is required is that we have some matter for Confession, even one venial sin will suffice; and if one cannot remember particular venial sins committed since the last Confession (such a state could indicate a lack of self-knowledge, since “for a righteous man falls seven times,” Prov 24:16), then it would suffice to mention just one sin from the past.

We acknowledge that venial sins are remitted through other means as well, such as the Eucharist, prayer, good works, etc. But the sacramental means was instituted by Christ to encounter Him and His tender mercy, and we must obey His will on frequent Confession through the Church’s teaching. It is best to try to make as complete a Confession as possible, without excessive concern about forgetting to confess a sin or becoming scrupulous.

E. Confidence in God’s Mercy

At the end of day, all that matters is God’s mercy. To understand God’s mercy, there is perhaps no better way than to look to Divine Mercy, the devotion approved by Pope John Paul II, who went so far as to designate the second Sunday of Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday. In her *Diary*, St. Faustina shares with us the deep sentiments of mercy in the heart of Jesus, especially in regard to sin and Confession. Some tremendous truths are revealed to us. We must approach Jesus with great confidence in His mercy:

My mercy is greater than your sins and those of the entire world. Who can measure the extent of my goodness? For you I descended from heaven to earth; for you I allowed myself to be nailed to the cross; for you I let My Sacred Heart be pierced with a lance, thus opening wide the source of mercy for you. Come, then, with trust to draw graces from this fountain. I never reject a contrite heart. Your misery has disappeared in the depths of My mercy. (*Diary*, 1485, 523-524) Have confidence, my child. Do not lose heart in coming for pardon, for I am always ready to forgive you. As often as you beg for it, you glorify My mercy. (*Diary* 1488, 530)

Jesus, speaking from the depths of His heart, tells Sr. Faustina that, even though they have wounded Him deeply, He ardently pursues sinners, opens heaven to those who repent, and turn to Him:

I cannot love a soul which is stained with sin, but when it repents, there is no limit to My generosity toward it. My mercy embraces and justifies it. With My mercy, I pursue sinners along all their paths and My Heart rejoices when they return to Me. I forget the bitterness with which they fed My Heart and rejoice at their return.... Tell sinners that I am always waiting for them, that I listen intently to the beating of their heart... when will it beat for me. (*Diary* 1728, 610)

He reveals that the greatest miracles take place in this Tribunal of Mercy (confessional):

Tell souls where they are to look for solace; that is, in the Tribunal of Mercy. There the greatest miracles take place [and] are incessantly repeated. To avail oneself of this miracle, it is not necessary to go on a great pilgrimage or to carry out some external ceremony; it suffices to come with faith to the feet of My representative and to reveal to him one's misery, and the miracle of Divine Mercy will be fully demonstrated. Were a soul like a decaying corpse so that from a human standpoint, there would be no [hope of] restoration and everything would already be lost, it's not so with God. The miracle of Divine Mercy restores that soul in full. Oh, how miserable are those who do not take advantage of the miracle of God's mercy! (*Diary* 1448, 511-512)

One consoling truth that should draw us to the confessional is that it is Jesus Himself who is hiding behind the "screen" of the person of the priest:

When you approach the confessional, know this, that I Myself am waiting there for you. I am only hidden by the priest, but I Myself act in your soul. (*Diary* 1602, 569)

My daughter, just as you prepare in My presence, so also you make your confession before Me. The person of the priest is, for Me, only a screen. Never analyze what sort of a priest it is that I am making use of; open your soul in confession as you would to Me, and I will fill it with My light. (*Diary* 1725, 610)

Given all that was just said, especially that the confessional is a "Tribunal of Mercy," it is important that the priest be kind in hearing Confessions. For it takes courage and sincerity on the penitent's part to bare his soul to the priest, even if the priest is Christ's representative. But more so, because many come with deep burdens and even wounds, they must feel that the

confessional is indeed the “Tribunal of Mercy” and that they experience God’s healing balm.

St. John Vianney understood this to be the case in dealing with people: “Moreover, so many Confessions had shown him ‘the misery of man’; it was the object of his most profound pity; he understood at last that when dealing with men kindness is required above all else.”⁷⁹ In addition, in his love for the penitent, the confessor must go beyond the specific sins confessed, for he is not just the absolver of sins but also the physician of souls.⁸⁰ The ministry of mercy entails both Confession and spiritual direction and a flowering of graces is derived from the priest’s generosity:

The ministry of being a “spiritual counsellor and physician” is not just one of forgiving sins *but of guiding and orienting Christian life to correspond generously with God’s loving plan for us*. When the priest responds generously to this plan, that *effective flowering of graces* which the Holy Spirit gives to his Church in every age becomes possible. (n. 136, 36, emphasis added)

As such, there is an element of spiritual direction within Confession, seeking to heal wounds, correct bad habits, help to avoid dangers, and attain holiness. To help the penitent thus, the confessor penetrates the sins to the underlying motivations and roots. To give one example, if a young Catholic person confesses seeking sinful gratifications and lacks any self-control, the priest might ask if the penitent is experiencing an emptiness in his heart that is not being filled, and if that emptiness derives from a lifestyle that is self-engrossed.

3. Concluding Remarks from The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy

The new document, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*, affirms much that has been written in this chapter. What stands out and dominates is the absolute necessity of both Confession and spiritual direction for the vitality and for renewal in the Church, especially for fruitfulness in the New Evangelization:

⁷⁹ Francis Trochu, *The Curé d’Ars*, 294.

⁸⁰ Thomas Dubay, *Seeking Spiritual Direction*, 112.

The perennial reform of the Church's life needs an unequivocal note of hope. The growth of priestly and religious vocations and of ecclesial commitment on the part of the laity in the path of holiness and in the apostolate requires a renewal in the ministry of penance and spiritual direction which should be exercised with well founded enthusiasm and generous self-giving. This is the new Springtide that John Paul II hoped for: "... I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians... respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time." ... The ministry of reconciliation and the service of spiritual direction are decisive aids in this constant process of openness and fidelity to all the Church and, especially, of the ministerial priesthood's actualization of the activity of the Holy Spirit. (nn. 139-140, 58)⁸¹

Many think of engagement in the new evangelization as getting involved in various ministries. But the goal is to lead the baptized to holiness and the apostolate: "... all of this implies a commitment of the baptized in their journey of holiness and their undertaking of the apostolate" (n. 137)— it is principally the priestly ministry of Confession that enables this. This journey of joyful service to the Lord requires "new eyes and a new heart, capable of *rising above a materialistic vision of events*, capable of glimpsing in the development the 'beyond' that technology cannot give" (n. 138, 57). Priests must keep in mind that they are sent and are accompanied by Christ in this ministry of mercy (n. 138, 57). The laity and religious must see in this sacrament, and, if possible with spiritual direction, the most powerful means to holiness and renewal in the Church.

⁸¹ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 Dec 1990, 92), quoted in *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy*, n. 139, 58.

CHAPTER 4

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

(Ignatian Charism)

By constantly reading these books he began to be attracted to what he found narrated there. Sometimes in the midst of his reading he would reflect on what he had read. Yet at other times he would dwell on many of the things which he had been accustomed to dwell on previously. But at this point our Lord came to his assistance, insuring that these thoughts were followed by others that arose from his current reading....

But there was a difference. When he reflected on worldly thoughts, he felt intense pleasure; but when he gave them up out of weariness, he felt dry and depressed. Yet when he thought of living the rigorous sort of life he knew the saints had lived, he not only experienced pleasure when he actually thought about it, but even after he dismissed these thoughts, he still experienced great joy. Yet he did not pay attention to this, nor did he appreciate it until one day, in a moment of insight, he began to marvel at the difference.

Then he understood his experience: thoughts of one kind left him sad, the others full of joy. And this was the first time he applied a process of reasoning to his religious experience. Later on, when he began to formulate his spiritual exercises, he used this experience as an illustration to explain the doctrine he taught his disciples on the discernment of spirits.¹ (St. Ignatius' Conversion)

Spiritual Warfare is our Context

Though perhaps unfamiliar to most Christians, it is evident that Christ's life, when examined closely, was lived in the context of spiritual warfare. The Church Fathers point out that the devil himself, through his "instruments," sought to take Christ's life as a child. Jesus began His ministry with the battle in the desert with Satan, who was to return, as Scripture indicates, at the "appointed hour." Not only would He frequently be involved with

¹ Luis Gonzalez, *Life of St. Ignatius*, Memorial of St. Ignatius on July 31, OOR, *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. III, 1565-1566.

expelling demons, He saw the mission of His life as one involving a battle with, and victory over, Satan, “And I saw Satan fall.” The “hour” of which John speaks is the hour of His passion, when he faced the onslaught of Satan in full force. At the cross, He has already conquered Satan. Jesus reassures His disciples, “Do not be afraid, I have conquered the world.”

The basic context of human and Christian life too is spiritual warfare, as evidenced by our two beginnings: temptation in Eden at the dawn of human history (nature); and Christ’s overcoming Satan and retrieving rights over mankind (grace). This truth appears to be lost to our times. In war, to be unaware of danger leads to loss of lives and even over-running of countries, as was the case in the rise of Hitler in twentieth-century Europe. The Christian too must know that, as He allowed the devil to attack Jesus, God allows him to attack us. It is vital then to learn how to combat the devil (“spiritual warfare”), beginning with a knowledge of his strategy of ordinary attacks within our souls (through “discernment of spirits”) and his extraordinary attacks in infestation (through closing of doors, deliverance, and, rarely, exorcism).

Let us beware a critical misconception regarding spiritual warfare. When we think of spiritual warfare, our minds tend to immediately consider “extraordinary” attacks of infestation and possession, as we find in several people Jesus encountered as described in the Gospels. First, we ought to note that these phenomena are greatly reduced in a Christianized society, where the powerful sacraments are celebrated everywhere and every day. Then, we must note too that, while Scripture witnesses to the devil having some influence on illness, we cannot tell when it derives from his action, and, in any case, illness often arises from natural causes and falls within the providence of God. This means that we should not be distracted too much by the infestation by spirits or their occasional influence through illness.

For the ultimate and principal goal of the devil is to damn us through temptation. Since he himself has already been damned to hell and is envious of the mercy God shows toward us, he seeks to frustrate the plan of God for our salvation, and to bring us to his fate. Within God’s providence, the only way he can do this is through our use of our free will. That is, to lead us to damnation, he is limited to tempting us, and for those striving to love God, he attacks through the mind, sense faculties, and passions— hence

the importance of discernment of spirits. Thus our primary focus should be on the “ordinary” attacks of the evil spirits within us each day. To give an example of its importance, Jesus Himself needed to apply discernment of spirits on the cross, where he was tempted by Satan through his enemies to “come down from the cross”— had He succumbed to this devious trap, our redemption would have been thwarted. Thus our primary focus in spiritual warfare should be on the daily ordinary attacks, e.g., to take away our peace and turn us away from God’s will, especially through temptation.

Thus, the primary difficulty in spiritual warfare is that most people are not even aware that there is a spiritual battle taking place within them. Consequently, when troubles arise in their life, they do not realize that their principal battle is not usually the external crisis but rather an interior spiritual battle or struggle, one that requires a “discernment of spirits.” The constant temptation is to be overwhelmed by the external trials that arise and not seek to protect peace and our reliance on Jesus at all costs: a seminarian on the eve of ordination or a religious sister before being clothed (as happened to St. Thérèse of Lisieux) may feel unworthy to go forward; a priest who has a moral crisis that becomes known might be tempted to leave his diocese or the priesthood. Over and over again, spiritual directors have been pointing out to directees that the struggles they experience need to be “framed” within discernment of spirits. They don’t see its value, both how it can protect them in major decisions that impact their lives and how it helps their everyday “ups and downs” and decisions.

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

Where St. John of the Cross excels in the stages of the interior life and Chiara Lubich in the spirituality of unity, St. Ignatius of Loyola excels in discernment, including discernment of two spirits and its application in the daily Examen of Consciousness. This introduction to discernment of spirits relies primarily on the teachings of Fr. Timothy Gallagher received through two retreats, but presented through the filter of the author’s personal experience and use in spiritual direction.

Background of St. Ignatius

The quoted text given at the beginning of the chapter refers to the experience of St. Ignatius of Loyola during his convalescence that was to have a profound impact upon the Church. He was recovering from the injury sustained from the impact of a cannon ball that passed between his legs.

The only reading material available to him were a book on the lives of the saints and one on the life of Christ. Ignatius writes of his joyful experience of reading these books, and of the alternating competing thoughts concerning his great desire for military glory and courtly love with giving His life over to Christ. While reading the life of Christ our Lord or the lives of the saints, he would reflect and reason with himself: “What if I should do what Saint Francis or Saint Dominic did?” This was the dramatic turning point in the life of St. Ignatius. His imagination was being transformed. He was torn between his self-serving thoughts of worldly glory and thoughts of giving up everything to follow Christ.

In the end, he chose to follow Christ the King— but it is of crucial importance to appreciate *how* this transformation came about. Ignatius subjected his imagination and emotional life to a certain scrutiny. That is, he did not let his feelings completely dominate him, but reflected on them to determine where truth and goodness lay. Once he made that determination, he put his whole life at their service.

The second paragraph on St. Ignatius’s conversion points to how Ignatius’s own experience of grace and spiritual insight undergirds the doctrine he teaches in the Spiritual Exercises. It was his insight into his own emotional response that enabled him to see the way he should go. And his insights into the distinction between good and evil spirits, refined especially during his months of prayer in solitude at Manresa, eventually developed into what is now called, “discernment of spirits.” This discernment enables us to recognize God’s action in both providence and in His leading us to discern His will and to submit ourselves in surrender to His loving providence.²

² In this section, the author may have drawn from a sources but cannot recall the source.

1. A Synthesis of the Rules of Discernment

A. The Rules of Discernment

From his convalescence experience described above, developed more fully at Manresa, Ignatius composed fourteen rules of discernment, primarily for the first week of the Thirty-day Spiritual Exercises, and eight more “Rules for Further Discernment” for the second week. In addition to Fr. Timothy Gallagher’s two retreats to seminarians (2006, 2015)³ mentioned earlier, this chapter relies also on his book, *Discernment of Spirits*.⁴ Readers are warmly encouraged to read this tremendously helpful written guide by a modern disciple of St. Ignatius, whose community, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, espouse the Ignatian charism. One possible summarized practical supplement to Fr. Gallagher’s work is Chapter Five of Fr. Robert Spitzer’s *Five Pillars of the Christian Life*.⁵ It would be helpful to begin by reading first the “Rules of Discernment,” and, if possible, the short autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola.⁶ This chapter only proposes to give an introduction to all baptized, and especially consecrated souls. It is hoped that this introduction may inspire them to seek more resources for fuller development of this area.

The presupposition for the fourteen Rules of Discernment is that one can discern movements of the spirit within, whether from the good spirit or from the evil spirit. This experience is not new in the Catholic tradition. One of the greatest figures in the early Church whose conversion experience illustrates this point is St. Augustine. Augustine certainly had personal exterior influences, especially that of St. Ambrose in Milan, the tale of the soldier who left his fiancée and joined a religious order, as well as the words he heard, “*Tolle et lege*.” St. Augustine’s great discovery, however, was the recognition of

³ Some points in this chapter have been drawn from these two retreats, and thus will show no citations.

⁴ Timothy Gallagher, *Discernment of Spirits* (York: Crossroad Publ. Co, 2005). Because of the importance of this topic, we mention here other formats of Gallagher’s book that are also available: e-book and audio-books; a set of 5 DVDs by EWTN, “Living the Discerning Life: The Spiritual Teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola”; free podcasts of discernment of spirits available online that can be downloaded at discerninghearts.com.

⁵ Robert Spitzer, “Fourth Pillar: Partnership with the Holy Spirit— Consolation, Desolation, and Spiritual Discernment” (Chapter Five), *The Five Pillars of the Spiritual Life: A Practical Guide to Prayer for Active People* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 83-99.

⁶ John Olin, ed., *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola, with Related Documents* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992).

God's interior inspirations and the devil's hindrances. In the twentieth-century, Fr. Karl Rahner, with the help of his Ignatian background as a Jesuit, was one of the most prominent theologians to have underscored the importance of our interior experience for theology.

It may help to see the overall order of the Fourteen Rules of St. Ignatius. The first eleven rules deal with consolation and desolation, the last three treat of temptation.

- Rules 1-11: Consolation and Desolation (Rules 4-10:
Desolation)
- Rules 12-14: Temptation

The first six rules constitute three pairs in respective order:

- Rules 1 & 2: Towards mortal sin and towards God
through purification
- Rules 3 & 4: Consolation and Desolation
- Rules 5 & 6: In Desolation, never make changes and
four strategies to employ
- Rules 7-10: Continue Rules 5-6 in strategies regarding
Desolation

Two general points can be noted here. First, the larger number of these fourteen rules treat desolation. Fr. Gallagher believes that, of all St. Ignatius' teachings, his doctrine of awareness of and dealing with desolation may be his greatest gift to the Church. Second, St. Ignatius makes a distinction between spiritual and non-spiritual consolations and desolations. Spiritual consolations are uplifting of the heart with respect to God, such as an experience of faith, or contrition, whereas non-spiritual consolations are natural consolations, such as what we can receive from experiencing uplifting music, a beautiful sunrise, warm friendship, and good food; spiritual and non-spiritual desolations work at different levels. So important for our lives are these rules of discernment that Fr. Gallagher earnestly encourages that, after having been introduced to them, we find some way to remember the rules (e.g., putting them on a wall or beside the computer, reviewing them frequently— for this, we might consider using a one-page summary).

B. Examination of the Fourteen Rules

The Opposing Directions of the Two Spirits

In the first two of the fourteen rules of discernment, St. Ignatius identifies two spirits that correspond to two movements. The good spirit comprises primarily the Holy Spirit, as well as our weaknesses and the bad influence of the world; the evil spirit comprises primarily the devil, as well as our strengths and the good influences of the world. In general, we must recognize the aims of two spirits, who work in two opposing directions. For example, St. Ignatius teaches in the second rule that for those who are moving towards God, it is the good spirit that encourages man to go forward and the evil spirit who hinders his progress. And he hinders his progress by attacking a person's mind, by bringing false reasoning, for he is "a liar and the father of lies" (1 Jn 3:8; Jn 8:44).

Their differing goals and action on us can be likened to journeying in two different directions in a car, with an accelerator (most of our human system) and a brake (mind). In the direction of moving away from God and toward sin, it is the evil spirit who presses the accelerator, our imagination and passions, to spur us on toward sin, while the good spirit acts on our brake, our conscience (intellect), to reveal to us the falsity of the promises made. As one moves toward God, it is the good spirit who steps on the accelerator by inspiring us to greater heights and to conversion (e.g., conversions of St. Ignatius and St. Augustine), while it is the evil spirit who steps on the brake (mind), trying to retard or impede our progress with false reasons, causing confusion, agitation, and discouragement. Since we who are striving to serve God are in the second rule, it is important therefore to realize that our enemy is stepping on the brake, that is, attacking the mind—we have to be more conscious of what is taking place in our minds, as well as the desolation he brings.

Definition and Workings of Consolations and Desolations

The presupposition of all this is that a spiritual battle is taking place, but is taking place primarily within. If one is unaware that a spiritual battle is raging within, one can be attacked with impunity and suffer much turmoil, and even despair, without being cognizant of the reality of the situation. Fr.

Gallagher compares a person who is unaware of attacks of spiritual desolation to a tumbleweed that is blown in every direction. The way one can discern between the two spirits is by the experiences of consolation and desolation. It is important to know that God can only bring consolations and joys and that the devil only desolation; otherwise, one might be tempted to be disillusioned with God. While God does not cause desolation, He allows desolation to bring growth and fruits— this is an important point.

Consolation and desolation are heart-level experiences, and can be distinguished by the two opposite directions to which they lead. Consolation has five different elements: the heart is enflamed with love; experiencing a love in no created thing but only in the Creator of them all; tears; increase of faith, hope, and charity; all interior joy, with quiet and peace, that calls our hearts to heavenly things.⁷ One of the most striking signs of the presence of desolation is the use of universal negatives or absolutes: “God never loved me, does not love me now, and could never love me.” These absolutes, of course, as our experience tells us, do not reflect reality.

There are a number of daily ways in which the evil spirit can disturb us, which we might not recognize as such: disturbing our peace; dwelling on our past or present sins; making our minds run continually, (e.g., by worrying or by going into the past or future; making us run with busyness); not opening up to or depending on others; and isolating ourselves. When one recognizes the signs or the fruits of each spirit, one is better equipped to proceed in the spiritual battle. In general, the good spirit brings the fruits of the Holy Spirit, like love, peace, joy, benevolence; while the evil spirit, in his context of damnation in hell and lack of love, can only give what he has: negativity, frustration, anger, confusion, hatred, unforgiveness, a critical spirit, discouragement, despair, focus on self, etc. Here is St. Ignatius’ description::

I call desolation all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations, moving to want of confidence,

⁷ In his book *Discernment of Spirits*, Timothy Gallagher gives a more complete definition and fuller illustrations of consolations and desolations (pp. 47-71).

without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from his Creator and Lord.

Three Steps in Discernment of Spirits

Once we become aware that there might be a spiritual battle within us, the next step is to discern which of the two spirits are influencing us by detecting whether we have consolations or desolations. Fr. Gallagher highlights St. Ignatius' **three-step approach** for combat (*SpirEx.*, 313):

Awareness

Understanding

Taking action: accept or reject

The most important step by far is the first step, to be “aware” that something is happening within. The saying attributed to Socrates applies here, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Second, we now seek to “understand” by discerning which spirit is acting through whether we are experiencing consolations (good spirit) and desolation (evil spirit). Then, in the third step, we act accordingly: “accepting” the suggestions of the good spirit or “rejecting” the suggestions of the evil spirit.

Drink in Consolations

Because of the primary focus of dealing with the many difficulties that desolation brings in its train, we may neglect to understand the importance and necessity of consolation. St. Ignatius has said that without consolation he would find life very difficult. Fr. Gallagher emphasizes that when we experience consolation, we must learn to *drink it in*, to *soak it in*, to immerse ourselves in it. Because life can be difficult, people are inclined to be long-suffering. As one woman told Fr. Gallagher, until he taught her how to drink in consolations, she believed that the Lord was asking her to simply “grunt and bear” life. While God allows desolation in our lives, which bring much grace, the whole-hearted receiving of consolations can bring much growth in the spiritual life. Here is what St. Claude de la Colombière teaches regarding prayer, counselling the directee to leave the prepared points when consolation comes:

About prayer— I think you cling too closely to the points given in your book: nevertheless, if to do so helps, do not change. Remember that every time you are filled with feelings out of the ordinary, whether of thanksgiving, love, admiration of God’s goodness, desire of pleasing him, contempt for things of this world, or the thought of his presence, you must make these things the subject of your prayer and try to relish and increase these sentiments.⁸

Let us recall the signal method Jesus used with the three apostles taken up with Jesus to experience the glory of Christ at the Transfiguration so as to be able to weather the storm of experiencing Christ’s crucifixion and death. But beyond its strengthening for trials to come, there are other great benefits: the love of God is sealed into our hearts, God guides us through the consolations, and they enable us to look forward to the full glory of heaven. The reader is encouraged to read the heart-warming episodes of consolation in Fr. Gallagher’s *Discernment of Spirits* (Ch. 3), including those of Julian of Norwich, Blaise Pascal, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth Leseur, and St. Elizabeth Seton. For example, he describes an episode with the young Elizabeth Seton, who had suffered much (death of mother, lack of love from step-mother, absences of father, death of husband). She joined a wood cutter on a trip to the woods, where God touched her heart deeply, and she was ravished interiorly (consolations) for three hours. She said that she grew more in those few hours than in many years of spiritual life.

2. What to Do during Desolation

Perhaps we can begin with the single most important principle that can protect us, the fifth rule. Fr. Timothy Gallagher compares this rule to the “light that will never go out” that was given by Galladriel, the Elf Queen, to Frodo in the book made into the movie, *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. This is the *Great Rule*: never change your previous proposals or make new major decisions during desolation (Rule 5). During desolation, we are more under the influence of the evil spirit, and, as Ignatius teaches, we must reject its inspirations. Fr. Gallagher has offered an example from the experiences of some seminarians (and young religious). On first entering a seminary, a seminarian may experience consolations, enjoying the novelty

⁸ St. Claude de la Colombière, *The Spiritual Direction of St. Claude de la Colombière* (San Francisco: Ignatius 1998), 16.

and graces, with no experience of major desolation. However, later on, when things get busy and difficult, he may begin experiencing desolation. He might then be tempted to think that he has made a mistake in entering the seminary, but it would be rash for him to make a hasty decision. We can add here that he can feel unworthy of his vocation, or even that he is deceiving his superiors. It is vital that he waits until he returns to consolation, or, at least, when he is back on an even keel, when he is able to hear the good spirit and can make a true decision that corresponds to God's will. There is absolutely no exception to this rule, none whatsoever— we should never break this rule.

The lives of many saints would have turned out differently if they had made critical decisions during periods of desolation (e.g., St. Pio of Pietrelcina). Fr. Gallagher spoke of St. Thérèse of Lisieux's experience of desolation on the eve of her receiving her religious habit. She interiorly felt that this was not her vocation and that she was deceiving her superiors. Asking to speak to her novice mistress outside the chapel privately, she shared her interior turmoil and doubts. The novice mistress laughed at her, for she was used to seeing these attacks from the enemy.

Fr. Gallagher points to another rule that we should never overlook, the thirteenth rule. During difficulties, St. Ignatius recommends going to “one's good confessor or to another spiritual person, who knows his [evil spirit's] deceits and malicious designs” (Rule 13). St. Ignatius employs the example of a wife or daughter being tempted with a sinful suggestion from a Don Juan: in Fr. Gallagher's language, if this is not revealed to the husband or father, the “game is on”; if revealed, the “game is over.” Thus, spiritual direction is an ideal forum to bring any such difficulties.

But this rule fits in with a much larger context of mediation in general, and consulting in particular. A priest, in his earlier years, spent six years trying to discern his vocation, and was amazed at the revelation of how quickly his discernment moved once he found a spiritual director to whom he was able to open his heart— he learned the principle of mediation, of how God normally works through others.

Summarizing what we have learned, Fr. Gallagher counsels us to maintain above all these two rules to guide and protect us: Rule 5 (“take the fifth,”

i.e., never make changes during desolation) and Rule 13 (never walk alone, i.e., always reveal temptations to someone). In an experience similar to one just described of St. Thérèse, a young religious nun, not yet solemnly professed, was experiencing similar doubts about her worthiness and her deceiving her superiors on a return trip on a plane, and all but made the decision to leave the congregation and call her parents to pick her up at the airport. Then, she was quickly on her guard (having some background on Ignatian spirituality) when an inner voice told her to say nothing to her spiritual director. On her return, she wisely immediately phoned the spiritual director, and God used him to explain that she was going through desolation and to not make any rash decisions, and to reaffirm her vocation. God was able to save her vocation because she applied to the thirteenth rule of revealing her crisis to someone.

Discern Whether there Might be Physical or Moral Causality

When faced with desolation, we might consider first doing a preliminary exercise, a diagnosis to eliminate two possible secondary causes (physical and moral) of desolation. First, we can examine our physical condition to see if it needs attention. We must normally seek to avoid physical desolation, for it can lead to spiritual desolation— physical desolation is but a small step towards spiritual desolation. For example, if we are exhausted or have bronchitis, we should take time for recovery; if we are stressed out, we might need to let go of some duties, find some fellowship or get more recreation.

Second, if our physical condition is fine and desolation still remains, we then go on to examine our moral condition, to examine one's conscience to see whether the desolation was caused by some fault of ours, for example, if we have been unfaithful to prayer or judgmental of others.

Third, after having ruled out possible physical or moral causality, if desolation still remains, we can now proceed and discern if this is a trial or learning that our Lord wishes us to endure, which is the next step.

Keeping in mind the two big rules (5 of making no changes & 13 of opening our hearts to someone) and diagnosing whether there is physical desolation or a moral cause of the desolation, we can take the following

general approach to spiritual desolation. At all costs, while seeking to accept the trial because God has allowed it, we must, nevertheless, not be passive but proactive—we must resist—otherwise we will suffer spiritual harm. The thing is to “*contra agere*,” to reject and go against inspirations of the evil spirit.

In general, during desolation, St. Ignatius counsels us to take *four means*: pray, meditate, examine, and do penance (Rule 6): to “pray” is to turn to God for help, rather than ceaselessly playing the tape of the problem (e.g., hurt) over and over in our minds; to “meditate” is to use Scripture texts that console and strengthen us, such as Psalm 23 (Fr. Gallagher suggests having a “quiver” of these Scripture arrows prepared in advance at hand); to “examine” is to allow the light of the Holy Spirit to fall on that situation, to give understanding, find the cause, and perhaps even suggest a resolution; to “do penance” is to hold back the inclination to give in to a compensation (e.g., turn to TV, internet, food or drink), and let go a duty, such as prayer. During desolation, “false reasons” will surface: for example, one is tempted not to go to spiritual direction, feel that prayer is not benefitting me, worry about what others think of me, and so on.

In the specific situation where we find ourselves unable to pray, we go counter to the suggestions by recognizing that we can be at peace and attentive to God’s presence in a “receptive” way, knowing that God is “active” in a deep way to transform us. We must recognize some of the common attacks of the evil spirit: *to make us stop praying, become discouraged, lose our peace, lose trust in God, and think we are far from or unworthy of God.*

We can complement the four primary means of Rule 6 with other strategies from the rules that follow:

- ❖ First, desolation has meaning and God gives us “sufficient grace” to resist and to attain salvation (Rule 7). This rule implicitly affirms that there is meaning to the trial: God brings great good out of desolation; in fact, St. Ignatius teaches that, without desolations, we remain spiritual children (implied in Rule 9).
- ❖ Second, desolation does not last forever, but gives way to consolation. As the saying goes, “trouble comes to pass,” it does not come to stay. Desolations and consolations alternate (Rule 8,

see *Discernment of Spirits*, p. 110-112); thinking during desolation of the consolation to come can strengthen us.

- ❖ Third, it is helpful for us to be aware that there are three reasons for desolations: personal fault (mentioned earlier); trial that tests us and brings graces; humility from recognition of our helplessness during desolation (Rule 9).
- ❖ Fourth, St. Ignatius counsels us to know that the evil spirit is like a weak person attempting to attack a strong person. The weak one makes ferocious signs of aggression, but if confronted, that one's weakness would become manifest (Rule 12— where Ignatius uses a woman as tempter, one interpreter suggests a more appropriate image for our time might be that of dealing with spoilt children). Fr. Gallagher notes how impotent one feels during desolation, we are likely to be expressing the litany of “I can't, I can't...” or be hearing a voice saying, “You are too weak.” But the evil spirit is in reality very weak, and once we stand up firmly against the initial suggestion, he immediately backs down: “it is proper for the enemy to weaken and lose heart, fleeing and ceasing his temptations...” (Rule 12).
- ❖ A useful reminder here is the importance of stopping the temptation in its tracks as early as possible. Fr. Gallagher employs the image of a snowball that can be stopped at the top of the mountain, but would obliterate anything in its path halfway down the mountain.

Strategy to Prepare for Future Desolation

During consolation, one of the most important things we can do is to prepare for desolation. We must recognize the tactics of the enemy (Rule 14). One would imagine that General Titus, leading the Roman army to besiege Jerusalem in 70 A.D., with his military experience, would have first circled Jerusalem to identify weak spots in the fortifications. If he found one such weak spot, he might concentrate the barrage of his artillery there, in the hope of making a breach. Once a breach has been made, with the superior military forces outside the city, that city would inevitably fall (as Jericho fell to the Israelites when the walls fell). The evil spirit employs a similar strategy. The devil has known us since our birth and knows where our “breaches” are, and continually finds entry through these breaches. If one is not aware of these weak points, the devil will have a field day with us,

who may have no idea of what is taking place within us. It is imperative, therefore, that during consolation we resolve to firm up those breaches, or, at the very least, to be aware of these weak spots and know the defensive measures of counter-strategy to take.

There are two counsels from Rule 11 that give us two overall approaches to consolations and desolations. During consolation, *we can act as if we are not capable of anything whatsoever*, and that everything we have derives from a gift from God. Fr. Gallagher teaches that, during consolation, we are inclined to be naively confident and think we have the spiritual things mastered. And during desolation, we can do the opposite, *to act as if we are capable of doing anything*, since God is with us.

Three Troublesome Areas

In times of desolation, there can also be temptations, which are deceptive suggestions of the enemy. While desolation (movement of the heart downwards) and temptations are distinct, these two tactics of the enemy often go together. Let us pause briefly to look at a few common temptations.

One danger in the spiritual life is the temptation to believe that God does not love us—this is perhaps the greatest lie the devil will try to foist on us. The temptation to believe that God does not love me because of my continual falls, remaining defects, conflicts, and other difficulties, can have tragic consequences on our life. Witness the example of Martin Luther's life. His difficulty began with this very problem, on the image of a demanding God and how he could possibly stand before God in his condition of sinfulness, and the despair that followed. Luther's problem is not new, though his condition was rather extreme, as was his reaction. John Dillenberger wrote:

We must recall the problem which plagued Luther before he entered the monastery, namely, how one could stand in holiness before a righteous, demanding God. This problem tormented him no less when a monk—that is, when exercising the very vocation which was the epitome of man's relation to God.... Difficult though it may be, it was believed that one could love God with a good deal of the spontaneity with which God loves us. Luther did not find himself so persuaded. Neither in his conduct nor

in his attitude did Luther find ground for hope. Instead he saw despair, and God appeared as wrath, not as love.⁹

Yet another problem that troubles many people, the difficulty of personal weakness or sin in their life. A devout Catholic mother with young children, especially if she is pregnant or is not well, may sometimes find herself irritable with her husband and with her children. But she must remember that God leaves us with defects and that everything that happens, even her defects, are allowed by God. The first step to combat this is to *distinguish between temptation and sin*: the feeling of irritability need not be sin, for sin requires consent. Second, she must understand that her context modifies her situation, such that such a mother or a superior with great responsibility or is ill will face greater propensity to irritability. Third, she must be able to accept her defects, as God Himself “allowed” Paul to have the “thorn in his side.” That is to say, God wishes us, while trying to make resolutions to overcome tendencies and using human means to prevent them, to accept our condition of weakness, and wait for God’s “visitation,” especially through growth in the stages of the interior life to overcome them.

3. Synthesizing what we have Learned

Let’s attempt to capture the value of discernment of spirits by contrasting the typical ignorance of it to the following summary of learnings. For if spiritual consolations and desolations truly form a large and key part of our everyday life, then there are a number of great benefits that become apparent when one becomes aware of them and knows how to act. Let us consider these benefits:

- ❖ First, it is a great light to be able to know of their existence, as well as their distinction from non-spiritual ones;
- ❖ Second, the grace to recognize them;
- ❖ Third, the knowledge that only God sends consolations and only the evil spirit causes desolation;
- ❖ Fourth, the wisdom to “drink in” the effects of consolation to strengthen us and grow in the spiritual life, and to reject the influences of the evil spirit in desolation, which is also a process of discernment, a great gift;

⁹ John Dillenberger, ed., Introduction to *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), xv-xvi.

- ❖ Fifth, the discernment of how to act in consolation (humbling oneself) and in desolation (having great trust);
- ❖ Sixth, the knowledge of various strategies to combat desolation;
- ❖ Seventh, knowledge of how to prepare for desolation in times of consolation and the two rules to always protect (Rules 5 & 13);
- ❖ Eight, the insight that the enemy is truly weak when we stand firm.

Given these manifold and valuable benefits, we see why Fr. Gallagher originally wanted to give his book, *Discernment of Spirits*, the title, “*Setting Captives Free*.” For Fr. Gallagher, the key to the whole exercise is not just to experience being in desolation (“myself-in-desolation”), but to be able to reflect upon myself being in desolation (“myself-reflecting-upon-myself-in-desolation”), which brings liberation—it is a movement from emotion to the mind.¹⁰

Let us also consider some key learnings. First, God is so close and involved with our lives that he not only directs providence but also guides our interior life. Even when we are far from God, He is always close to us (Rule 1). A second truth is the great benefits that desolation brings: “Without desolation, we would remain spiritual children” (Ignatius of Loyola). We often become aware that the most difficult moments of our lives, if we examine them after that event, give rise to many graces by our sharing in the Paschal mystery. Furthermore, we discover that spiritual life is not linear, but cyclical, alternating between consolations and desolations. Fr. Gallagher employs the insightful example of Julian of Norwich, who, in one episode, experienced some twenty alternations of consolation and desolation, and was able to draw fruits and insights from that experience, including realizing that the desolations were not due to any fault of hers.¹¹

Discernment of spirits is a tool that can be used in many areas of spiritual life, as we find in the Spiritual Exercises. St. Ignatius tells us that the Spiritual Exercises are designed to help a person overcome himself and order his life, so that he will never reach a decision—and particularly not a vocational decision—through some disordered affection. St. Ignatius wants to help the retreatant rid himself of any inordinate attachments. He assists us by setting the goal clearly in mind, which enables us to avoid falling into

¹⁰ Timothy Gallagher, *Discernment of Spirits*, 109.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

the wrong path. He explains the idea further in what he calls the Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises*:

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and in this way to save his soul.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for man, to help him in working toward the end for which he is created.

From this it follows that I should use these things to the extent that they help me toward my end, and rid myself of them to the extent that they hinder me.

To do this, I must make myself indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything that is left to my freedom of will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on my own part *I ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters.*

We ought to desire and choose only the thing that is more conducive to the end for which we are created; we should discern whether we are motivated only by the desire to do God's will or whether we are also motivated by the desire to do our own will. The fact is, we can sometimes convince ourselves that we are motivated by the desire to do God's will when, under the surface, we are really being motivated by other factors, so that our desire to do our own will is still very much in play. Our feelings, our emotions, can sometimes supply improper motivations. How can we root out bad motivations? The first thing we need to do is become aware of them. To use an overused phrase that has become a cliché, we need to "get in touch with our feelings"—hence, discernment of spirits. For those who strive to sincerely follow Christ, the devil is not going to tempt serious sins, like orgies, cocaine binges, extramarital affairs, and abortions. Where he may not be able to cause us to fall into mortal sin, he will try to take away our peace or give us false identities or insights, so that the dominoes will start falling (e.g., making us constantly run and be busy that we neglect prayer).

It might be helpful to conclude with an example of the power of Discernment of Spirits. An upstanding priest with admirable qualities, who was overwhelmed by the several heavy responsibilities assigned by his bishop and who was afflicted by an interior difficulty (obsessive compulsive

disorder), reacted in intense ways that led him to need months of rehabilitation. His reaction was probably an unconscious cry for help. On his first return to a public gathering, he was deeply troubled and shared it with a classmate. Of the thoughts offered by the classmate, the one the priest found the most helpful was the classmate's diagnosis of desolation in these words: "Do your concerns about other priests knowing about what you did and thoughts about leaving the diocese remind you of what we learned about desolation: having no hope (there is no hope for remaining in priestly ministry or staying in this diocese), self-blame (it's all my fault), all black and white scenarios?" With these words, the priest felt a burden lifted off his shoulders, reflecting the title that Fr. Gallagher intended for his book, "Setting Captives Free"— he felt a great relief and realized that he was under attack by the evil spirit; he was able to continue his ministry with hope for the future.

We saw earlier the similar freeing from the attacks on vocations suffered by St. Therese of Lisieux and the nun returning on the plane. As Fr. Gallagher pointed out: the key first step is awareness; then identifying whether there are spiritual consolations or desolations; and finally accepting or rejecting respectively. And as St. Ignatius encouraged, we do not make changes during desolation and it is best to share our desolations with a spiritual guide.

CHAPTER 5

THE INTERIOR JOURNEY TO GOD

(Carmelite Charism)

One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
— ah, the sheer grace! —
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled...

O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with His beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.¹ (St. John of the Cross)

The author of this book has interest in the Carmelite charism, but does not claim expertise. This chapter can offer only an introduction, to provide an overall framework and landmarks, in the hope that it will spur the reader to seek out and drink more deeply from this bountiful cup of the Church. There is no substitute for reading the primary texts, specifically the writings of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross; yet the commentaries offer valuable insights for interpreting their texts.

While primary texts from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Kavanaugh-Rodriguez translations) and the Allison Peers' translations of the works of St. Teresa of Jesus will be employed, this chapter shall draw from various commentators, including Fr. Paul-Marie of the Cross' *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*; Fr. Iain Matthew's *The Impact of God*; David B. Perrin's *For Love of the World: The Old and New Self of John of the Cross*; Sr. Mary Niere's *The Gospel of Contemplation*; and Fr. Thomas Dubay's *Fire Within*. A highly recommended book is by Sr. Madeleine of St. Joseph, *Within the Castle with St. Teresa* (reprinted by the Carmel of Lafayette). For general themes in St. Teresa of Jesus, one might consider the work of two

¹ St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, in Kavanaugh-Rodriguez, *Collected Works*, 295-296.

of her notable contemporary commentators, Fr. Tomás Alvarez, *100 Themes on Her Life and Work*² and Fr. P. Marie-Eugène, *I Want to See God: A Practical Synthesis of Carmelite Spirituality*. An accessible introduction can be found in the CD set by Fr. Andrew Apostoli, *The Journey Within: Teresa's Interior Castle*.³

Preface: The Impact of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross

Christian Tradition has long known of an interior journey of purification to union with God (pre-eminently one that comprises three stages).⁴ In the sixteenth century, the two outstanding co-founders of the Discalced Reform branch of the Carmelites, St. Teresa of Jesus (more commonly known as St. Teresa of Avila) and St. John of the Cross, were called to play a significant role. They were given a mission of elaborating more clearly and systematically the contours of the stages of the interior journey, drawing from the rich experience of their own spiritual journey within. We can immediately see the value of having knowledge of the stages of the interior life when we note that they parallel the stages of human and religious life. A first-time mother is greatly helped in having some knowledge of the basic stages of human growth (e.g., infancy, toddler, “terrible twos,” childhood, adolescence, etc.) and a prospective member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuit) is more reassured with knowledge of the expectations and the stages of their long formation. As some familiarity with human and religious domains help, so knowledge of the stages of our interior life can greatly assist one to negotiate this journey.

² A solid general bibliography can be found in Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 88-94. For a practical synthesis by another well-known Carmelite expert, consider P. Marie-Eugène, *I Want to See God: A Practical Synthesis of Carmelite Spirituality*, trans. M. Verda Clare (Thomas More Publishing, 1998). Accessible works by Discalced Carmelites that provide more background include: Otilio Rodriguez (co-translator of the famous series of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Jesus, and professor at the Teresianum in Rome), *The Teresian Gospel: An Introduction to a Fruitful Reading of the Way of Perfection* (Darlington Carmel, 1993); Sam Anthony Morillo, *Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1994); Pius Sammut, *God is a Feast: A New Look at St. John of the Cross* (Great Britain: New Life Publishing, 1996); Casa Generalizia Carmelitani Scalzi, *Teresian Prayer*, ODCS Ongoing Formation Booklet, Ontario. For a fine talk, look under “Lectures on St. Teresa of Avila” for Father Daniel Chowning, at www.ToTheHolyMountain.org. Some have found Ruth Burrow’s image of three islands in *Guidelines to Mystical Prayer* helpful.

³ Andrew Apostoli, *The Journey Within: Teresa's Interior Castle*, CD set (Canfield, OH: St Paul’s, 2003).

⁴ See, for example, Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*.

Let us make some preliminary observations about the impact of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross. First, it is difficult to overestimate their impact upon the Church and the world. Jordan Aumann, a pre-eminent spiritual theologian of the twentieth-century, indicates something of their influence: “They have given the Church a spiritual doctrine that has never been surpassed. So great was their influence and so brilliant their exposition that they have far outshone all the other writers of the golden age of Spanish spirituality.”⁵

Fr. Andrew Apostoli, in his audio series, pointed out that one historian testified that St. Teresa has had greater impact on the Counter-Reformation than King Philip II of Spain and St. Ignatius of Loyola combined.⁶ He added that this does not yet take into account the tremendous influence that St. Teresa had on the next dominant spirituality in the Western Church, the French spirituality, not to mention her influence on notable saints, like St. Francis de Sales and St. Alphonsus Liguori.⁷ The fact that their spirituality dates from the sixteenth-century does not take away from their perennial value and fruitfulness for the contemporary period, even though spiritualities must adapt to each new age. We see the power of the influence of St. John of the Cross on twentieth-century theologians, like Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Jordan Aumann, the psychologist-theologian Benedict Groeschel,⁸ and Pope John Paul II.

Second, it should be noted that God’s gift of the Carmelite charism to the Church is not restricted to these two co-founders. The core framework of Teresa and John endures, but there is continued interpretation, updating,

⁵ Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, 198. For a good historical overview of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross, see pp. 189-198.

⁶ Andrew Apostoli, *The Journey Within*.

⁷ For her influence through Carmelite disciples, see Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 57-59. The Preparatory Commission for the Fifth Centenary of the Birth of St. Teresa of Jesus (Avila) 1515-2015, “‘I was born for You’ (‘Para Vos Nasci’, Fifth Centenary of the Birth of St. Teresa of Jesus- 2015, Document II, 30), summarizes her influence thus: “This is the significance of her charism as an ‘experience of the Spirit.’ Her spiritual experience is the soul and engine of the new Carmel, the powerful force that spread her charism to other countries in Europe (Italy, France, Flanders...). Her spiritual experience was also the basis of her profound missionary instinct (Africa, Persia, New World...). It also explains the wide diffusion of her writings which are an initiation into the Christian experience.”

⁸ Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: Crossroad Publ. Co., 2007), Appendix: “Historical Note on the Doctrine of the Three Ways,” 194-196.

and development through their spiritual children. Their spiritual children include: Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, Bl. Titus Brandsma, St. Teresa Benedicta a Cruce (Edith Stein), St. Teresa of the Andes, and Mother Aloysius of the Blessed Sacrament (Concord, Massachusetts). For example, where St. Teresa describes the overall spiritual journey within the soul, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity deepens what the Trinitarian indwelling entails. This means that one can take the entire Carmelite charism as a global gift from God to the Church.

Third, we might ask how the Ignatian spirituality and the Carmelite spirituality complement each other. A cursory examination suggests that the Ignatian charism appears, principally though not exclusively, to focus on daily movements, like discernment of God's will and discernment of spirits (although the love of Jesus dominates and our eternal destiny clearly constitutes the overall framework). The charism of St. Teresa and St. John, on the other hand, is more explicitly directed towards the goal of transforming union and the journey it entails, and thereby looks principally at the stages of the overall interior journey in life. We note also that the two dark nights (of the senses and of the spirit) are caused by contemplation, the inflow of the Holy Spirit, that is, by His drawing ever closer to the soul which He touches with His light and love, unlike desolations, which are caused by the evil spirit. While consolations and desolations are like undulations that form part of our everyday life, the dark nights are privileged periods, which, if one does not slide backwards, would be intensive periods endured for months, and even years.

Fourth, let us consider some general principles of the Carmelite charism. (i) First, all without exception, not just the canonizable saints, are called by their Baptism to holiness and all are called to go through all stages of the interior journey, though some may proceed more rapidly if it is God's will and if they are generous. (ii) Second, it is an interior journey into the heart of one's soul, where one attains union with God, a spousal love, as John of the Cross describes:

What more do you want, O soul! And what else do you search for outside, when within yourself you possess your riches, delights, satisfactions, fullness and kingdom — your Beloved whom you desire and seek? Be

joyful and gladdened in your interior recollection with Him, for you have Him so close to you. Desire Him there, adore Him there. Do not go in pursuit of Him outside yourself. You will only become distracted and wearied thereby, and you shall not find Him, or enjoy Him more securely, or sooner, or more intimately than by seeking Him within you.⁹

(iii) Third, beyond union, this journey that results in transformation leads us back to transform the world. (iv) Fourth, the Carmelite charism sees Mary as the Carmelite model, the contemplative and spouse of God. Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, O.C.D., an authority on Carmelite spirituality, wrote about the significance of devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel:

[Carmelite spirituality is] a special call to the interior life, which is pre-eminently a Marian life. Our Lady wants us to resemble her not only in our outward vesture but, far more, in heart and spirit. If we gaze into Mary's soul, we shall see that grace in her has flowered into a spiritual life of incalculable wealth: a life of recollection, prayer, uninterrupted oblation to God, continual contact, and intimate union with him. Mary's soul is a sanctuary reserved for God alone, where no human creature has ever left its trace, where love and zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind reign supreme... Those who want to live their devotion to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel to the full must follow Mary into the depths of her interior life. Carmel is the symbol of the contemplative life, the life *wholly dedicated to the quest for God*, wholly orientated towards intimacy with God; and the one who has best realized this highest of ideals is Our Lady herself, 'Queen and Splendor of Carmel.'¹⁰

Fr. Thomas Dubay's introductory chapter in *Fire Within*, "A Question of Relevance," sets the context of our post-Vatican II period's difficulties of accepting the Carmelite teaching. His long and wide experience of giving spiritual direction and retreats reveals that there is a deep void in the hearts of our people, who have often never heard of this message, and a lack of teaching of infused contemplation in seminaries in his time, a formation focused on work, resulting in an overturning of Jesus' instruction to Martha that "only one thing is necessary" (pp. 9-10).

⁹ St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle* 1:8.

¹⁰ Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, quoted in Bede Edwards, OCDS. *Carmel Clarion* Volume XXI, 17–22. "St. Simon Stock—The Scapular Vision & the Brown Scapular Devotion." July–August 2005, Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington Province.

Fr. Dubay identifies several obstacles. (i) The first is a rejection of self-denial in the context of a “me” generation: “Death to one’s senses and desires is unhealthy if not impossible, it is said, and we understand better today that we can find God not in negation but in affirmation, joy, and celebration.”(p. 3). He adds that “a philosophy that produces nothing has issued from nothingness, that is, from no intellectual principles rooted in reality” (p. 5).

(ii) A second obstacle is that there are vast gulfs between Eastern mysticism like Buddhist contemplation (given the attraction among some today for Eastern religions) and Christian mysticism: the former teaches impersonal prayer, but the latter is pre-eminently a profound personal union with God. (iii) Third, “Equally inept are psychological explanations of the Teresian mansions,” here referring to the stages of prayer as purely psychological experiences (p. 7). He frequently finds infused prayer among active and cloistered religious, and that Teresa and John are the best guides for them. He reiterates a well-known point, that the Carmelite teaching is simply Gospel, and that one cannot depart from evangelical teaching. He noted that the emphasis on the primacy of contemplation over action was restored in the teaching of Vatican II.¹¹

1. Overview of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross

The goal of the interior life is not perfection, but union, attested to by our longing for transcendent union. The Preparatory Commission for St. Teresa’s 5th Centenary pointed out the Carmelite wisdom that the absence today of interior communion with the transcendent One leaves an “open wound” in our hearts:

At the same time, if the situation in the modern world is creating a crisis of identity for men and women, who act contrary to their dignity and the transcendental values written in their innermost being, they leave themselves vulnerable like an open wound. They are wounded by the passion for Transcendence. Teresian Spirituality is anthropologically centered on the human person in whom God dwells. It is open to communion with Him (GS 19) and is able to welcome Him in the most interior part of the *Castle*.

¹¹ Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Jesus, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel*, 1-12.

Teresian Spirituality also helps us become aware of our dignity threatened by our modern culture. Therefore, to teach men and women about St. Teresa's contemplative attitude is, at the same time, to help them discover their true identity.¹²

The Carmelite teaching recalls mankind to its identity and dignity. Based on the "transcendental values written in their innermost being," man longs and thirsts for transcendence, and if diverted or abandoned, "they leave themselves vulnerable like an open wound."

There are two main stages in the journey to God: most are familiar with the first (ascetical), and many enter but few understand how to climb to the second (mystical, contemplative). The journey entails a divine purification so that God may progressively possess the soul till there is transforming union. The following might represent the more commonly accepted correspondence between St. Teresa of Jesus' seven Mansions of the "Interior Castle" and St. John of the Cross' "Three Ways" or stages (though some variation is found in Carmelite literature). The first three Mansions represent the purgative way, the Fourth Mansions represent the illuminative way, and the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh represent the unitive way.¹³ The different stages entail different levels of prayer and two dark nights, which are incorporated below into a template of the seven Mansions of St. Teresa (she uses "Mansions" (plural) to indicate many rooms in each Mansion).

Stages of Prayer

Natural Recollection M 1-3 (Meditation, Active Contemplation)

Infused Contemplation M 4 (Prayer of Quiet)

Union M 5-7 (Simple Union, Betrothals, Spiritual Marriage)

Stages of Purification

Dark Night of Senses (death of sensible pleasures, natural & spiritual)

Dark Night of Spirit (death of all self)

¹² The Preparatory Commission for the Fifth Centenary of the Birth of St. Teresa of Jesus (Avila) 1515-2015, "I was born for You" ('Para Vos Nasci', Fifth Centenary of the Birth of St. Teresa of Jesus- 2015, Document II").

¹³ There appears to be divergent opinions on their correspondence between St. Teresa's seven Mansions and St. John's three Ways: Benedict Zimmerman, O.C.D., and one Introduction to the *Interior Castle* have the Illuminative Way corresponding to Mansions 3 and 4; Ralph Martin has the following breakdown: Purgative (M 1-3), Illuminative (M 4-6), Unitive (M 7) (*The Fulfillment of All Desire*, 13); and another source has the "betrothal" taking place in the fifth rather than in the sixth Mansion.

Natural Level

Supernatural Level (Purification of the Unconscious)

			<i>transition</i>	Initial Contemplation	Simple Union	Spiritual Espousals	Spiritual Marriage
1st (Mansion)	2nd	3rd		4th	5th	6th	7th
			<i>Dark Night of Senses</i>			<i>Dark Night of Spirit</i>	
Formal & vocal prayer	Discursive prayer	Affective prayer & natural recoll'n		Passive recollection and Prayer of Quiet	Prayer of initial union	Ecstatic prayer, extraordinary phenomena	Transforming union
Avoids mortal sin, beginning of prayer	Straddling two worlds	Prayer, penance, charity with fidelity		Will is captivated by God	Will and intellect absorbed in God	All four (will, intellect, memory and imagination) captivated	One will with God's will — senses are also bound

M 1-3: Purgative (**Beginner**)

M 4: Illuminative (**Proficient**)

M 5-7: Unitive (**Perfect**)

Let us use a helpful distinction from a website:

Prayer can be Separated Into Two Categories:

1. **Ascetic Prayer:** In ascetic prayer we initiate interaction with God through vocal prayer and meditation. This is also called purgative prayer because of the cleansing effect on our lives. The *first three Mansions* of the Interior Castle cover this material.
2. **Mystical Prayer:** God drives the activity in mystical prayer. Teresa writes about this in *Mansions four through seven*.

We then Divide **Mystical Prayer** into Two Categories:

- **Illuminative Prayer:** through illuminative prayer God enlightens our will and understanding. Teresa explains this in the *fourth mansions*.
- **Unitive Prayer:** In *Mansions five through seven* Teresa writes about unitive prayer. Unitive prayer leads us to a deep and intimate relationship with Christ 'where the most secret things pass between God and the soul.' Unitive prayer covers 2/3 of the Interior Castle and is the focal point of the book."¹⁴

¹⁴ "Teresa of Avila Turns 500: Fifth Mansions," accessed February 22, 2018, <https://teresaofovilaturns500.wordpress.com/2014/05/03/the-fifth-mansions-prayer-of-union/>.

A. Seven Mansions of St. Teresa of Jesus

St. Teresa tells us that, when ordered by her superior to write her experience of prayer and she did not know how to begin, God came to her assistance by revealing

... a most beautiful crystal globe, made in the shape of a castle, and containing seven mansions, in the seventh and innermost of which was the King of Glory, in the greatest splendour, illumining and beautifying them all. The nearer one got to the centre, the stronger was the light; outside the palace limits everything was foul, dark and infested with toads, vipers and other venomous creatures.¹⁵

The crystal depicted the soul, with God at its centre providing the light and “the secret union, or spiritual marriage, takes place in the innermost centre of the soul, where God Himself must dwell” (*Interior Castle*, Ch. 2). To accomplish this union, God progressively captivates all the faculties and fixes them on Him (reversing the disintegration after the Fall). In the first three Mansions, through prayer, a person begins by entering the Interior Castle into the First Mansion, the first requirement is avoiding mortal sin. Seeking to penetrate the Castle more deeply in the Second Mansion, one finds external helps, such as good people, books, and sermons. Progressively by active effort and the help of God’s grace, one can progress to the Third Mansion, where much virtue, penance, prayer, and works of charity can abound, though at the natural level.

Then there is an immense leap to the Fourth Mansions (stage of Illumination, first of the mystical Mansions), which is the beginning of contemplation and higher forms of prayer through the inflow of the *Living Flame*, the Holy Spirit. There is also a great leap to the Fifth Mansions, as this is the beginning of union, incipient or simple union: “Oh, sisters. How shall I ever be able to tell you of the riches and the treasures and the delights which are to be found in the fifth Mansions.”¹⁶ Most get into theses Mansions, but few get very far (“few are chosen”), for one must hold

¹⁵ St. Teresa of Jesus, *Interior Castle*, trans. E. Alison Peers (Garden City, NY: Image, 1961), 8. There is now a “study edition” available: St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle: Study Edition*, trans. K. Kavanaugh & O. Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS, 2010).

¹⁶ St. Teresa of Jesus, *Interior Castle*, 96.

back nothing and be dead to things of the world.¹⁷ Already in the Sixth Mansions, where the dark night of the spirit takes place, some of the highest forms of prayer, and phenomena can also be present (e.g., ecstasy, rapture, flights, with possible locutions, and extraordinary gifts like stigmata and bilocation).

St. Teresa also employs the image of four “Waters,” by which God waters His garden (soul), with four levels of prayer. Mansions are indicated below that appear to correspond to the four Waters.

First Water	Active Recollection (M 1-3)
Second Water	Prayer of Quiet (M 4)
Third Water	Sleep of Faculties (M 5)
Fourth Water	Prayer of Union (M 6-7)

There are not four substantially different contemplations, but *different degrees* of the same living water.¹⁸ The four Waters correspond to four ways of drawing water, i.e., of prayer: well (vocal and meditative), turnstile with aqueduct (prayer of quiet), nearby stream or river (sleep of faculties), and rain (union).¹⁹ She also uses a more basic distinction to depict the ease that supernatural prayer has over natural: aqueduct vs. reservoir right where needed (Fourth Mansions, Prayer of Quiet) and a striking image of transformation of the silkworm into a butterfly (Fifth Mansions).

John’s work *The Living Flame of Love* describes the sublime perfection of love in the Seventh Mansions, of spiritual marriage, with fruits of the Holy Spirit culminating in the Beatitudes. St. Teresa describes the union thus: “The two lighted candles join and become one; and the falling rain becomes merged with the river.”²⁰ *The Spiritual Canticle* also describes this marriage:

In *The Spiritual Canticle* St. John describes the soul’s anxious search for God and the ultimate encounters of love, using the symbol of a bride seeking the bridegroom and finally attaining to the perfect union of mutual love. God draws the soul to himself as a powerful magnet draws

¹⁷ Ibid., 96-98.

¹⁸ Sr. Immaculata, *A Guide to the Stages of Prayer According to St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross* (Bloomington, OH: Mount Carmel Hermitage, 1971), 25.

¹⁹ St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Image, 1960), Ch. XI, 128.

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

the metal particles, and the journey of the soul to God is increasingly more swift until, having left all else behind, it enjoys the most intimate union with God that is possible in this life: the mystical marriage of transforming union.²¹

The Seventh Mansions are the highest stage before the beatific vision in heaven, those who don't attain it in this life will require Purgatory to complete the transformation. We should note that each of the seven Mansions has many rooms (million rooms), for the path each person takes is unique. But there can be a temptation for those who do not experience the fruits of the higher Mansions (e.g., ecstasy) to think that they are not making progress or are unworthy of these states. St. Teresa teaches rather that "active union is sufficient" (union with God's will), that it is not necessary for a soul to possess *passive union*, experienced especially at the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Mansions, to attain perfection. She states that many who are not granted these supernatural graces will attain higher glory in heaven.

Perfection... does not consist in ecstasy. True union with God consists in the union of our will with his.... Those souls who have achieved just active union... have very often acquired much greater merit since they have had to overcome great difficulties. And the Lord directs them in such a way that the consolation which they have not experienced in this life will be preserved for them in the next.²²

St. Alphonsus de Liguori, drawing from the teaching of St. Teresa, affirms this truth: "Since all holiness consists in transforming our will into that of God, we should desire and ask God for nothing more than to be directed by him to make our wills one with his."²³

Fr. Paul-Marie of the Cross highlights the receptivity or surrender required for God taking possession of us. It is infused contemplation, the inflow of the Holy Spirit, that requires passivity on man's part, that accomplishes a taking possession of the faculties by God. It begins with possession of the

²¹ Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 197-198.

²² St. Teresa of Jesus, quoted in Alphonsus de Liguori, *Alphonsus de Liguori: Selected Writings*, Classics of Western Spirituality (Book 93), ed. Frederick M. Jones (New York: Paulist, 1999), 178.

²³ Alphonsus de Liguori, *Alphonsus de Liguori: Selected Writings*, 178.

will (Prayer of Quiet in Fourth Mansions), then the intellect (Sleep of the Faculties in Fifth Mansions) with simple union, followed by betrothal in the Sixth Mansions (intermittent union, all faculties possessed), and spiritual marriage in the Seventh, where there is union of wills (permanent union, senses also possessed). On the human side, there is need for dying to self, which makes possible full possession, to rise fully in God. This means that what is required is a union of wills, of making the will of God the sole focus of one's life.²⁴ It is surrender or abandonment on the part of the soul that makes this possible.

True union can very well be reached, with God's help, if we make an effort to obtain it by keeping our wills fixed only on that which is God's will.... This union with God's will is the union that I have desired all my life; it is the union I ask the Lord for always and the one that is clearest and dearest. (*Interior Castle*, 5, 3, 3-5)²⁵

Let us consider some generalities about the seven Mansions of St. Teresa of Jesus' *Interior Castle*. First, as mentioned, we note that each Mansion represents many rooms, and each person enters in his unique fashion.

Second, we note a major transition from natural to supernatural, including of motivation: from selfish motivations of fear or reward in the first three Mansions to the filial love of the upper Mansions.

Third, we note that it entails a transition from natural to contemplative prayer, while keeping in mind that prayer and virtue go together. While it can be difficult to discern our level of prayer, we can discern more easily our stage in the spiritual life by examining our virtues, i.e., our fruits (e.g., degree of love).

Fourth, this transition involves overcoming the seven capital sins (deadly sins), especially through the increased dominance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

²⁴ Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, trans. Kathryn Sullivan (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1997), 74-75.

²⁵ St. Teresa of Jesus, *Interior Castle*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2, trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1997), 5, 3, 3-5.

Fifth, while St. Teresa affirms that it is helpful to know which Mansions one is presently in, it comes with a danger: introspection and pride in comparing myself to others. In fact, she emphasizes that God is a “lover of humility,” and if we consider ourselves unworthy to be in the Third Mansion, God will lead us to higher Mansions. Sixth, there is really only one infused contemplation by which the Holy Spirit transforms our soul and faculties, but leading to different stages corresponding to our state; and only one dark night, but with two phases, again corresponding to our stage—one Giver and Communication of Self, the “receiver” is transformed according to his stage.

B. The Three Ways [Stages] of St. John of the Cross

Where St. Teresa gives much space to the different levels of progression (Mansions), St. John is more concerned with the principles of transformation, along with the two dark nights that accomplish it. Nevertheless, the path for both is one of love. It is a journey of the Lover (God) seeking the beloved (soul), as well as an imitation of Christ. The principal premise is that only God can accomplish the purification and transformation (active on God’s part), during which purification we are to surrender (passive). The dark nights enable this transformation: “The soul’s powerlessness and emptiness, the knowledge it has acquired of its weaknesses, the feeling of being rejected by God forever, hasten and intensify this work of detachment and purification that condition the renewal of the soul’s being and the infusion of graces and divine gifts.”²⁶

It is accomplished by infused contemplation, an inpouring of the Holy Spirit. The dark night of the senses causes the transition from meditation to the beginning of infused contemplation. Contemplation is an “infused, loving knowledge that both illumines and enamours the soul, elevating it step by step to God, its Creator.”²⁷

²⁶ Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 75. A shorter theological elaboration of the Three Ways can be found in Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance, *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life: A Brief Outline of the Main Principles of Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (Rockford, IL; TAN, 1977), and a more developed elaboration in Garrigou-Lagrance’s *The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Prelude of Eternal Life* (Rockford, IL; TAN, 1989), vol. 2.

²⁷ St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, 2, 18, 5.

Where previously, through assiduous prayer, the intellect apprehends divine truths with admiration, the Holy Spirit, through the exercise of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, grants a knowledge produced in the soul. It is an inundating of the whole soul with one single and identical act of love, through faith, love, and wisdom.²⁸

This contemplation accomplishes a divinization of the soul by grace and of its faculties through the infused virtues by the actualization of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The divinized operation of the faculties takes place above all through the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, “which are the true principles of this transformation and of its passage to the mystical life.”²⁹ It entails a gradual possession of the faculties, till it is God who acts in the transformed person. There is some spontaneity when God possesses the faculties, but the soul is totally passive when there is *substantial touch* of the soul, characteristic of perfect contemplation, which happens at the highest Mansions.³⁰

Necessity of Purification

St. John of the Cross describes a path to God based upon the classical “three ways” of the interior life of three stages: purgative (“Beginners”), illuminative (“Proficients”), and unitive (“Perfect”), representing childhood, adolescence, and adulthood respectively in the spiritual life, with the passage to each new stage through a crisis for the soul, a conversion. God completes the purification in a surpassing manner through aridity and removal of sensible consolation, and raises it to a stage of infused contemplation, without the straining of memory, reason, and will.³¹ For John, the path to union with Christ is one of an “Ascent to Mount Carmel,” the holy mountain scaled by Elijah. It is a progressive ascent, with stripping of all attachments to attain interior nudity and emptiness so as to be filled with God our Spouse. It is a path of the “*nada*” (nothing) to attain the “*todo*” (all) in transforming union. Fr. Jordan Aumann summarizes the stripping in these “nights” in the path of the *nada* thus:

²⁸ Sister Immaculata, *A Guide to the Stages of Prayer*, 30-32.

²⁹ Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 76.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

The fundamental principle of St. John's theology is that God is All and the creature is nothing. Therefore, in order to arrive at perfect union with God, in which sanctity consists, it is necessary to undergo an intense and profound purification of all the faculties and powers of soul and body. *The Ascent — Dark Night* traces the entire process of purgation, from the active purification of the external senses to the passive purification of the highest faculties; *The Living Flame* and *The Spiritual Canticle* describe the perfection of the spiritual life in the transforming union. The entire path to union is "night" because the soul travels by faith. St. John of the Cross presents his teaching in a systematic manner, with the result that it is spiritual theology in the best sense of the word; not because it is systematic, but because it uses as its sources Sacred Scripture, theology and personal experience.³²

Fr. Aumann highlights the essential elements: God is all and the creature is nothing; the goal is perfection with God; and the path is the stripping of all attachments, interior and exterior, walking by faith in the "nights." The path described by St. John is a path of purgation, of emptying, to allow the divine inpouring to take place.³³ He too affirms that what John gives is pure Gospel, e.g., "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mt 3:2); "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24).

Sr. Madeleine of St. Joseph, in her insightful work, *Within the Castle with St. Teresa*, gets to the heart of why many fail to climb the mystical Mansions: a lack of denial of self. The soul is tempted to focus on *actions* and not on the interior act of *subordination* to God, "love is a submission" (48). The goal is the fulfillment of the First Commandment: "Now God has a right to a total 'yes'..." (78). Union with God is the destiny of all humanity, and many efforts at spiritual progress involve compromises that aim only for the surface, and not the full surrender that allows the possession of the soul by God (she calls this *objectivity*):

Why is progress rare? What impedes it? Many simply lack the inspiration. But there is something worse than holding back out of humility: it is the self-sufficiency of those who persuade themselves that they do not have

³² Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, 196.

³³ *Ibid.*, 198, summary in 194-198. See also Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), especially "Christian Perfection and Mystical Experience" and "Progressive Purgation," 122-135 & 177-207 respectively.

to give more than “edifying action”... This, in a word, is the mentality of upstarts, sterile because it is lacking in humility, the seed of all progress. Thus the Third Mansions, if badly understood, can become a rut in which one gets bogged down in the mud of “self.”³⁴

She compares God and self to a rope over a wall with two buckets tied at each end, and that in order for one bucket (God) to rise, the other bucket (self) has to be lowered (67). Souls can become caught up with the necessary first level of human formation, but which is still only the prerogative of the Third Mansions (80). To continue to make progress, the soul must then learn to give up its own will, especially through learning obedience:

What I think would be of the greatest profit to those who, by the goodness of the Lord, are in this state is that they should be most studious to render ready obedience. Even though they be not in a religious Order, it would be a great thing for them to have someone to whom they could go, as many people do, so that they might not be following their own will in anything, for it is in this way that we usually do ourselves harm.³⁵

A big difficulty is the discernment to recognize the subtle ways one is choosing self. Sr. Madeleine notes false desires in this choosing of self, this self-love: lack of desire (pious but not set on this goal); a desire in words (sentimental); a desire in theory (think we have already arrived); and a false desire (seeking “mystical sweetnesses”) (83). The last one mentioned here is a common temptation, to savor the sweetness received in these higher Mansions as an end to itself. Here are two analogies to illustrate the holding up of progress: it would be like Elijah in the desert using the food provided to stay at his temporary refuge, rather than using it to continue to the mountain where he will meet God; or it would be like picking a bud (e.g., consolations from the Fourth Mansion) and feeding on it, instead of allowing the bud to blossom into a beautiful flower (92-96). There is an unconscious attachment to self that falsifies the spiritual life, the way of the “flesh” and not of the “spirit”:

³⁴ Sr. Madeleine of St. Joseph, *Within the Castle*, 76.

³⁵ St. Teresa of Jesus, *Interior Castle*, III, Ch. 2, n. 12, quoted in Sr. Madeleine of St. Joseph, *Within the Castle*, 80.

The life of the flesh is to covet and to absorb it [joy of Fourth Mansion]; that of the spirit is to leave oneself and to give oneself. It is the flesh that decrees that all renunciation is an impoverishment and poverty a decadence. The spirit, on the contrary, makes its fortune when it loses itself. Forgetfulness of its own advantages is its business, its privilege, and its nobility. There is no ambiguity in the way Saint Paul expresses this requirement... And again: "If by *the Spirit* you put to death the evil deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom 8:13)....

The Lord has many children who are his in principle and who, on hearing these things, desire to be so completely. Unfortunately, the reality escapes them— this total intimacy with God— because they have not chosen poverty of spirit. For, as the Apostle says, again: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are *sons of God*" (Rom 8:14). Only these, not others; the title is incommunicable.³⁶

Maturity begins in the Fifth Mansions: "According to the Saint [Teresa], the sign of spiritual freedom is to be 'mistress of our passions' to the point of *not wishing that our will should be done*, but only that of God."³⁷ For St. John of the Cross, the need for pure love is starkly clear: this detachment or emptying oneself ("nothing, nothing, nothing") is the absolute precondition for progress. He employs two striking examples to illustrate the need for the mortification of all voluntary desires. The first is of a bird that is meant to soar to the heavens but is held down even if it is tied by just one thread:

It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord. For even if tied by a thread, the bird will be prevented from taking off just as surely as if it were tied by cord— that is, it will be impeded from flight as long as it does not break the thread.... This is the lot of a man which has attachment to something; no matter how much virtue he has he will not reach the freedom of divine union.³⁸

A second powerful image used by St. John to describe the stripping and union is that of a fire penetrating a log, "wounding it with the flame, drying it out, and stripping it of its unjustly qualities until it is so disposed that it can be penetrated and transformed into the fire" (*Living Flame* 1, 19), the flame, "every time it flares up, it bathes the soul in glory and refreshes it

³⁶ Sr. Madeleine, *Within the Castle*, 97-98.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁸ St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Ch. 11.

with the quality of divine life” (*Living Flame* 1, 3)— such is the work of the “Living Flame,” the Holy Spirit.³⁹ When the soul is free of selfish desires and has holy indifference, it is now able to fly to God, as described in this inspired text:

From creatures now my soul is free,
Detached from all created things;
Now she at last has taken wings
And lives her life delectably.
To God, and God alone, she clings.⁴⁰

Program

St. John of the Cross spells out a program based on maxim that he himself lived. First, it is helpful to see the translated version of his drawing of the “Ascent of Mount Carmel,” that outlines his program,⁴¹ as well as to read the stanzas of his poems, of which his works are commentaries.⁴² These poems remind us of the Song of Songs, and in this case, of the lover going out into the night (dark nights) to seek union with his Beloved. At the end of Chapter 1 of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, John of the Cross presents three Counsels: the all-important Counsel of imitating Christ; renouncing everything for love and honour of God; and controlling our passions which are self-centred and recalling Christ’s teaching to leave everything.⁴³

First, have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with His. You must then study His life in order to know how to imitate Him and behave in all events as He would.⁴⁴

Second, in order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus....⁴⁵

³⁹ Fr. Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 54-55.

⁴⁰ St. John of the Cross, poem, *Glosa a lo Divino*.

⁴¹ K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, eds., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 66 or 67.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁴³ <http://www.domcentral.org/study/aumann/asceticjc.htm>.

⁴⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk I, Ch. 13, n. 3, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. K. Kavanaugh & O. Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1979), 102.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Bk I, Ch. 13, n. 4, 102.

Endeavor to be inclined always:
not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;
not to the most delightful, but to the harshest;
not to the most gratifying, but to the less pleasant;
not to what means most rest to you, but to hard work;
not to the consoling, but to the unconsoling;
not to the most, but to the least;
not to the highest and most precious, but to the lowest and
most despised;
not to wanting something, but wanting nothing;
do not go about looking for the best of temporal things, but
for the worst,
and desire to enter for Christ into complete nudity,
emptiness, and poverty in everything in the world.⁴⁶

With the help of Fr. Paul-Marie of the Cross, let us begin by giving some theological background to this path of the detachment.⁴⁷

First, St. John's program, derived from much contemplation of Scripture, especially the Gospels, goes beyond the apophatic vision of Pseudo-Dionysius (knowledge of what may not be said about God, prayer that empties the mind and remains in the presence of God), by setting Christ as the path, in whom the Father has spoken His all. Second, no union is possible without Christ, and no path but that of His cross: "Let Christ crucified be enough for you, and with him suffer and take your rest" (*Sayings*, #92). And perfection is nothing other than suffering for the sake of the Beloved: "Love consists not in feeling great things but in having great detachment and in suffering for the Beloved" (*Sayings*, #115). This is truly Gospel teaching. And second, to imitate Christ, as we saw in the "Maxims," "renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God," and "do this out of love for Jesus Christ" (*Ascent* 1, 13, 4).

Second, to imitate Christ, as we saw in the "Maxims," "renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God," and "do this out of love for Jesus Christ" (*Ascent* 1, 13, 4). The path is absolute detachment of everything:

⁴⁶ St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk I, Ch. 13, n. 6, 102-103.

⁴⁷ Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 44-52.

Temporal advantages, intellectual riches, virtues that the soul believes it possesses, graces, and finally self, the soul must give to all the same answer: *Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.* (emphasis added)⁴⁸

Such sacrifice requires strength, through an attachment to Christ. This does not mean withdrawing self from all human values by a renunciation of mind or senses, but rather to order them towards the highest path of faith.

If the individuals resolutely submit to the carrying of the cross... they will discover in all [trials] great relief and sweetness. This will be so because they will be traveling the road denuded of all and with no desire for anything (*Ascent* 1. 78, 7).⁴⁹

Two Dark Nights

We must define our terminology and more fully describe its workings. The dark night of the senses is the passive purification of the senses and the dark night of the spirit is the passive purification of the human spirit (passive entails surrender on our part to allow the Holy Spirit to act), though our active purification continues in both. The first dark night is like clipping the tops of weeds, the second night removes their very roots.⁵⁰

In the first night (senses), there is a deprivation of the pleasures, satisfactions, and desires of the sense appetites, so that it becomes once more subordinated to the spirit; in the second night (spirit), there is purification of self and all sin so that the spirit adheres totally to God. Every impurity, especially of egocentrism, must be removed to allow God to communicate Himself.

The purification or stripping is called “night” for three reasons: it is an emptying, a deprivation of the objects of our senses and spiritual faculties, leaving some disorientation and withdrawal effects; it is a walking this stage by the interior night of faith; and it is because God, our goal, is so far above that He is dark to our minds. The purification process is painful because, after Adam’s sin and its consequent legacy, it “is a cure of illness and therefore involves a cutting away, a removal of the roots of spiritual

⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁰ Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within*, 168.

maladies, and a separation from the egocentrism that wounds us.”⁵¹ This is the reason why mystical prayer is for everyone, for everyone is called to perfection, “with a complete holiness free of all defects.”⁵²

Spiritual writers all know of the existence of “dark nights” in the path to union with God, though with different nomenclature.⁵³ Iain Matthew teaches that the dark nights are the time-tested way to conversion. St. John starts with the advanced beginners, who are already in the Third Mansions and are already beginning the journey through the dark night of the senses (most do not arrive at the second night in this life).

In the purgative way (first three Mansions), one is still weighed down by one’s passions and the capital sins, there is only so far that our active purification can attain. With the infusion of “contemplation” (inflow of the Holy Spirit), God administers *surgery*, which requires anaesthesia (“dark night”), so that the soul is freed from the weight noted above while at the same time is able to love disinterestedly.

It is fitting that the person do what she can, so that God will “put her in that divine surgery, where she is healed of all of which she could not heal herself. For however much the soul might help herself, she cannot by her own effort purify herself so as to be disposed in the least part for the divine union of perfect love, if God does not take her hand.”⁵⁴

Causes of the Dark Nights

For contemporary analysis of the dark nights, we can turn to two offerings. First, Sr. Madeleine of St. Joseph identifies other key causes of the dark nights: (i) opposition to the directing of the will to God by the yet unconverted lower faculties; (ii) opposition from the world and people, remaining in their comfort zone, who naturally oppose progress; (iii) uprooting and transplanting to a supernatural soil, which naturally turns our interior world upside down. She also mentions the tension or anxiety from

⁵¹ Ibid., 160.

⁵² Ibid., 161.

⁵³ For example, St. Raymond of Capua (OOR on Memorial of St. Catherine of Siena) mentions that we will receive double and treble blows if we are friends of Jesus, and Blessed Columba Marmion often emphasizes the importance of the path of the cross for transformation into Christ.

⁵⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, Bk 1, 3.3.

not being fully united with God. Her own opinion is that this anxiety is not due to the infinite distance between Creator and creature (e.g., Virgin Mary's natural capacity for God), but to sin.⁵⁵

Second, Sr. Mary Niere, from her personal experience as a Carmelite Sister, brings forward two insights. Those in the Third Mansion, though experiencing a greater desire to do more for God, find that, instead of being rewarded, they no longer experience the consolation that praying or doing good can bring. What is happening is that, gradually, they must confront the human limitations and weaknesses which they cannot accept. Sr. Niere believes that this corresponds to the psycho-spiritual explanation of the person's development (see Table 1 in her book).⁵⁶ Erik Erikson formulated the theory of the eight stages of human development, in which the person faces a crisis that he must overcome at each stage of growth.⁵⁷ We make resolutions and yet find ourselves backsliding. This period of crisis is the entry point to another level of growth.

In addition, Sr. Niere offers a second scientific explanation of the dark night. The reason why many things go wrong has to do with a process of reintegration, specifically of the conscious with the unconscious. The dark nights arise from the traumas and hurts which the unconscious has repressed or submerged, and as integration takes place with progress in the spiritual life, the unconscious pours out into the conscious. Sr. Niere sees this as taking place at midlife.

Sr. Niere states that these are real ailments (physical, psychological, and spiritual), and we need help from doctors, counsellors or friends, and spiritual guides respectively.⁵⁸ Such an explanation conforms to the understanding that grace heals and reintegrates, but we must also add a caution to this perspective. Fr. Dubay categorically states that one can distinguish mental or emotional problems from dark nights by their very different symptoms: in the former, there can be "unrealism" and "depression," in the latter, the person is "as realistic as a laundry washing-

⁵⁵ Sr. Madeleine of St. Joseph, *Within the Castle*, 140-146.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18, 68.

⁵⁷ The Jesuit retreat director, Fr. Gerald O'Mahony, employs different ages of growth in his work, *A Way into the Trinity: The Story of a Journey* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2004).

⁵⁸ Mary Niere, *The Gospel of Contemplation* (Philippines: St. Paul's, 2007), 42-43.

machine operation” and there is no depression, but cheerfulness. For Fr. Dubai, the dark nights cannot cause depression, mental problems, chronic fatigue, and other similar conditions.⁵⁹ This does not include the exceptional cases where both are found together.

Another reason for the dark nights is that they entail walking in darkness through the theological virtues. In the two nights, the purification is carried out through the theological virtues: faith purifies the intellect, hope the memory, and charity the will. What is striking is that, if the soul chooses to live in the darkness of faith, hope, and love, God must grant union to Him. Since nothing created bears an essential likeness to God, faith alone can accomplish this, for it is “an interior light derived from the light of God which illumines all things in the light of God and makes us see them as he does.”⁶⁰ If God is so far above our intellects, the soul “must journey, insofar as possible, by way of the denial and rejection of natural and supernatural apprehensions’ (*Ascent* 3, 2, 3). For the human intellect must enter this night.”⁶¹ It is a surpassing night as it allows us to know God. There must be a similar purification of the memory through hope and charity.

Hope, also, undoubtedly puts the memory in darkness and emptiness as regards all earthly and heavenly objects. (*Ascent* 2, 6, 3). Charity, too, causes a void in the will regarding all things since it obliges us to love God above everything.... (Whoever does not renounce all that the will possesses cannot be my disciple). (*Ascent* 2, 6, 4)⁶²

Docile to the Inspirations of the Holy Spirit

But with the beginning of the dark nights, *the soul is no longer primarily focused on active mortifications and one’s work, but on watchfulness and attentiveness, to put into practice whatever inspiration is given, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit* and living in the “darkness” of faith, hope, and love. This is what one can expect. Entering the second stage is prepared for by entering the passive night of the senses, the purification induced by God.

⁵⁹ Thomas Dubai, *Fire Within*, 163-164.

⁶⁰ Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Church: Studies*, trans. A. V. Littledale (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1960), 124, quoted in Paul-Marie of the Cross, 87.

⁶¹ Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 49.

⁶² St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, quoted in Paul-Marie of the Cross, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 51.

Here, faith, hope, and charity are cast into the crucible of trials and sufferings. While loving someone inordinately, for example, the loved one dies; this is passive purification. Detachment is taught whether the contemplative likes it or not. The experience that everything is negative will come. There will be no satisfaction in prayers, in liturgies, in community or family life. Everything becomes negative, sour, and meaningless. All human support is stripped away.⁶³

The soul's activity becomes more and more under the dominance of God's action.⁶⁴ This process is the beginning of the resurrection in the soul through the risen Lord.

The risen Lord infuses Himself into the soul directly through the Holy Spirit, gradually taking over the will by love (prayer of quiet), the intellect, imagination and memory (prayer of full union) until the faculties are totally under His dominance in the transforming union. Here He rules mightily and sweetly.... In the marriage... the soul partakes of the omnipotence of God.⁶⁵

The action and fruition of the resurrection becomes more intense until the soul is fully divinized, resulting in an overflow of which the body partakes.⁶⁶

2. Managing in the Dark Nights

First of all, it is helpful to have a concrete sense of what the dark nights are like, of what difficulties to expect. St. Faustina revealed her own experience:

This [passive night of the senses] was a painful and difficult trial that one may call an interior agony, nevertheless indispensable to full union with God on earth.... They lasted a year and a half. Prayer at that time brought her neither joy nor consolation. Great fear came over her. She perceived her own misery and the holiness of God, by whom she felt rejected. She compared the torture she experienced to the sufferings of the damned. Experiencing hatred for everything that is holy, she tried with heroic efforts to abide with God; she made many acts of hope against all hope.

⁶³ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 38-39.

⁶⁴ Sr. Immaculata, *A Guide to the Stages of Prayer*, 37-40.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

The next stage in the development of the virtue of hope was the passive night of the spirit, which lasted almost three years, from May of 1935 onward. At that time, Sister Faustina neither felt the presence of God nor found any pleasure in holy things. Her hope was shaken. She was plunged in complete spiritual darkness. She experienced the loss of God whom she loved above all in life. She was in spiritual agony because she felt rejected by God, as if damned.

At the same time, her soul thirsted for God and desired Him with all its strength. She experienced a state that she described as absolute despair. The only resort for her was the will to abide with God, contrary to everything she felt, and to renew acts of hope amidst total darkness and the sense of nothingness.⁶⁷

To manage in the dark night, it is helpful to know if one is in a dark night. There are three signs found together that indicate the presence of the dark night of the senses: absence of consolation in things of heaven or earth; eyes habitually turned to or fixed on God, even though there is very little pleasure in doing so; and inability to meditate discursively or use the imagination. Fr. Dubay points out a common mistake, diagnosing ordinary sufferings of human life as “dark nights.”⁶⁸

The key element of keeping its gaze on the Lord distinguishes this night from a disturbance from one’s fault (*Ascent* II:12-15, *Dark Night of Soul* I:9). Once one has discerned that one is in the dark night (a knowledgeable spiritual guide can help to confirm this), then one employs a strategy to deal with the dark night (just as St. Ignatius saw it necessary to have a strategy to address the more common everyday desolations). St. Teresa of Jesus, in two famous texts, strongly counsels us to move forward with determination, no matter the obstacles, emphasizing its vital necessity:

As I say, it is most important... that they should begin well by making an earnest and most determined resolve not to halt until they reach their goal, whatever may come, whatever may happen to them, however hard they may have to labour, whoever may complain of them, whether they reach their goal or die on the road or have no heart to confront the trials

⁶⁷ *In St. Faustina's School of Trust*, 37-38.

⁶⁸ Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within*, 160.

which they meet, whether the very world dissolves before them.⁶⁹ I was astounded at how much can be done on this road if one has the courage to attempt great things; the soul may not have the strength to achieve these things at once, but if it takes flight it can make good progress.⁷⁰

Sister Mary Niere's *The Gospel of Contemplation* offers numerous lists of concrete manifestations of the dark nights and passive contemplation, as well as counsels to manage the dark nights.⁷¹ Sr. Niere observes that people trying to escape from this heavy reality often fall back on the seven capital sins, e.g., blaming others, clinging to false securities.⁷² She also lists reasons why some people cannot go through the dark night: fear of facing one's sinfulness and limitations, not willing to give up attachments, no proper guidance, lack of desire to advance, lack of generosity in embracing the cross.⁷³ Failure to accept the dark night would result in not moving forward to the second stage of contemplation (which begins at the Fourth Mansion), not progressing from human action to divine action. Unless God takes us from the first stage, we cannot go to the second; we remain stunted, in childhood.

Mediocrity in the spiritual life of contemplation is very often an indecision whether to cling to something (an object, an idea, a habit, etc.) or to let it go. St. John's approach in resolving the contemplative's ambivalence (mediocrity) is to let him face his limitations squarely to let him see honestly that all that is not God is limited. St. Therese of the Child Jesus, with her prayer, "turn for me into bitterness all the consolations of this earth, so that I will find my joy only in You," is a real disciple of St. John of the Cross.⁷⁴

To prepare for coping with the dark nights, we must address the erroneous perception that St. John of the Cross' teachings are discouraging, and even appear to be a throwback to a medieval asceticism.

Sr. Niere tries to forestall and resolve possible misunderstandings so that we do not miss the great treasure that is being offered. First, St. John's

⁶⁹ St. Teresa of Jesus, *Way of Perfection* (New York: Image, 1964), XXI, 150.

⁷⁰ St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, XIII, 138.

⁷¹ Mary Niere, *The Gospel of Contemplation*, 48 ff.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

maxims do not all have to be applied at once, only as the occasion arises that requires it.

Second, they are not to be taken literally: we do not hate (“have contempt for”) ourselves, but rather try to ever more “de-center” the self that has become the center since the Fall, where God and others should become the center.⁷⁵

Third, we must be aware that natural desires do not hinder union with God (for we cannot mortify all our desires), only voluntary desires to which we consent. Fourth, no two people are alike, each is unique, there is no cookie-cutter pattern. Thus we do not have to be constantly comparing ourselves to another; God has a unique path for each of us. Fifth, what this also means is that there is much freedom in the relationship of love, “Love and do what you will,” St. Augustine says. We are truly God’s children by Baptism and so have the “freedom of children of God.” When we are primarily focused on rules, we may not be truly living the language of love and may also be trying to “save ourselves” or “win” our salvation. We have to avoid Pelagianism (Pelagius’ doctrine erroneously held that we do not need Christ’s grace, as we have not been affected by the primordial sin of Adam and Eve).⁷⁶

Three Common Pitfalls

We note of three particular pitfalls with the experience of a dark night. First, the immediate danger is that the dark night is experienced as a regression, of going backwards, of not being as faithful as before. Fr. Dubay notes the difficulties: the person feels “as though their inner world is caving in”; he cannot see the two nights as applying to him; and has little idea of how beneficial they are. The person needs reassurance, but must not shorten prayer, must pray with simple attention, and not be concerned that he is wasting his time.⁷⁷ It is precisely this night that makes room for God and joins us to God:

When you are burdened, you are joined to God. He is your strength, and he is with people who suffer. When there is no burden, you are just with

⁷⁵ Ibid., 14-24.

⁷⁶ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 70-72.

⁷⁷ Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within*, 167-168.

yourself, your own weakness. It is in the difficulties which test our patience that the virtue and strength of the soul is increased and affirmed.⁷⁸

Fr. Matthew reassures the perplexed soul: God needs “to unlock us at the point we cannot unlock ourselves” and that is precisely the pain that is bewildering that is able to do this; and only God can do this.⁷⁹

Second, unless we are expecting it, we may be thrown off by human instrumentality: “The dark night very often comes through human instruments. That is why it is so difficult to see the hand of God in His instruments.” These include betrayal, intrigues, jealousy and envy, family problems, feelings of rejection, great humiliation, feelings of fears, insecurities, and strong negative enslavement that one cannot overcome. “But God is always there— unperceived.”⁸⁰

A bout of illness coincides with humiliation at work; a friend seems not to care, or a relationship fails; my religion makes me feel more isolated, even foolish, especially after a chance conversation where principles I took for granted were questioned, even mocked. And prayer feels dead. All or some of these file away and together subvert the framework of faith out of which I was living my life. Life itself seems to have burst the hypothesis of God⁸¹

The greatest difficulty is that it entails putting out from shore, where the dark nights can be bewildering, disconcerting, feeling out of control, taken to extremes, to the edge. It may seem to him that a new stage has begun in his life, and the world looks somewhat differently. It requires leaving the safety of the shoreline, but in this case, to enter a storm. But God is in the storm. We must cling only to God; He is the only security. We must “repose” in Him in the storm.

But unless I will let loose my grip on this beautiful island and the people I love so deeply and leave everything that is familiar into the vast ocean, the high seas where I can no longer see the shoreline and lose sight of the

⁷⁸ St. John of the Cross, *Sayings* 4.

⁷⁹ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 78.

⁸⁰ Mary Niere, *The Gospel of Contemplation*, 41.

⁸¹ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 51-52.

land, then I cannot be free. I have to learn to find my security in the storm, in the wind, in the hurricane, in the uncertainties and loneliness of the high seas. I have to make this my home, truly a part of me. I am not afraid of them. Then I become free to dance and sing in the storm of loneliness and pain because you my God have become my one and only security.⁸²

It is greatly reassuring to know that this is the path that all God's friends take; and more specifically, to know that everything that happens to us is part of the Providence of God, coming as it were, "from His hands."

Regarding his own dire situation before his death, St. John wrote this to one of his spiritual daughters:

As for my situation, daughter, do not let this cause you pain.... It is not men who are doing these things, but God, who knows what suits us best and orders all things to bring us blessing. Think nothing but that God ordained it all, and where there is no love, put love, and you would draw love out.⁸³

We recall too St. Teresa's symbol of the caterpillar becoming a butterfly without any effort by the caterpillar, freedom is a gift from God and cannot be earned. The silkworm enters the cocoon to "die," not knowing whether it will "rise." The soul feels as if it is rejected by God. It entails a walking in the darkness of the night of faith, hope, and love, the three infused theological virtues. St. Teresa adds that in the upper Mansions what matters is not thinking much but loving much: "At this stage, will power cannot help because nothing is experienced but weakness. Stop reasoning and analyzing. Leap into Faith."⁸⁴

With respect to love, the soul seeks not the gifts but the Giver of the gifts, and acts purely out of love. It is a progression from self and all that serves self to seeing with God's eyes, responding with His heart, loving with His heart. The soul acts out of a new center (God Himself).

⁸² Mary Niere, *The Gospel of Contemplation*, 54-55.

⁸³ St. John of the Cross, Letter 26, to María de la Encarnación, 6/7/1591, quoted in Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 77-78.

⁸⁴ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 77-78.

3. Three Sublime Fruits of the Transforming Union

St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross both tell how the transformation and union make the trials endured in the nights seem little in comparison. It is helpful to know that the fruits are manifold and ineffable. Fr. Dubay offers a comprehensive list: remarkable delight, co-action with God, cessation of imperfections, heroic virtue, confirmation of grace, innocence of evil, peace and refreshment, cessation of inner sufferings, symphony with creation, fullness of joy, limited continuity (with previous experience), and the greatest triad, “transfiguration, deification, marriage.”⁸⁵ Here, we wish only to introduce the reader to three great fruits, formulated somewhat differently: caverns for God, nuptial union (marriage), and God in the world (deification, see Fr. Dubay’s *Fire Within*).

A. Caverns for God (Indwelling Trinity)

Here we can draw out in St. John that “God’s purpose is to make the soul great.” To accomplish this, the Holy Spirit leads us by the hand: “... he shows us how, puts the instrument in our hands, and, holding our hand, plays the tune with us.”⁸⁶ We discover the greatness when the dark nights allow the digging of “*deep caverns of the soul*” that can hold the Infinite, God himself: “O lamps of fire bright-burning, with splendid brilliance, turning, deep caverns of my soul to pools of light!”⁸⁷

The whole spiritual life revolves around making space for God, and John’s great discovery is that it is God who creates the space, and He does that through the “dark nights.”

So of the “deep caverns of the soul”, John says that “nothing less than the infinite will fill them”. This immensity usually (perhaps thankfully) stays hidden— though more hidden than it should be when rubbish is thrown into it. But when these caverns “are empty and pure, the thirst and hunger and sense of spiritual longing is more than can be borne... The capacity of these caverns is deep, because that which they can hold is deep and infinite; and that is God”.... For John, Paul’s phrase has come alive. He quotes it: “I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.” This is resurrection,

⁸⁵ Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within*, 180-195.

⁸⁶ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 26-27.

⁸⁷ St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, st. 3.

seen, not just as history, nor solely as reward, but as a process. The first paragraph of *Flame* presents the process succeeding— the person “utterly bathed now in glory and love, in her innermost core pouring out nothing less than rivers of glory.”⁸⁸

B. Nuptial Union

There is tremendous healing, along with the ability to finally love with one’s whole heart and mind. The soul that arrives at the state of transforming union attains the last stage before the beatific vision, “only a thin veil separates it.” Such a soul longs for that union and begs God to tear away that veil. It is transformed into a flame of love that derives from the Trinity:⁸⁹

And it should not be held as incredible in a soul now examined, purged... that the promise of the Son of God be fulfilled, that the promise that the Most Blessed Trinity will come and dwell with anyone who loves him (Jn 14:23). The Blessed Trinity inhabits this soul by divinely illumining its intellect with the wisdom of the Son, delighting its will in the Holy Spirit, and by absorbing it powerfully and mightily in the delightful embrace of the Father’s sweetness.⁹⁰

The human person has entered profoundly into the inner life of the Trinity, with the language of lover and beloved, the fulfillment of human marriage.⁹¹

By His divine breath-like spiration, the Holy Spirit elevates the soul sublimely and informs her and makes her capable of breathing in the Son and the Son in the Father, which is the Holy Spirit Himself, Who in the Father and the Son breathes out to her in this transformation, in order to unite her to Himself... This kind of spiration of the Holy Spirit... is so sublime, delicious, and deep a delight that a mortal tongue finds it indescribable... for the soul united and transformed in God breathes out in God to God the very divine spiration which God— she being transformed in Him— breathes out in Himself to her.⁹²

⁸⁸ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 27.

⁸⁹ Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, 198.

⁹⁰ St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, 15, in Kavanaugh-Rodriguez, *Collected Works*, 585.

⁹¹ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 23.

⁹² *Ibid.*, st. 39, no. 3, p. 558.

C. “God” in the World

Iain Matthew affirms a central truth of spiritual life: if we wish to find our good, then we must first seek the good of others; first we love, and then the rest will come with it. It is the path of “self-forgetfulness.”⁹³ David Perrin describes that there is a double dynamic. St. John’s journey to the center of our soul where God resides is “a movement both inward and outward”: an intimate movement in darkness to the heart of one’s being to find God, and then transformed in God, it goes out into the world. The interior movement leads to spiritual marriage, when the soul becomes “oned” with God, and, as it were, becomes “God” in the world.

This spiritual marriage is incomparably greater than the spiritual espousal, for it is a total transformation in the Beloved.... The soul thereby becomes divine, becomes God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life.... There are two natures in one spirit and love.... This union resembles the union of the light of a star or candle with the light of the sun, for what then sheds light is not the star or the candle, but the sun, which has absorbed the other lights into its own.... The union wrought between the two natures and the communication of the divine to the human in this state is such that even though neither change their being, both appear to be God.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, st. 22, no. 3-4, 497.

PART II

PRIESTLY MISSION IN CHRIST

“I have come to cast fire upon the earth”

(Lk 12:49)

CHAPTER 6

PREPARATION: SEMINARY YEARS

(Christ Forming the Apostles)

The spiritual training... should be imparted in such a way that the students might learn to live in an intimate and unceasing union with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Conformed to Christ the Priest through their sacred ordination they should be accustomed to adhere to Him as friends, in an intimate companionship, their whole life through. They should so live His paschal mystery themselves that they can initiate into it the flock committed to them. They should be taught to seek Christ in the faithful meditation on God's word, in the active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church, especially in the Eucharist and in the divine office, in the bishop who sends them and in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, the children, the sick, the sinners and the unbelievers. They should love and venerate with a filial trust the most blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as mother to the disciple by Christ Jesus as He was dying on the cross. ¹ (*Optatam totius*)

The seminarian, from the beginning, should set his sights directly on the goal of the priesthood: to become an *alter Christus*, through, as Vatican II's Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatam totius* (quotation above) depicts, union with the Father and friendship with Christ. The seminary years are a privileged time of grace given by God, the priest's own formative Nazareth years. As Jesus was formed in the quiet of Nazareth, preparing in quiet the foundation of virtue and wisdom, so too, the future priest, also formed by St. Joseph and our Lady, will prepare for his future years in Christ's ministry. It is a critical time of formation: as the seedling, so the tree; as the seminarian, so the priest. Alternatively, the seminarian could view these years as analogous to the three years the apostles were formed by Jesus: as Jesus kept the apostles close to Him and guided them to become the foundation of the Church, so Jesus now through the Holy Spirit keeps the seminarian close to His Sacred Heart, forming him silently in the "hidden" seminary years.

¹ The Decree of Vatican II, *Optatam totius* ("Decree on Priestly Training"), n. 8, quoted in *Pastores dabo vobis* n. 45.

1. Overall Approach to Seminary Years

A. Paradigm: The Hidden School of Nazareth

In the earlier book, *New Christ: Divine Filiation*, a chapter on “Human Virtues” already treated the path and virtues of “Nazareth.” But the human virtues of Nazareth are particularly needed to be developed during the seminary years. Here are two Nazareth parallels that the seminarian can apply to his seminary years. The seminarian might begin his seminary formation by asking for the grace of being given Joseph and Mary to be his spiritual father and mother respectively, so that they can form “Christ” in him. More importantly, the seminarian can see himself in the place of Jesus as another son of the Father: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”; “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Pope Paul VI, in describing the school of Nazareth, wrote of the importance of silence, family life, and work.² Three similar areas are also important for the seminarian: contemplation, fraternity, and formation to become priest and victim. First, contemplation must form the great foundation for future ministry, e.g., the example of Mary’s contemplation (“his mother kept all these things in her heart,” Lk 2:51). As mentioned previously, when God wishes to prepare someone for a great task, he often takes them into a Nazareth or desert (e.g., Moses, St. John the Baptist, St. Paul). Second, the seeds of fraternal love within the future brotherhood of the presbyterium must be planted now in the seminary, so that, God willing, lifelong friendships and support can be established. Third, the sanctifying of work is to prepare the priest to be a “priest and victim.” As Bishop Fulton Sheen noted, Jesus was born in order to die, and Christ’s priest is given a participation in the same mission of Redemption, a preparation for a life of great sacrifice.

One can take the Canadian seminarian, Gérard Raymond, a Québec City seminarian who died before Ordination in 1932 at 19, as a role model. From the beginning, Gérard Raymond set out to be a “missionary and martyr,” and he knew that this path of love would entail sacrifice, which is

² Paul VI, Address January 5, 1964, OOR on Feast of Holy Family, in *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. 1, 426-428.

reflected in his resolutions: “Live always for Jesus, like Jesus, with Jesus. Detach myself as much as possible from the world, supernaturalize everything. See in myself a future religious, priest, martyr, missionary.... Love. Suffer. Love”³ (see this Chapter’s *Appendix* for his plan of life).

B. Perennial Temptation— Not Fully Jumping In

We note here a pitfall into which the new seminarian can fall. There is a temptation to enter the seminary with the primary focus on “discerning” his vocation. A director of a Propaedeutic Year program recounted how he dissuaded incoming seminarians from having this as primary focus because of the temptation for the seminarian to merely “dip his toes” in the water of seminary life, and not fully jump in, not commit. He recommended that they throw themselves completely into the program as if they were called, and then allow God to reveal to the seminarian His will in the course of the formation years at the seminary. Evidently, an incoming seminarian should ask God for clarity in the discernment of his vocation; but he should allow God time to reveal it, both in his heart, through others, and in the events of life, but in God’s time.

Besides the trap of not committing oneself, excessive focus on discernment can end up in “navel-gazing,” too concerned with self-interest and perhaps neglecting his responsibilities and fraternity with fellow seminarians; and ends up failing to make significant progress in human virtues and the spiritual life. He should presume he is called to priesthood, and his generosity in giving of himself will enable him to become the best possible priest, or if called to marriage, the best possible husband and father.

³ This is the author’s translation of text taken from Gérard Raymond, *Journal de Gérard Raymond*, Québec: Séminaire de Québec, 1937, 108-109. He was born on August 20, 1912, and died on July 5, 1932, just before his twentieth birthday. Besides his tremendous depth of interior life, one can learn from his daily regimen and resolutions, found sprinkled throughout his *Journal*. His cause of canonization has been introduced. An English biography is *Gerard Raymond 1912-1932: A Knightly Soul*, Kessinger Publishing, 2007; and an article given by Donald L. Boisvert, “Piety, Purity and Pain: Gérard Raymond and the Ideal of French Canadian Catholic Manhood,” accessed July 11, 2015, http://religionanddiversity.ca/media/uploads/reading_corner/boisvert/boisvert_-_piety,_purity_and_pain.pdf.

St. Alphonsus de Liguori addresses with seriousness following a vocation in the two possibilities. First, he warns us about not seeking the priesthood if it clear that one does not have a call. He warns that it is dangerous for someone who may not have a vocation to proceed forward to the priesthood at all costs: “In the ordinary run of events, unsuitable candidates destroy not only themselves but also their family and the whole locality.”⁴ It is suggested here that, if there are improper intentions, the candidate remember that priests are held to a stricter accounting at their judgment at death.

But on the other side, there can be a price to be paid when one does not follow one’s vocation to the priesthood. If the call is clear, the candidate must follow it in a rather clear-cut and sober manner, but the difficulties are understandable in the context of the confusion of our times. St. Alphonsus is insistent that, if opposed by parents in regard to a vocation to the priesthood, the candidate is obliged to obey God rather than parents, that many people who have lost vocations due to parents’ interference can end up poorly.

C. Meditating on the Crucified Christ

Following the example of the saints, it is very fruitful for the seminarian, from the outset of his seminary life, to begin to meditate on the Passion of Christ— for this is the apex of Christ’s life, and by extension, of the life of the “new Christ.” It is likely the case that many false paths of self-indulgence can be avoided by this meditation. Saints know the power of this exercise, and St. Faustina pointed out that our Lord taught her in private revelation that meditation on our Lord’s Passion bears great fruit:

Today, during Mass, I saw the Lord Jesus in the midst of His sufferings, as though dying on the cross. He said to me, “My daughter, meditate frequently on the sufferings which I have undergone for your sake, and then nothing of what you suffer for Me will seem great to you. You please Me most when you meditate on My Sorrowful Passion. Join your little sufferings to My Sorrowful Passion, so that they may have infinite value before My majesty.” (*Diary*, n. 1512, 541)

⁴ Alphonsus de Liguori, *Alphonsus de Liguori: Selected Writings*, 158.

“There is more merit to one hour of meditation on My Sorrowful Passion than there is to a whole year of flagellation that draws blood; the contemplation of my painful wounds is of great profit to you, and it brings Me great joy.” (*Diary*, n. 369, 166)

“Know... that your silent day-to-day martyrdom in complete submission to My Will ushers many souls into Heaven. And when it seems to you that your suffering exceeds your strength, contemplate My Wounds and you will rise above human scorn and judgment. Meditation on My Passion will help you rise above all things.” (*Diary*, n. 1184, 430)

“There are few souls who contemplate My Passion with true feeling; I give great graces to souls who meditate devoutly on My Passion.” (*Diary*, n. 737, 296)

Jesus’s instruction on the Divine Mercy chaplet is found in the *Diary*.⁵ He gave a profound description of what we are to do in the “third hour” (3 pm), the “hour of great mercy” (*Diary*, n. 1320, 474): “... immerse yourself completely in My mercy, adoring and glorifying it; invoke its omnipotence for the whole world, and particularly for poor sinners... for at that moment mercy was opened wide for every soul” (*Diary*, n. 1572, 558).

One recommended contemporary book of meditation on Christ’s Passion is the work of the late Father Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross*. Possibly the best account of the passion of Christ available in English is Luis de la Palma’s *Sacred Passion*. There is an alternative approach to meditation on Christ’s Passion: looking at the passion of Christ in his suffering saints, especially of “victim souls,” like that of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, whose personal letters of spiritual direction are quite revealing.⁶ Though not classified as a victim soul, yet another life with an interior martyrdom is the biography of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *Come Be My Light* (this book reveals her “dark nights”). Inspiring public figures who have suffered include St. John Paul II and Cardinal van Thuan (*Testimony of Hope, Five Loaves and Two Fish*).

⁵ St. Faustina, *Diary*, nn. 475-476, 207-208.

⁶ Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 2000); Padre Pio of Pietrelcina: *Letters*, e.g., vol. 1, Correspondence with his Spiritual Directors (1910-1932) (San Giovanni Rotondo, Foggia: Editions “Padre Pio da Pietrelcina,” 1985); Luis de la Palma, *The Sacred Passion* (New York: Scepter, 2004).

Works by martyrs, like St. Thomas More (*A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, *A Treatise on the Passion*, and *The Sadness of Christ*) and John Gerard (*The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest*), or lives of martyrs, like St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. John de Brébeuf (*Saint Among the Hurons*), are inspiring. For private revelations on Christ's Passion, one might consider the writings of St. Bridget of Sweden.

D. Never Lose our Childhood Faith

In the wake of instability and confusion, including the loss of the sense of the Church in the post-Vatican II era, the seminarian can become disoriented. In trying to reassure some seminarians disturbed by the confusion after Vatican II during the 1980s, a seminary professor-spiritual director offered to disoriented seminarians some sage words: "Never lose your childhood faith." These words were a balm and revelation for the troubled seminarians. An example of the disorientation suffered was the pressure to have the seminarians detach themselves from pious devotions while moving on to a more mature "image" of God, as if the seminarians could artificially and superficially change the image of God within their hearts. Deeper conversions only take place in the course of the dark nights (St. John of the Cross), in which the Holy Spirit is the primary agent of detachment and union. Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland, had experienced the attack on her childhood faith:

Out of this tangled religious experience, Catherine knew that she had discerned her possession of the gift of faith and recognized that she could not be separated from it. But she also recognized that her faith had been nurtured with devotions learned in childhood rather than by understanding gleaned from mature study of Scripture and doctrine. Her faith under attack, she experienced the lack of formal knowledge needed to know where the attack was in error. This shaking experience led to her resolve to educate herself further and enkindled the determination to do whatever she could do to educate the poor in the truths of the faith. It would also lead her to form valuable friendships with learned priests whose influence would be far-reaching.⁷

⁷ M. Joanna Regan & Isabelle Keiss, *Tender Courage: A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine McAuley, First Sister of Mercy* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 14. The religious institute

Not only did venerable Catherine recognize that “her faith had been nurtured with devotions learned in childhood rather than by understanding gleaned from mature study of Scripture and doctrine,” with her faith under attack, she took steps to protect it, to learn the foundations, the truths of faith, and pass them on to the poor in that area. To detach ourselves from the moorings and roots of our Church culture and our childhood faith is akin to ripping a plant from the ground and its roots, with its disastrous consequences.

When we lose touch with childhood devotions, like devotion to our Lady, the Sacred Heart, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and, at the same time, become so sophisticated as to be caught up exclusively with current ecclesial buzz words— like “social justice,” “liturgy,” and “lectio divina,” which, obviously, are very important for our faith— we may lose our way in the Church. Thus, spiritual growth is always organic, retaining rather than destroying the foundation of one’s childhood faith and devotional life.

E. Docility and Transparency in Spiritual Direction

The selection of a spiritual director may be the single most important decision that a seminarian can make during his seminary years. All things can be brought forward to the spiritual director, not only one’s spiritual life, but also academic goals and struggles, organization, relationships, family struggles, and many other details.⁸ In the process of selecting a spiritual director, a seminarian could consider three steps. First, it is ideal to consult the Holy Spirit and ask Him to show the seminarian whom He would choose. Second, it is also good to seek the counsel of seminarians of virtue and good judgment, since God often speaks through others. Third, he can look for particular key qualities in the spiritual director, whether he: is led by the Holy Spirit; lives the faith, as opposed to talking about it; proposes, not imposes, yet is directive and challenging when necessary (e.g., parents with children); have *depth* in spirituality, that is, not primarily known for their intellectual knowledge or flashy talents; and have some understanding

of the “Religious Sisters of Mercy” was established in 1973 and their Mother House is located in Alma, Michigan.

⁸ Some seminaries, in addition to spiritual directors, also have formation counsellors, who regularly meet with the seminarians in their charge for academic and other non-spiritual formation elements.

of discernment (God's will, discernment of spirits) and the stages of the interior life.

The saints understand that being led by the Holy Spirit through a representative of Christ can be the greatest aid to union with God. The fundamental disposition in all spiritual life is more than external obedience; it is the desire to be led by the Holy Spirit, to not guide oneself. The seminarian has to see beyond the human director and perceive the sacred forum, in which the true spiritual director is the Holy Spirit. A seminarian can be very attached to certain devotions, penances, or a project, and fail to realize that these may be attachments to self and that obedience trumps all plans and preferences.

F. Protecting Purity and Chastity

In our present context in which the world is inundated by a culture of sensuality and compromising images, it has become more difficult to maintain purity. We are aware that we are influenced, and even wounded, by the culture that forms us. This area is so problematic today that it requires much fuller treatment than this section can offer, and it should be addressed with a comprehensive preparation during seminary formation. The Federation of Seminary Spiritual Directors has examined this issue in some of their meetings.

Beyond the key help of transparency in spiritual direction and in Confession, reading good books or looking to other resources in this area can be of help, of which we mention a few: *When God Asks for an Undivided Heart: Choosing Celibacy in Love and Freedom* (Andrew Apostoli); *Courage to be Chaste* (Benedict Groeschel); *Every Man's Battle: Winning the War on Sexual Purity One Victory at a Time* (Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker); and *Virginity* (Raniero Cantalamessa).

Let us consider the insights from select works. Francis Fernández-Carvajal's contemporary work offers some helpful insights for a self-examination.

One should also take into account that our Lord asks those he calls to apostolic celibacy to live chastity with a special refinement of mind and heart: avoiding conversations inappropriate for someone close to our Lord; in the way one dresses; in guarding the eyes; and, above all, with the

joyful example of their own lives. They have to show others the beauty of chastity by their own greater capacity to love, their generosity and cheerfulness, their refinement of soul. Thus they will proclaim with their lives that this virtue is always attainable, if one uses the means that our Mother the Church has recommended for centuries. (discussed above)⁹

Fr. Carvajal points to a critical insight: seeing beyond the “negative” aspects of chastity and purity to their positive value; it is in fact a great gift. We note that the apostles, in imitating Christ, came to see the great fruitfulness of their sacrifice (leaving family, homeland) and of the public example of their consecration to Christ. Fr. Carvajal also offers some helpful ways by which we can guard our hearts.¹⁰

One can also look to an older work that offers the perennial wisdom of the Church. One such work is M. Eugene Boylan’s *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*. The advantage of an older work is that it tends to focus on the foundations and have an approach that is more direct. First, the priest has not only renounced the sense of pleasure of marriage, he has also “renounced a much higher type of pleasure— the companionship, the sympathy, the understanding, the romance, the consolation, which arise from loving and being loved in marriage.”¹¹ Not understanding this renunciation has led to some priests falling in this area.

Second, he notes that the problem is not just what we see, the exterior object, but also that object as glamorized in our imagination. On the one hand, we have to have custody of the eyes, but there is also need for “interior mortification of the memory and of the imagination, which should be exercised even before conscience warns one of sin.”¹²

Third, we must be prudent of friendships with women. Fr. Boylan notes that it is not so much the ones we have known for most of our life but very special relationships that evolve after ordination. Here he points to our needs as human beings and how dangerous liaisons can begin innocently:

⁹ Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves*, 177-178.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 144-151.

¹¹ M. Eugene Boylan, *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*, 97.

¹² *Ibid.*, 99.

Human nature is human nature. Men and woman have a natural attraction for one another. They find in each other a natural complement, satisfying a need that may sometimes be keenly felt. God himself told us that it is not good for man to be alone. Unless a priest makes God his Friend and Partner, human nature may become imperious in its demands. It is dangerous to think that mental intimacy has no connection with physical intimacy.... Friendships may start in a common intellectual or cultural interest; it may even begin on a very high spiritual plane. But it may not be easy to keep it within such limits.¹³

Relationships can begin in various ways, such as consoling or counselling a woman with marriage problems. There is also the danger of women who are attracted to celibates: “To the less idealistic, the charm of forbidden fruits may be an allure; and there is no end to the motives that make some women hunt for scalps, counting the clerical scalp as a special trophy.”¹⁴ Here is where the help of a confessor or spiritual director is particularly important, as a person swept up in intimate emotions may not be able to see clearly.

Fourth, he also mentions that some recreations and activities are not advisable for the celibate. He mentions that alcoholism “is not the only form of escapism to which the nervous temperament may have recourse.... Mental hygiene is of great importance for the priest— even for his virtue.” He must protect his thoughts and reveries. Fr. Boylan concludes: “But the real defence, the proper policy, is a whole-hearted search for God and a complete union with Christ. True chastity must find its support in a full and fervent interior life wherein Christ is all in all.”¹⁵

2. General Considerations

A. A Healthy but Committed Approach to Celibacy

There are some general considerations to keep in mind. First, unless we realize that seminarians, priests, and all consecrated souls are subject to temptation, we may end up twisting ourselves into knots interiorly, constantly burdened by feelings of guilt and inadequacy (tool of the enemy).

¹³ Ibid., 99-100.

¹⁴ Ibid., 100.

¹⁵ Ibid., 102-103.

It may help to see a few examples. St. Francis de Sales teaches that the “thorn in the flesh” of the apostle Paul were temptations against chastity. Blessed Dina Bélanger, a mystic who attained the highest degree of intimacy with the Lord, revealed that God allowed her to suffer “trials” of attacks against chastity from the age of 20 to 26 and the last two years of her life.¹⁶ Sr. Briege McKenna, engaged in ministry to priests for over 40 years, teaches that priests are made of flesh and blood, that is, for intimacy of marriage, and should expect to have desires and temptations:

The commitment to celibacy *does not free us from sexual temptations*. Those temptations will come just as they come in every vocation in life. *I believe the devil will harass us* because we are willing to accept this radical choice for the building up of the kingdom.¹⁷ (emphasis added)

Yet this is not to be passive but to truly make a commitment:

When I make a commitment, *I have to let go of other choices*. We forge our future by a commitment. A fearful or passive or indecisive person, a wavering person, *ends up an unhappy person, an unfulfilled and a fragmented person*. Trying to keep all options open, we realize none of them.¹⁸ (emphasis added)

A saintly friar, one of the co-founders of a men’s religious order and the founder of the women’s sister order, described both the attraction and the commitment in his life. In giving a retreat to seminarians, he said: “Every so often, I fall in love.” One can imagine the surprise of the seminarians in hearing this from a saintly friar. He went on to explain that, rather than suppress it by sweeping it under a rug, he first acknowledges the beauty, goodness, and virtues of that woman, perhaps as someone he would ask to marry if he were a layman. But then he would move to the second and critical step: “Lord, I give her up for You.” His approach points to both the possibility of attraction but also the healthy addressing of the heart. In this area, it is ideal to strive to protect our hearts from developing attachments from the start.

¹⁶ Blessed Dina Bélanger, *Autobiography*, 23, footnote 2.

¹⁷ Sr. Briege McKenna, *Miracles Do Happen* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant, 1987), 86.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Sr. Briege also teaches that we need friendships with both men and women, pointing to the example John Paul II (we see warm friendships he cultivated with youth that continued through the years). She revealed that it was the Lord's will that she collaborate with Fr. Kevin Scallon in their ministry:

Celibacy is not a denial of human love. It is not a denial of the possibility of having support from, and good friendships with, persons of the opposite sex. Celibacy does not call me to deny my sexuality and all its attractions and emotions. Such a strained and unnatural attitude toward my own sexuality would not prepare me to be a representative of Jesus Christ who is the man of love.¹⁹

Second, spiritual writers recommend that we do not fight this area directly. St. Josemaría Escrivá suggests that, instead of focusing directly on fighting unchastity (this matter is very “sticky”), we focus on dominant virtues, like humility and charity, and chastity would follow more easily. The area of charity is especially a great protection: when one is zealous for the welfare of his flock, charity fills the heart and leaves less room and time for temptations.

A special teaching by our Lord to Sr. Briege McKenna gives us much clarity in the proper approach. Our Lord Himself taught her the truth of being “preoccupied” with Him and not our sin. After a very difficult night of temptations, she went to Mass in a spirit of desolation and discouragement. At Communion time, she saw an “image” of a battered tent and of man going in. The battered tent represented Sr. Briege and the man was Jesus. In the subsequent scene, Jesus was holding her hands and talking to her, but her eyes noticed the holes in her tent and she worried about what people would think (of her). So she left Jesus to tend to the holes, but Jesus pulled her back. This is such a great lesson for all Christians, and in a special way, also for priests and consecrated souls:

It was then that I felt Jesus gently pull me down. He looked at me with great kindness, and he said, “Briege, if you become preoccupied with these holes and your work in fixing these holes, then you’ll forget about me. But if you become preoccupied with me, then I’ll fix your tent.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

I realized that I was spending too much time worrying about the temptations and my sins, about how I was going to cope and about what other people thought. The Lord showed me that conversion and repentance happen when we become preoccupied with Jesus and turn to him. When you turn to Jesus, you automatically turn away from sin....

That's what happened to all the great sinners in the church: they turned to Jesus and away from sin.... We all must remember that when we sin, we must not become preoccupied with the sin *and keep going back over the sin, but turn to Jesus*. When you begin to try to please him and to live for him, then he changes your life.²⁰ (emphasis added)

Third, what should a priest, religious, or consecrated soul do when one has developed an attraction, e.g., a priest to laywoman, a woman religious to a priest. Perhaps the best thing to do is to reveal it to one's spiritual director, or at least to one's confessor (one of St. Ignatius' fourteen rules of discernment).

Fourth, men are aroused primarily through the eyes, and the custody of the eyes merits first consideration. Mt 6:22 teaches that "The eye is the lamp of the body," and a maxim in the spiritual life is: "The eyes are the windows of our soul, we can let in an angel or a devil" (used, for example, by St. Dominic Savio). Job 31:1 states, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?" We ought to mention one particular area that appears to be taking on massive proportions: internet pornography. A religious Sister, a psychiatrist, who assists in the rehabilitation of priests and religious who have addictions, conveyed to the author that this is the gravest addiction and the hardest to heal. This reality means that seminarians and priests and religious must take concrete steps to protect themselves. For those who have regular access to the internet, we might consider using internet filters, accountability software with a friend to monitor (e.g., the "Covenant Eyes" program, or simply a friend to help to share accountability), or having internet access only in our parish office and not in our sleeping quarters.

We have to know that this is the one area where we do not confront the enemy directly, but have to be "cowards," to "run away." This was the

²⁰ Ibid., 34-35.

teaching of St. Philip Neri, which he put into practice when he ran away when he found himself accosted by a prostitute in a trap laid for him under the pretext of an apparent pastoral need.

Fifth, in general, this area also calls for “distance.” If a woman reveals in the confessional that she is attracted to some priest, then the confessor can counsel her to stay away from him and from anything beyond the usual parishioner contact; if a man brings an adulterous affair to Confession, then he must be counselled to immediately stop all contact, because feelings and attachments are involved and sexual intimacy have been shared. There is no half-way measure in this area; one has to “cut it off,” otherwise one will keep falling and remain in “no-man’s land.” An extension of this “distance” is that confession of sins should not go into many details, to protect both the penitent and the confessor; just what is required to allow the confessor to judge the gravity of the matter and condition of the penitent.

Finally, a balanced priestly lifestyle is perhaps the best approach. These include the following: transparency with one’s spiritual director or confessor; fidelity to prayer, especially devotion to our Lady; priestly fraternity; a healthy lifestyle, with regular diet, exercise, and recreation, and a hobby can be of even further help (many possibilities, including music, art, gardening, languages, reading, and sports); and taking one’s day off and annual vacation time. In general, priests who do not cultivate friendships are likely to seek compensation elsewhere; and the same applies to priests who do not find joy in their work or their people. Without joy, the priest drags himself around. It is said that the devil more easily attacks those who are sad and discouraged.

We can highlight one area that can escape the priest’s purview. The seminarian and priest is very likely to allow work or study thoughts to invade one’s rest time. One seminarian whose first language was not English told his spiritual director that he was tired during the day because he had to worry about his studies at night in bed. This is an area we must learn to protect and practice abandonment by stopping all thoughts of work, homilies, planning, worries, in the period we retire to sleep (“You shall not pass!” of *Lord of the Rings*), and entrust all of these concerns to God. It allows us to sleep more peacefully and we exercise a certain discipline.

B. Mortification

Mortification is discussed in various chapters in this book, e.g., “Background” (priest and victim); “Priestly Years” (“Incompleteness without Self-giving,” “Suffering and Failure”); and the next section, “Three Great Foundational Virtues of Penance.” Nevertheless, because of its centrality, and for the sake of the seminarian starting out, it is worthwhile to make a few general comments here.

Let us highlight a few key thoughts from M. Eugene Boylan’s *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*. Mortification is necessary because of the revolt of the lower powers (which may collectively be designated as “concupiscence”) against the higher powers or faculties. Taming of concupiscence and redirectings of the lower faculties are necessary so that man can love God with his whole being. Mortification is also necessary to combat bad habits derived from personal sin, to reduce temporal punishment, and also to share in Christ’s Passion as vicarious suffering. If the priest views mortification from his ministry as sufficient, he will be in for a surprise, as “self-indulgence will take over command when we are off duty in regard to our ministry.”²¹ He notes the importance of corporal mortification (food, drink, smoking, bodily posture), but emphasizes that they be done cheerfully; and that if we find it burdensome, “it is probably better to omit it and to accept the humiliation of being so weak.”²²

But he maintains that it is essential not to omit interior mortifications, which include our thoughts: “Day-dreaming, reveries, memories, and anticipations, should be carefully controlled.” Like the athlete who, to be successful, trains beforehand, so the Christian trains even in his thoughts. He warns too of pride that can arise out of excessive attachment to corporal mortifications: “For the man who prides himself on not being like the rest of men is far from being truly mortified.”²³ Like St. John Vianney, he mentions the efficacy that comes with vicarious suffering. He quotes the words of Pius XI to the Carthusians on the primacy of prayer and penance: “It is easy to understand how they [Carthusians] who arduously fulfill the duty of prayer and penance contribute much more to the increase of the

²¹ M. Eugene Boylan, *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*, 82.

²² *Ibid.*, 82-83.

²³ *Ibid.*, 87.

Church and the welfare of mankind than those who labour in the tilling of the Master's field."²⁴ And even more, the unmortified priest has none of the joy of companionship with Christ, and "As a result he plunges into activity in search of human applause and the satisfaction of achievement," but the thrill soon passes, as Boylan so accurately describes of what might be a familiar failure in priestly ministry today:

Now the priest is the chosen friend of Jesus, and his life must be one of intimate friendship with Him and a complete sharing of His life and work. But the whole life of Christ is characterized by the Cross. Self-indulgence never ruled a single moment of it. Now, how can a man who rejects the Cross and who will not hear of any interference with his self-indulgence, live and work in intimate friendship with Jesus?...

He has all the obligations of the priesthood, but few, if any, of its real joys. For, of course, it is that familiar friendship and constant companionship with the Master that a priest should find his greatest solace and joy. The unmortified priest has none of that joy.... As a result he plunges into activity in search of human applause and the satisfaction of achievement. But even if he is successful therein, the thrill soon palls and he is forced to seek lower but more intoxicating joys to satisfy his needs and to deaden his conscience.²⁵

The "Virtue of Penance" in Dom Marmion and Segundo Galilea

There is a temptation for people to focus on "love" in a "touchy-feely" focus on being nice, a superficial niceness (sentimentality), without first instilling mortification or discipline. In the Christian life, we always begin with the foundation and structure (responsibilities, rules, discipline, penance, acceptance of crosses) before we complete this with love (apex). Saint Columba Marmion, an outstanding spiritual director, formulates the entire spiritual life in three fundamental virtues: compunction, mortification, and love—which are, in fact, elements of the "virtue of penance" (consider Jesus' first words, "Repent..."). The following can be a program for life:

²⁴ Pope Pius XI, Apost. Const. *Umbratilem*, A.A.S. 15.10.24, quoted in Eugene Boylan, *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*, 85-86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

What you lack, what leaves some feebleness, some want of equilibrium and stability to your spiritual life, is not having practiced the virtue of peace enough. Confession remits every sin, but there remains in the soul, as it were, the scars of sin which a contrary habit— the virtue of compunction— should eliminate. I want you therefore for a few years to give yourself to the virtue of penance. In doing so you must not remember your past life in detail but recall that you have offended God and constantly regret it. The virtue of penance will be manifested in you by these three things:

1. *The spirit of compunction.* I very much want you to keep always in this spirit. Say often, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.” By this prayer we say nothing, we simply show God our misery; we feel that we are only poor sinners in His sight. You certainly should not lay your mind under restraint and forbid yourself all acts of praise and thanksgiving, *but compunction should dominate.* Often make the Stations of the Cross; *always begin your prayer by casting yourself as a sinner at God’s feet.*

I am sure that if you thus steep yourself in compunction during some years until God calls you to another state of mind you will derive from it immense good for your soul. If you have delayed giving yourself to our Lord, well! Repair that by giving yourself to Him now without reserve, with great fidelity and great generosity. And never fear that your past faults and infidelities will prevent you from reaching the degree of union that God intends for you; in an instant He can repair all that.

2. *Mortification.* For you it will consist above all in the perfect observance of the Rule and the regular discipline, and in the mortification of the common life generously accepted.

3. *Love.* You ought to love much; you have a loving heart capable of loving much. *You must repair the past by great love for Our Lord.* You must love like Mary Magdalene at Jesus’ feet, “Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much.” Say often to Our Lord, ‘My God, I want to love Thee to a far greater degree than I have offended Thee in the past.’²⁶ (emphasis added)

We cannot be a resurrection people without first going through the cross, the perennial foundation. Failure to live Blessed Marmion’s foundational “virtue of penance” is basically a seeking of self and not living expiation and

²⁶ Columba Marmion, *Union with God: Letters of Spiritual Direction by Blessed Columba Marmion*, 54-55.

victimhood for Christ's flock. It is important to identify compromises in this area. Fr. Segundo Galilea notes the common lapse of neglect of prayer:

For men and women dedicated to spirituality, prayer is one of the privileged areas of temptation.... its weakening or extinction compromises every aspect of this life. If Christians are fervent, giving in to the "demons" of prayer will leave them mediocre. If they are serving in the Church's ministry, they will become empty activists. If they are holy, they will cease being so. In every case, they will cease influencing the spread of God's reign. For the demon, separating men and women from prayer sets them on the road to separation from God; separating ministers from prayer makes them sterile; separating saints from prayer destroys those who multiply God's grace.²⁷

A second and very common source of failure of being with Christ on the cross is seeking inordinate self-fulfillment in recognition and praise:

A more subtle temptation is to hope for recognition and even praise from the laity and hierarchy of the church. Those who fall into this temptation become dependent on this type of human gratification in order to maintain a high level of enthusiasm and morale. It seems that in ministry they are not striving to please God, but men and women. When praises and explicit recognition are missing, they interpret it as ingratitude and a lack of appreciation. They begin to flag in their motivation and dedication.²⁸

The author of this book has found a particular prayer very helpful for a daily Act of Contrition. It is the "Prayer for Daily Neglects," as it is commonly called, and it invites us to offer God the Father the Sacred Heart of His Divine Son, as we read below, in reparation for our sins. The third petition brings to mind the Penitential Rite at Mass.

Eternal Father, I offer You the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with all
its love, all its sufferings and all its merits.
First — To expiate all the sins I have committed this day and
during all my life. Glory Be, etc.
Second — To purify the good I have done poorly this day
and during all my life. Glory Be, etc.

²⁷ Segundo Galilea, *Temptation and Discernment*, 47.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

Third — To supply for the good I ought to have done, and
that I have neglected this day and all my life.
Glory Be, etc.

C. Three Emphases of St. Josemaría Escrivá

St. Josemaría Escrivá, from his long experience and his holiness, offers some key counsels.

(1) The Importance of Confession and the Eucharist

There are some key truths for the seminarian to root in himself as he prepares for ordination. St. Josemaría Escrivá begins with priestly identity. He notes that the priest is no different from any lay person as a man and a Christian, no more special as a member of the Church. Yet, he is more a *priest* than the priesthood of the baptized, since he has a further conferral of a distinct priesthood with a special configuration that permits him to act “in the person of Christ the Head and Shepherd.” He offers his whole being as an instrument of Christ. His office thereby merits great reverence and a priest must allow himself to be different, to act fully as a ministerial priest.²⁹ Within the priesthood, he teaches us that the heart of the priest’s ministry are the two sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession.

The administration of these two sacraments has so important a part in the priest’s mission that everything should hinge on it. Other priestly tasks, such as preaching and giving instruction in the faith, would lack solid foundation if they were not aimed at teaching people to relate to Christ, to meet him in the loving tribunal of Penance and in the unbloody renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary, the Mass.³⁰

All priestly tasks lead to an encounter with Christ in these two sacraments. The Mass, in particular, should be, even more so than for lay Christians, the center of the priest’s life. For this reason, “A priest who, for no good reason, does not celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass every day, would show little love of God. It would be as though he wanted to reproach

²⁹ Josemaría Escrivá, *Homily* given on April 13, 1973, in *In Love with the Church* (New York: Scepter, 2007), 64-69.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 69, n. 43.

Christ by stating that he did not share Christ's desire for redemption."³¹ He counsels us not to rush or hurry such an august sacrifice, noting that some string out the readings and announcements but rush through the Eucharistic prayer. Like couples in love, we linger and want to be in the company of the Beloved.³² He teaches us to share our sorrows and bring our requests for help during the Mass, and reminds us of the importance of giving thanks for such a great gift: "Surely you have nothing so important on that you cannot give our Lord ten minutes to say *thanks*. Let's not be mean. Love is paid with love."³³ Thus, the seminarian should learn to make the Eucharist and Confession the twin pillars of his life, and to prepare for the Eucharist and make a devout thanksgiving.

(2) Humility

A prerequisite for growth is to live Jesus' own example: when the apostles were arguing among themselves who were the greatest, the surprising model He gave was a child. We tend to put adulthood and its manifold qualities of strength and maturity as the primary assets to acquire, yet it will not be so in heaven. In our times, the spirituality of St. Thérèse of Lisieux is confirmation of this path. More specific to the priesthood is St. Josemaría Escrivá's use of an old proverb: "*Iuvenes videntur sancti sed non sunt: senes non videntur sed sunt*— 'young people look like saints, but they aren't, while old people (those who have spent years struggling on the path towards God) don't seem to be, but in fact are saints.'"³⁴ He also said that people "like wine, age slowly." These sayings reveal a profound truth, that holiness requires time and maturation.

From our experience, young priests can be tempted to pride in two areas. First, a newly ordained priest, freshly formed from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the latest developments in theology, might be tempted to think that he knows more than his pastor, formed in an earlier and less-theologically developed era. Likewise, during the years in the seminary, a sense of having made some spiritual progress might give him a false sense of having already attained heights in the spiritual life. Iain

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 71.

³³ Ibid., 73.

³⁴ St. Josemaría Escrivá, quoted in Francis Fernández-Carvajal, *Through Wind and Waves*, 102.

Matthew confirms the truth of this insight by drawing from St. John of the Cross, who also compares us to wine:

Growth may not be felt at the time because what John holds up to us is not new ingredients, but a mellowing and maturing of what is most truly ours. He likens us to wine. People recently committed are like new wine: fresh, fizzy, and liable to go off. Mature love is like mature wine: no new bits, the same ingredients; but the batch will last, and the texture is smooth.³⁵

Young priests, who have not yet suffered much or worked much, can fall into this trap and think they know everything. For example, young priests, as soon as they are ordained, can wish to address their former parish priests and spiritual directors by their first name— would it not be better to wait till “Father” invites you to do so?

Yet, we can be consoled by the fact that while we may struggle daily and it may appear at times that we are not making progress, and we may even seem to be regressing in our spiritual life, if we persevere, God himself will lead us to that holiness we so ardently desire, in His time. Along with the insight that holiness grows with age, it is helpful if we also keep in mind that the spiritual growth occurs spirally. That is, we will run into the same landscapes in our spiritual life but perhaps do so at greater depths.

Again, growth may not be felt because we grow in spirals, not straight lines. The same phenomena— darkness, restlessness, or inner peace— recur at different depths as John traces the journey. “I’m the same as I was twenty years ago.” Maybe not: one may have spiraled deeper, though the scenery remains the same.³⁶

Let us mention another temptation into which seminarians and newly ordained priests can be prone to fall. The seminarian should also beware of the temptation to compare himself with other gifted seminarians. Thomas Cardinal Collins once gave a wise counsel to seminarians to remember that God does not create with a “cookie-cutter,” but that each person is unique before God, and that he need not try to become like other seminarians.

³⁵ Iain Matthew, *Impact of God*, 61.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

(3) Fraternal Correction

St. Josemaría Escrivá himself petitioned the Church authorities to allow that he could be corrected by anyone within the Prelature, but the authorities prudently declined it but allowed him to be corrected by three councillors at most. He gave instructions that it be a pillar in all the Prelature houses, teaching that a strong house is one that is built upon healthy fraternal correction. We find this wisdom practiced by some religious communities in the past in employing a “chapter of faults.” One of the best qualities that a seminarian or priest can have is the capacity to both give and receive fraternal correction. Regarding the giving of fraternal correction, given that many find it hard to practice this, it is vital to remember that it is our Lord’s Gospel request and is thus not optional:

Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. (Lk 17:3)

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. (Mt 18:15-16)

We find from our own experience that the counsels or even rebukes we receive from others, while difficult, are often the most helpful insights and instructions we receive, and we may end up holding on to them for the rest of our lives. A Spiritan priest once shared this counsel with a high school class students: “Only two people will tell you if you have an embarrassing fault. Your enemy, who wishes to ridicule you, and your best friend, who cares enough about you to take you aside privately and tell you.” In this context, fraternal correction is really love in practice.

There is the danger, of course, of taking this to the extreme and finding fault with, and wishing to correct, everyone: “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” (Mt 7:3). While they seem very similar from the outside, the latter disposition to be a busybody differs from the true fraternal correction that flows from love in three important steps. First, the one who truly loves

begins with himself, seeking first to correct himself, to overcome and deny himself. Second, the one who loves first discerns if it is the wish of the Holy Spirit, waits for the Holy Spirit to provide the opportunity to do so, and offers the fraternal correction with gentleness and warmth and only in private. He seeks to give the truth in charity, whereas the work of the enemy is hasty, spurring one to act with frustration, impetuosity, and anger. Finally, he only proposes, and leaves his brother with his full freedom of choice, and, above all, relies on prayer for a good outcome.

D. Additional Elements

Filial Devotion to the Holy Father and Participation at Ecclesial Events

It is a wonderful thing for the seminarian to develop a great filial love for the person of the Holy Father, the vicar of Christ and the spiritual Father of the Church. It is also good for the seminarian to attend ecclesial events at which the Holy Father will be present, especially the World Youth Days and the Eucharistic Congresses. A priest studying in Rome discovered the power of such ecclesial events by chance. He happened upon the gathering of the youth from the Lay Movements of the world on the eve of Pentecost in 1998 in St. Peter's Square and had a very dramatic and moving experience. As he experienced the presence of the Holy Father and as he listened to the founders of some of these lay movements, it seemed to him that all of heaven was concentrated at St. Peter's Square and that the presence of the Holy Father and the Church in microcosm was like a lightning rod that concentrated the graces of heaven in that one spot.

Knowledge of Church's Tradition (Desert Fathers, Church Fathers, St. Thomas Aquinas, Carmelite & Ignatian Spirituality, Lay Movements)

Let us anticipate an area more fully covered in the next chapter, "Priestly Years." As mentioned earlier, one of the most helpful projects to do at the beginning of one's seminary years is to have goals, including to make long-term plans. These plans might include a list of books one may wish to read by the end of seminary years (e.g., Vatican II documents, the Catechism).

In this area, two additional principles are suggested here in advance: to find a *Theological Mentor*, and to *Read the Best Books*. Seminary years might be the best time to cast about looking for a great theologian who appeals to our

heart, choosing from among the very greatest, and looking to him as a mentor to guide one's theological vision, that will also feed his spiritual life.

In this privileged time, we are blessed with certain new developments. Despite Pope John Paul II's continued call for Christians today to breathe with the two lungs (East and West), we have neglected the theology, spirituality, and liturgy of the East. One Catholic theologian did his doctoral thesis at Oxford under Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware (who was also the thesis director for the current Russian Foreign Relations Director, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev) and gained tremendous breadth of vision in doing so. Many of the new lay movements and phenomena today have an openness to the East, and these include Taizé, Madonna House, the Community of St. John (Balthasar).

While the West has much to offer the East, including its strengths in the developments in social justice and missions, the East also has much to offer the West. Two books of Olivier Clément, well-known Orthodox author of Eastern Christian spirituality in Paris, are worth looking at: *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* and *On Human Beings: A Spiritual Anthropology*.³⁷ George Maloney, in the Foreword of *On Human Beings*, gives this counsel:

It should challenge both Orthodox and other Christians in the West not only to be open to the treasures of the traditions of the Christian East of old but, above all, to receive these traditions, expressed here in modern, existential terms, and through them enrich and revitalize the Churches at the dawn of a new millennium and into the 21st century. Perhaps from a deeper study of patristic theology, especially the theological anthropology of the Eastern Fathers, Western theology can regain something of its existential dynamism, and theology will again become a "life in God-Trinity". In turn, Eastern theologians and lay people may profit from the Western view of social consciousness that opens up Eastern mystical prayer to universal compassion for all peoples in need throughout the world. Thus, a work on a geo-global level would evolve and develop the cosmos in all of its materiality so as to allow the Logos made flesh to transform all of the creation into the body of Christ.³⁸

³⁷ George A. Maloney, foreword in Olivier Clément, ed., *On Human Beings: A Spiritual Anthropology* (New York: New City Press, 2000), 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Use of Summers

One of the greatest helps for seminarians, if they are free to choose, is to look for summer experiences that will form them to be better priests. While parish work during summers is a good experience, the seminarian will have ample parish experience in his internship year, and once he's ordained, he will most likely be in a parish for the rest of his life. It is suggested here that it might be helpful for the seminarian's formation to seek other enriching experiences that might prepare him for his future work. These could include: military chaplaincy work with the young cadets; a missionary experience, e.g., in India or South America; work with the poor (e.g., the Missionary Sisters of Charity in Mexico or Father Ho Lung in Jamaica); a summer of intense theological reading, especially in the year preceding ordination; or assisting the parish in planning the youth participation in a World Youth Day. For his field education, it might be formative to seek experiences further afield: pro-life work, prison ministry, or ministry with women of the street, experience with lay movements, like the Focolare (e.g., Mariapolis).

The seminarian may wish to have greater vigilance during summer holidays. With the more relaxed schedule of summer, there is a tendency to let all discipline go, and we might find that we fall more often in the areas of our weaknesses and that the good practices we developed at the seminary fall by the wayside (we do not take vacation from God). It is vital to continue to make weekly schedules, which can be less structured. The key is to maintain some basic discipline and plan: fixed rising times, daily Mass, frequent confession, Divine Office, vigilance in areas that might pop up more strongly if living at home (internet use, idleness), doing some apostolate or helping at the parish.

3. Eve of Priestly Ordination:

General Confession, Consecration to Mary, Begging Graces or Making Resolutions

Before the diaconate or priestly ordination, there are a number of helpful exercises. First, before Ordination, the ordinand might consider making a General Confession of the sins of his life, perhaps during the retreat in preparation for his diaconate Ordination. At the eve of his Ordination, he

might have a disturbed heart and soul, burdened by past sins, conflicts, traumas or even abuse. The General Confession permits him to bury, once for all, all the past sins and troubles that weigh him down, while at the same time, offering him a fresh start, as well as new impetus for a new beginning in the priesthood. He must follow, not his weakness, but his vocation.

Second, on the eve of his priestly ordination, there are two key things that he might consider doing. He could choose to consecrate not only himself, but also his priesthood, to Mary. She, by the free surrender of the future priest, takes on a more intense and active role as “spiritual mother” of the priest, helping to configure him closer to the image of Christ the High Priest and Shepherd, while taking charge of his spiritual formation and assisting with his pastoral ministry. In addition, the priest could make certain promises, as did Bishop Fulton Sheen, to celebrate every Saturday Mass in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and to spend a holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament every day of his priestly life. Similarly, St. Maximilian Kolbe entrusted all the merits of his apostolate into the hands of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. The new priest might also consider asking for a special grace for his priestly life, for example, the grace of becoming a good confessor or of protection for his life of purity.

Following his ordination, in addition to a later visit to the Holy Land, the newly ordained priest might consider making a visit to Rome, the heart of the Church, to experience her universality. During the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, newly ordained priests going to Rome were sometimes able to be allowed to concelebrate one of the Holy Father’s weekday private morning Masses. Apparently due to age and health concerns, it was no longer possible with Pope Benedict XVI during his pontificate, and Pope Francis’ present residing at Casa Santa Marta may not offer this opportunity either.

Nevertheless, a visit to Rome can be worthwhile for other reasons. The priest can still attend general audiences with the Holy Father, celebrate Masses at altars of the popes and other saints in St. Peter’s Basilica (including those of St. Leo the Great, St. Gregory the Great, St. Pius X, St. John XXIII, and St. John Paul II), and visit the excavations (*scavi* in Italian) under St. Peter’s Basilica. In addition, he can visit the other three major basilicas (St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, St. Paul) and one of the two

main catacombs along the *Via Appia* (St. Calixtus and St. Sebastian). He can visit tombs of many saints in Rome (St. Catherine of Siena, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Agnes, and St. Philip Neri, to mention a few), the Roman universities (Gregorian, Angelicum, Teresianum, San Anselmo, Holy Cross, etc.), and historical sites, like the Roman Forum.

Rome can also serve as a jumping off point for other cities and pilgrimage sites on a one or two day trip by train: day-trips to Assisi, Florence (the art capital of Italy), Monte Cassino (monastery and tombs of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica), or longer pilgrimages to the house of Loreto (house of the Holy Family near Ancona) or San Giovanni Rotondo (tomb of St. Pio of Pietrelcina). In northern Italy, one could also visit Milan (tombs of St. Charles Borromeo, St. Ambrose, or St. Augustine in nearby Pavia), or Turin (St. John Bosco, St. Dominic Savio, St. Joseph Cafasso, the Shroud of Turin).

Selection of a New Spiritual Director

The first priority of the newly ordained priest should be finding a good spiritual director, the friend of one's heart. He should consider entrusting this priority of finding a spiritual director to our Lady, the Queen of Clergy. Experience suggests that it is difficult to find parish priests who have both the experience and the time to give spiritual direction to fellow priests. It is often easier to find a spiritual director among certain communities, especially if they are endowed with the charism and background for this work, like the Ignatian communities (e.g., Jesuits, Oblates of the Virgin Mary) and the Opus Dei prelature. It is recommended that spiritual directors from vibrant communities that have deeply renewed their original charism be preferred. As to frequency, the visits to one's spiritual director should be frequent and regular, not when one feels "ready," perhaps at least once a month, even every two or three weeks. This was developed in Chapter 3 ("Spiritual direction and Confession").

There can be a deep sense of conflict from one's weaknesses and unworthiness to become a shepherd for Christ. At the eve of his ordination, the ordinand seminarian with a particular moral weakness may question whether he can be a worthy priest, to act "*in persona Christi*." There is a very

straightforward resolution to this. First, the priest in question should be consoled with the knowledge that, even if he falls, he is actively struggling with his weakness. That alone gives him the moral “authority” to continue preaching from the lectern, even on the theme of his very weakness. Second, as long as he entrusts this concern to a representative of Christ— a confessor or preferably a spiritual director— and listens to him, then he should go ahead with his ministry. Third, in struggling with the weakness, especially by making certain “rules” or guidelines for himself, he should accept his having this weakness and await God’s providential help— for Christ did say, “Ask and you shall receive.” In a particular way, he should have frequent recourse to the “Tribunal of Mercy” (Confession) and to our Lady.

Appendix: Lessons from a Model Seminarian

Gérard Raymond

As it is easier to learn a foreign language by speaking with children native to that language, so it is easier to see more clearly delineated the virtues of the road to sanctity in a young saintly seminarian. We present from his *Journal* the schedules, resolutions, and aspirations of Gérard Raymond as a model for seminarians. As we read his maxims and exercises, it is important to keep in mind the context of his times. The seminarian should consult his spiritual director before incorporating elements into his spiritual life.

*The Daily Maxims and Exercises of Gérard Raymond (from his Journal)*³⁹

Monday, September 15, 1930.- Today, I compose this table of resolutions.

RESOLUTIONS

1. Prayer and Pious Exercises:

- a) Mental prayer: ¼ hour, each morning
- b) Examination of conscience each night and meditation on death
- c) Stations of the Cross every noon
- d) Rosary, in the Church or on the way to school
- e) Mass each morning
- f) Communion each morning
- g) Ejaculatory prayers, each hour at least, recollection
- h) Visit to the Blessed Sacrament each time I pass the chapel (church), if the circumstances permit.

2. Spiritual Reading:

- a) “*L’heureuse année*,” each morning
- b) A page from the Gospels each noon

³⁹ Gérard Raymond, *Journal de Gérard Raymond*. See also the English biography, *Gerard Raymond 1912-1932: A Knightly Soul* (Kessinger Publishing, 2007). The texts given in these pages are personal translations; but *A Knightly Soul* also has its own translation of some of these texts, pages 40-43. Permission was granted to publish this schedule of Gérard Raymond by Monsieur le chanoine Jacques Roberge, Supérieur général du Séminaire de Québec (Rector of the Grand Séminaire) on July 17, 2015.

- c) Towards the evening, read from the *Imitation*, or St. Francis de Sales, or St. Alphonsus, or others.
3. **Mortifications:** Set an order of days for practices for each day, to practice one of these mortifications. In addition, practice each day the following ones:
- a) Never cross my legs
 - b) Each evening, day, 3 “Hail Mary’s,” slowly, on my knees with my hands under my knees
 - d) Out of bed at once with the bell
 - e) Always sleep on my back on the plank
 - f) Follow a rule of life, of studies
 - g) Mortify the tongue by reflecting always before speaking
 - h) No sugar in my food or beverages
 - i) Eat more of what I prefer and more of what I dislike
 - j) Mortify the eyes by regularly keeping them lowered.
4. **Duties of my state:** Accomplish these to perfection, so as to please God.
Live always for Jesus, like Jesus, with Jesus. Detach myself as much as possible from the world, supernaturalize everything. See myself as a future religious, priest, martyr, missionary.
Mottos: *Quid nunc Christus?* [“What now, Lord”—
before a difficult situation]
Duc in altum [“Throw out into the deep”]
Love. Suffer. Love. God come to my assistance.⁴⁰

RULE [“Schedule”]

Here then is my program, for school days in any case:

- 5am Rise: rise as soon as awoken, dress as soon as I am on my feet
- 5:15-6 Study: morning lessons
- 6:15 Mass: game of the devil who wishes to distract me from piety— begin well
- 7:00 Breakfast: frugality, especially with sugar
- 7:15 Depart for class: on the way, guard my senses; watch my imagination. Recite the Rosary if I am alone

⁴⁰ Ibid., 107-108.

- 7:45 Visit the Blessed Sacrament: bring others, if possible
- 8am Class: put all my attention to follow the lecture
- 10am Return: watch my eyes and my tongue
- 10:30 Snack: a ¼ hour is enough
- 10:45 Study
- Noon Lunch: give good example
- 12:45pm Reading or Study (or rest)
- 1:15 Depart: always be vigilant on these trips; pray
- 1:45 Visit chapel; no ostentation, no concern for human respect
- 2:00 Class: for each question posed to all the students, if I know the answer, wait till others have answered, unless I am directly questioned, otherwise be silent in humility
- 4:00 Return: be vigilant and pray
- 4:30 Study: primary homework
- 5:45 Supper: practice mortification of flesh and spirit
- 6:15 Magazine: “Catholic Action”
- 6:30 Spiritual Reading
- 7:00 Lessons
- 7:30 Prayer in chapel: no distractions
- 8:00 Study: homework, readings, written assignments, etc.
- 9:30 Sleep: “My God, make me sleep as soon as I rest.”⁴¹

[The following are partially summarized]:

I. Practices Of Mortification to Fight the “Flesh”:

Taste (Food): mortification at table is the alphabet of the spiritual life

Eyes: mortification of the eyes is the protection of the heart

Tongue: “The tongue is a universe of sins”

1. In general, don’t speak unless asked
2. Think before you speak (literally “turning my tongue several times in the mouth before speaking”)
3. Never speak of myself, unless asked
4. Never complain
5. Endure patiently criticisms, attacks, without reply

⁴¹ Ibid., 31-32.

6. Restrain an impetuous word

The other senses: “He who, making little of external mortifications, saying that the interior mortifications are more perfect, shows clearly that he is not mortified, neither interiorly nor exteriorly” (St. Vincent de Paul)- [most of the resolutions here have not been included]

1. Not get up during my studies to chat with others
2. To hold to a rule of daily life and to follow it to the letter.⁴²

II. Practices of Humility to Overcome Self-love:

Act as if I was very humble, consider myself as the least.

Kiss the ground each night.

In class, respond after others have given their response first [Summarized].

Know how to ask of everyone and on everything.

Never speak of myself, unless asked to.

Never seek to justify or defend myself from accusations, above all if they are true, even if they are false.

Never, ever, defer some good resolution that I can do.

Apply myself to consider my faults and see only the virtues of others.⁴³

III. Sample Text (April 29, 1929)

“O Jesus, make me love you more than I love myself. You see, I am ready to do all to please you; I wish only to live for you; to do your will. You have created me in order to serve your glory, that I will love and serve you. I wish to love you, to serve you, to do all for your glory, to accomplish your holy will. I wish to live only for you; I do not wish to speak, walk, write, act except for your glory. Fix in me this resolution always, this resolution to please you. Bring about above all that I accomplish this resolution, that I have the energy, the necessary courage to accomplish it. Alone, I can do nothing. With you, I can do everything. With you, I feel the power to move mountains. Without you, I cannot even raise a grain of sand.

.... Oh! Give me a little place in the elevator of St. Thérèse, draw me to you as soon as possible.

O that each moment of my life be a step on the stairs that will bring me to you.

O Jesus, quickly make a saint of me, so that each of my actions may have merit.”⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 54-55.

⁴³ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 56-57.

CHAPTER 7

MINISTRY: PRIESTLY YEARS

(Christ's Mission)

How [can priests convert]? Transforming themselves into Me [mystical incarnation]. But, how does this transformation work out practically?—BY LOVING, that from that love is derived generosity, abnegation, self-forgetfulness, sacrifice, ardent zeal for my glory, faith, hope and having one sole will with the will of my Father, by one total and absolute surrender to all His arrangements.

The priests ought to be preoccupied most seriously with knowing Me interiorly. They ought to copy in themselves my love, respect, adoration and abandonment to my beloved Father; my sentiments, desires and voluntary immolations, my subjection and my obedience; my humility, graciousness and charity; the incomparable tenderness of my Heart; the yearning to suffer, my love for the apostolate, the forgetfulness of my very Self and of the offenses which were done to me; my heroic examples and the giganticness of my charity, which always preferred the needy poor.¹
(Concepción Cabrera de Armida)

The priest does not simply “do ministry.” He takes on a new identity as *alter Christus* and follows the path of Christ (sentiments of Christ in quotation above). After His Baptism in the river Jordan and His preparation of testing in the desert, Jesus began the mission given by the Father. As Christ was sent by the Father, the priest is sent by Christ, to continue Christ’s immense mission of Redemption: “As the Father has sent me, I also send you” (Jn 20:21). For this great mission, the priest, mandated by Christ through the bishop, also receives like Christ the Holy Spirit to accompany him. Thus, sent by Christ within the Church, and armed with the power of the Holy Spirit and faith, he is to bring the whole world to Christ, and, through Christ, to the Father. We will now examine certain elements that can assist him greatly in this mission (e.g., spiritual director, fraternity in priesthood, theological reading), elements already introduced in the previous chapter. This chapter can also serve as a self-examination for the priest who wishes to renew his priesthood.

¹ Concepción Cabrera de Armida, *To My Priests* (Modesto, Ca: Ediciones Cimiento, 1996), 123.

1. Ordination and Early Years of Priesthood

A. The Priest is Ordained Principally to Celebrate the Eucharist

Religions generally present the priest as a mediator between God and man, principally by offering sacrifice. The New Testament priest offers specifically the one sacrifice of Calvary, the Eucharist. To understand the centrality of the Eucharist in the priest's ministry and life, let us respond to the post-Vatican II attacks on the ministerial priesthood by looking to Scripture and Tradition as presented in an interview with Henri de Lubac. When questioned directly about the need for the priesthood, he presented the following overarching framework: it is the Last Supper that is the origin, not only of the Church, but of the priestly ministry as well. That is, it is the Eucharist that makes the Church, and the priest is the only one deputized as Christ's legate or other self to celebrate the Eucharist. De Lubac finds some helpful insights from a scholar of the Calvinist tradition, M. von Allmen:

The institution of Holy Communion is not only the moment of the institution of the Church, but also that of the institution of the ministry in and for the Church. It is in this sense that we must undoubtedly understand the fact that at the time of the last supper, Jesus is with the Twelve exclusively, is only with those who are then to teach the Church to celebrate Holy Communion.²

It is exclusively the Twelve, and, by extension, all who share in their priesthood, who are to celebrate and lead the Church to the Eucharist. Von Allmen reinforces the role of the priest when he points out that we discover in the New Testament that, from the beginning, there has always been “two poles within the unity of shared salvation: a shepherd and a flock, a father and a family, a witness of Christ and the members of his body.”³ These two poles have a reciprocity, and the priesthood is for the sake of building that flock that is the Church— through the Eucharist. Henri de Lubac, drawing from Tradition and Scripture (especially from the Scripture scholar, Heinrich Schlier), points out the fallacy of introducing opposition between preaching the Word and the Eucharist, or priority of the Word over the

² M. von Allmen, *Essai sur le repas du Seigneur* (no citation given), quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 340.

³ *Ibid.*, quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 341.

Eucharist. While the Church teaches that preaching is the primary function of the priest, it is so because he must first gather the people to Christ before he can celebrate the Eucharist. But it is the Eucharist that is the source and summit of Christian life.⁴ Even more, the Eucharist is itself the highest form of the proclamation of the Word, the principal means of evangelization: “For Paul, the celebration of the Lord’s supper is the proclamation of the death of the Lord and of his Resurrection.”⁵ De Lubac tells us that the whole ritual proclaims it and is at the heart of the Church—the Church having a Eucharistic structure. He offers another helpful text from von Allmen:

Far from offering the Church a chance to resign her mission, the sacrament [Eucharist], on the contrary, simplifies and purifies the missionary duty by marking out the frontier between the world and herself: it shows her where she can and must step out in order to carry the Gospel to the world, and where she must retire within herself in order to give thanks and to intercede.

B. Finding and Choosing a Spiritual Director

What may be the absolute first priority for the newly ordained priest is to find a new spiritual director. While many concerns immediately confront the newly ordained priest, such as learning to preach, perhaps none is more important nor pressing than finding a spiritual director. A newly ordained priest blessed with a good spiritual director, and, God willing, a good first pastor, quickly discovers that these two constitute the best pillars to stabilize his priestly life and help him grow in his ministry. A good spiritual director can be a gold mine. The new priest will inevitably encounter difficulties that come in varied forms and situations, but a good spiritual director can protect him from pitfalls, support him in crises, and lead him along the path of growth to becoming a holy priest. Unlike the seminary, where spiritual directors are provided for him, the newly ordained priest may find that there are fewer options available in his diocese. As mentioned earlier, most parish priests do not have a background in spiritual direction and, in this era of shortage of priests, are usually too busy to be able to direct individuals.

⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 346-349.

⁵ M. von Allmen, *Essai sur le repas du Seigneur*, quoted in *Ibid.*, 350.

In spite of this scarcity, the new priest should look for some basic qualities in a good spiritual director. First, the spiritual director must understand that the Holy Spirit is the true spiritual director and that, as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual director seeks to see where He is leading the directee. Second, the spiritual director must be faithful to the Church and her teachings—this is a *sine qua non* requirement. He must not just tolerate her teachings; he sees that it is Christ who acts in *His* Church, and so submits to her out of love in humility and obedience. Third, the spiritual director ideally must live what he preaches; it is too easy to “talk the talk” and not “walk the walk.” It is preferable to choose a director who prefers to lead by quiet example than one who loves to give advice and expound eloquently on spiritual things. Principal among the qualities of lived example we look for is prayerfulness, and one way to tell is by the principle that if someone does indeed pray, you will “catch him praying.” Fourth, it is preferable that he be both experienced in spiritual direction and knowledgeable in the stages and pitfalls of the spiritual journey.

The last dimension above needs to be further elaborated. Thus, complementing the principal “non-directive” dimension of being an instrument of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual director also seeks to give some direction or fundamentals (“directive”). As a “spiritual father,” he seeks to introduce his directee into fundamental structures and methods: a plan of life and discipline; methods of prayer; stages of the interior life (Carmelite); Ignatian charism (like discernment of spirits and the Examen prayer); the need for peace of heart; the goal of abandonment and living the sacrament of the present moment. But a good spiritual father also strives to know what is happening with his children—he must not be passive but proactive in this regard. Since the spiritual director does not usually live in the same house as his directee, it is harder to know about the directee’s underlying problems. It means that a good father should not be blasé about difficulties the young priest might have, but be alert to signs of imminent difficulties, going “beneath” the words to the underlying problems, discerning difficulties, like negligence in prayer or using spiritual direction as a means to resolve issues rather than seeking growth in Christ.

C. Fraternity, Support Groups, Affiliation with a Community

A priest who isolates himself sooner or later makes a discovery. No matter how much or how perfectly he prays, fulfills his pastoral responsibilities, is attentive to the needs of his people, if he is lacking friendships and priestly fraternity, he will experience a deep emptiness and sense of unfulfillment within. This dynamic points to a certain priority the priest must follow. It begins with the priestly fraternity within the rectory, for “charity begins at home” (Mother Teresa of Calcutta). The newly ordained priest must put his first priority in the rectory life and find his strength for ministry flowing from that priestly fellowship: to try to build a good relationship with the pastor, and spend time with his pastor and other priests in the rectory, especially at meal times.

But he will also need priest friends, and on his weekly day-off, he might consider meeting a priest friend for a meal. Many have found help in support groups that meet monthly. At these meetings they can pray, perhaps discuss a document of the Church, share their difficulties, and enjoy fraternity. Timothy Cardinal Dolan devotes some time in his book to this, and Fr. Andrew Apostoli also treats of it.⁶

Beyond having a spiritual director, having a good relationship with the pastor and a support group, many have experienced great assistance through affiliation with a strong spiritual charism or movement. This type of affiliation is, of course, for those who feel called to a particular charism. A diocesan priest, now a faculty professor at a U.S. seminary, shared how being associated with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal since his seminary days at the North American College in Rome, has helped strengthen his priesthood.

A seminary rector, from his own fruitful experience as a long-time Third Order Augustinian and association with the Kolbe *Militia Immaculata*, recommended such affiliations to seminarians as a great support and aid in the priesthood. Examples of such affiliations include:

⁶ Timothy M. Dolan, *Priests for the Third Millennium*; Andrew Apostoli, *When God asks for an Undivided Heart: Choosing Celibacy in Love and Freedom* (Irving, TX: Basilica Press, 2007). Fr. Apostoli's concrete suggestions on pp. 182-186 are helpful.

- Priestly Fraternities (e.g., Focolare, Opus Dei, Madonna House)
- Third Orders (e.g., Carmelites, Franciscans, Benedictines)
- Particular affiliations (e.g., Charismatic Renewal)

One young priest, who struggled somewhat in his first parish assignment, found that things changed for him after he attended some Marriage Encounter and Cursillo weekends. These weekend experiences clarified his priestly identity in relation to Christ and taught him to depend on Him.

D. The Priority of Lived Holiness

The great temptation is to focus on preaching up a storm instead of putting first priority on example and holiness of life. The principal criterion that Jesus sets for those who would be His disciples is lived faith (Lk 11:28). Mother de la Touche, endowed with profound insights into Christ's Sacred Heart and into the priesthood, confirms that Jesus Himself led by example.

Our adorable Master did not confine Himself to teaching by words, to teaching by public preaching and private instruction; He taught above all by example. "He first did," says Holy Scripture, "and then He taught" (Acts 1.1). Is not the best lesson the lesson by example? What the ear cannot always be hearing, the eye can see, and is not the impression received through the eye, the stronger and the more vivid? Is not the heart more easily inflamed by having seen than by having heard? Jesus knew this; that is why, when He came to the teaching of the virtues, He commenced by practising them all. He made them appear in Himself so beautiful, so desirable, so fascinating, that hearts became inflamed with the desire of possessing them.

And even now, is it not the recollection of the sublime virtues which He practised on earth that moves us to imitate them? Is it not the thought of His divine patience that makes us patient, of His humility that makes us accept humiliation? Is it not the example of His adorable purity and that of His Virgin Mother, more than the few short words that He has said about it, which we find related in the Gospel, that causes the flower of virginity to bloom in all lands....

As in the case of Jesus Christ, it is above all by his example that the priest must teach. He ought therefore to be a living copy of Christ, he ought

always to present to the world this divine image. Let him offer then in himself a finished model of virtue, a living and visible model, easy to imitate.⁷

The key phrase of Mother de la Touche is found at the end: “As in the case of Jesus Christ, it is above all by his example that the priest must teach. He ought therefore to be a living copy of Christ, he ought always to present to the world this divine image.”

A saintly seminary priest professor, who had suffered tremendous hardships in Eastern Europe during the Second World War, once posed the question during a theology lecture of what is the most important thing that priests could offer to their people. Different responses were offered, including “prayer” and the “Eucharist,” but the answer the professor was looking for and finally received was “example.” Along the same lines, on another occasion, the same professor shared with a seminarian directee that he found that priests, when they pick up some little spiritual insight from a book or a talk, are wont to go out immediately and earnestly preach about it without first seeking to put it into practice. In so many ways, we have been taught that what the Church needs are not great preachers but great witnesses.

Saintly people all know this secret of the primacy of living the faith. Bishop Fulton Sheen, especially, offers a very pointed counsel: the world has heard all the arguments why it should become Christian, but it is waiting for the ultimate argument—holiness. Abbé Trochu indicates this path to be the secret of St. John Vianney, the patron of priests: “... the life of the parish priest [Vianney] was the most persuasive of all sermons; in it men could see the Gospel in action.”

The grace of God, the fruit of the prayers and penances of the saint, was silently doing its work. Above all, the life of the parish priest was the most persuasive of all sermons; in it men could see the Gospel in action.

When families were gathered around a hearth on an evening they used to say to one another: “Whatever our parish priest recommends, he first does himself. He practices what he teaches; we have never seen him take

⁷ Louise Margaret Claret de la Touche, *The Sacred Heart and the Priesthood*, 18-20.

part in any amusement; his only pleasure is, apparently, to pray to the good God. Surely there must be some satisfaction in prayer since he does nothing else. Let us follow his advice; he only seeks our good.”⁸

One concrete form of failure to live the faith is intellectualizing. Priests, like most people, tend to have gaps between what they say and what they do. A priest during his time of graduate studies in Rome, experiencing some spiritual lethargy, feeling as if he were in a rut in the spiritual life, consulted his Jesuit thesis director. This professor suggested that, in being totally immersed in his studies, the priest might have fallen into the trap of “intellectualizing.” The student priest, for example, can be studying the topic of charity in St. Thomas and learn many facts about charity, but he may in fact not be practicing it— he is living it only “in his head.”

People who intellectualize are often in their heads, absorbing a lot of facts, without necessarily undergoing the demands of putting them into action. On one side, we might be critical of the Church hierarchy of being too “conservative” and demand change in the Church structures, and yet we ourselves lack obedience and unity with the Church. On the other side, we may be all concerned about the liturgy, which, of course, is the apex of the Christian life, but be more concerned about rubrics than the poor or unity in ecumenism. We might be interested in knowing the latest bishop appointments, going to conferences, and reading scholarly articles, but not put first priority on deep, contemplative prayer. One spiritual director counselled his priest directee, who read through Cardinal Sarah’s *God or Nothing* quickly, not to set his sights on getting it read but rather to put into practice the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit regarding elements that moved him.

Failure to live the faith usually arises from gaps in the priest’s life, which can be many. They include the following: not being faithful to his prayer life; preaching on charity, yet belonging to an excessively exclusive clique; taking more than his allotted vacation times; not attending fully to his assignment from the bishop but being distracted by outside apostolates that give him more affirmation or fulfillment; lacking punctuality, when his parishioners have to be attentive to punctuality in their jobs and lives; not

⁸ Abbé Francis Trochu, *The Curé d’Ars*, 147-148.

returning e-mails or telephone messages for weeks; not being willing to receive fraternal correction from peers or paternal correction from the spiritual director or bishop; being too busy to take time to take care of himself by having regular meal times, getting exercise or recreation, making time for annual retreats with silence, and for fellow priests; and lack of tidiness or organization.

Raising the issue of possible gaps is not a case of being pedantic or being judgmental; it is rather to help us address our weaknesses so as to become the best possible instruments in Christ's hands.

Another failure to live the faith arises from not living in the "truth." This way of protecting our foundation is analogous to the teaching in Pope Benedict XVI's document, *Caritas in veritate*, to live "charity in truth." To live the greater aspect that is charity (building), we must first fulfill the requirements of truth or justice (foundation).

This means, for example, that if we are in a financial bind, we must never borrow money from the parish funds; if there are heavy demands in the parish, we never sacrifice our prayer life; if we receive many invitations to go to parishioners' homes for dinner, we stick to our planned guideline of limiting the number of visits per month; and if overwhelmed, we try to stick to our planned resolution of taking a day off no matter how big or busy the parish, taking time for re-creating, which helps us serve our people better.

E. Simplicity in Lifestyle

St. Philip Neri held a maxim to the effect that youth struggle with purity and older people struggle with attachment to things they have acquired over time. Thus, to live "pastoral poverty," it is suggested that the priest not get so involved with mundane things that he becomes attached to them. A priest scholar, needing a more up-to-date computer for his work, might give in to the temptation to spend hours and hours on comparing the reliability, speed, or maintenance track record of companies like Toshiba, IBM, Acer, etc., and then end up developing an attachment to the paraphernalia. This scenario can happen with other things like handheld gadgets (e.g., smartphones), cars, vacation, and sports.

Priests can come up with creative ways to avoid this pitfall. When buying a new computer, one approach is to do a limited amount of initial research for any purchase, but engage the help of a layperson who has the expertise in that area, perhaps to even assist the priest to purchase the item in question. If a priest needs a car, he can also engage the help of someone with more knowledge, or go the route of buying a used car, perhaps a car that is a year or two old, and so save money and not get caught up with having to choose particular models and configurations. It is also suggested that the priest not get too caught up with shopping, for being always on the lookout for sales and great deals may lead to attachment. Some priests are able to avoid spending too much time on shopping because they receive gifts of clothing from family members.

Simplicity can also apply to vacation. It is strongly suggested to avoid vacations that may cause harm to his priesthood: casinos, beaches where people are scantily clad, and bars or parties with heavy drinking. Some priests have found ways to have an enjoyable vacation, especially in the company of a priest friend: cottage or camping vacations, pilgrimages (e.g., to the Holy Land, Marian shrines), conferences (e.g., Newman), cultural vacations (e.g., Russia), nature (e.g., Alaska), vacations involving catching up with friends, going to an island to cover a parish for a priest by celebrating daily Mass (e.g., Cayman Islands). As he gets older, the priest might even consider making the sacrifice of giving up travel. Many religious congregations have limited vacation time (e.g., Fr. Ho Lung's community members get to visit their families every ten years; one European provincial friar's vacation consisted of giving two one week retreats and covering for a confrere at a parish in North America). It is also suggested that the priest avoid extravagance in his expenses. Though his salary is modest, his room and board and even gas expenses are covered, which leaves him with significant free capital. Even after he puts away a sum towards retirement (pre-authorized payments), he ought to be able to contribute a portion to charity.

F. The Twin Pillars of Scripture and Liturgy

For a renewal in the Church, the Second Vatican Council called for a "return to the fonts," especially Scripture, the Church Fathers, and the liturgy. We see the power of these fonts when we see the sanctity and

pastoral efficacy of the Church Fathers, whose influence continues on today. For the Church Fathers, it was Scripture and liturgy that dominated their faith life: doing theology was simply commenting on Scripture, and the liturgy was both the living context and the summit of their Christian life. Deep love of, and immersion in, both Scripture and the liturgy should characterize the priest of Christ, the “new Christ.”

Let us first consider the liturgy. Pope Benedict XVI, who would later come to know the Church Fathers through his study of St. Augustine, already perceived the vital place of liturgy during his student days:

[Professor] Pascher’s conferences, and the reverential manner in which he taught us to celebrate the liturgy in keeping with its deepest nature, made me a follower of the liturgical movement. Just as I learned to understand the New Testament as being the soul of all theology, so too I came to see the liturgy as being its living element, without which it would necessarily shrivel up.⁹

So dominant is the liturgy in the mind and heart of Pope Benedict XVI that he described his pontificate as presiding over a “cosmic liturgy.” How can we recover the Church Fathers’ vision of Christian spirituality as principally a liturgical spirituality? We have to move beyond what is immediate but not the most important. From the secondary and human side, the liturgy as the public, social, official worship of the Church entails the whole complex of rubrics and liturgical action. But while being faithful to the rubrics, we want to keep our principal focus on the divine and primary side, on the “divine mystery”: to see that the liturgy is principally an action of God in Christ and is a participation in the heavenly liturgy; to see that in the liturgical cycle, the mysteries of Christ become present and its graces are applied through the Church to the world here and now; and to see that, through the liturgy, I am united to the whole Church.

The priest holds the privileged place, acting *in persona Christi capitis* as an *alter Christus*. The advantages of the liturgical life are several: it helps me to be permanently supernatural in all my acts; it is a most powerful aid in conforming my interior life to that of Jesus Christ; it makes me live the life

⁹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998, German orig. *Aus meinem Leben: Erinnerungen (1927-1977)*, 1998), 57.

of the saints and blessed in heaven. The priest might consider looking at two of Pope Benedict XVI's works that reveal the depth of his understanding and love of the liturgy, *The Feast of Faith* and *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

The importance of Scripture is also well-documented in the Church's documents. The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation (2010), *Verbum Domini*, offers much rich fare for thought. Examples of the importance of Scripture abound. Pope Benedict XVI, in choosing to give us his greatest personal work, gave us a masterful trilogy on Scripture, *Jesus of Nazareth*. An older priest alumnus, returning to the seminary on Alumni day to celebrate a priestly Jubilee, shared with a seminarian after dinner a desire regarding Scripture: "If I had to go back to the seminary and do it over again, one thing I would do is learn all I can about Scripture."

Imitating the Church Fathers in the domain of Scripture, one particular area that impacts our preaching, our faith, and our spiritual life is the recovery of the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Pope Benedict XVI explicitly states that this link is very dear to him and foundational for his theology.

In this link between the two Testaments, there is a need today to recover and preach on the three "spiritual senses" that the Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms.¹⁰ We find today that preaching is focused almost exclusively on the literal sense of Scripture, the intention of the human sacred writer. To this end, much effort is given to analysis, especially employing the Historical-Critical method, and this is as it should be. However, there are three spiritual senses, that is, senses imbued by the Holy Spirit, that are built upon the literal sense: allegorical, moral, and anagogical.

¹⁰ "The spiritual sense. Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs. 1. The allegorical sense. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian Baptism. 2. The moral sense. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written 'for our instruction'. 3. The anagogical sense (Greek: *anagoge*, 'leading'). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem." (Taken from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 117)

While we always begin with the literal sense, we must go beyond to the senses of the Holy Spirit (spiritual senses) to discover the deeper meanings. For example, at every Easter Vigil, we read the texts of creation and Exodus always in light of the fulfillment that Christ brings, a new creation and a new Exodus. Without the spiritual meanings, we deprive our faith of its deeper and central content. To this end, the priest might consider a fine preaching aid, the four-volume work of the Benedictine scholar, Adrian Nocent, *The Liturgical Year*, which integrates Scripture, the teaching of the Church Fathers, and the liturgy.

G. Preaching Ministry

In our times, preaching aids and resources have become abundant. Today, we are blessed with many specialists in homiletics and a “Catholic Association of Teachers of Homiletics,” and there is no shortage of conferences on homiletics that we can attend.¹¹ Since the area is more adequately treated in our contemporary period, we shall highlight only a few practical elements for the priest (see Chapter 10 in *New Evangelization: Starting Anew from Christ*).

After the Synod on the Word of God and Pope Benedict XVI’s post-synodal Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, Pope Francis providentially dedicated a substantial section of his *Evangelii gaudium* on preaching, which was soon followed by *The Homiletic Directory*, written by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

We note that the final section of the *Directory* treats of preaching with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and that it encourages priests, while basing their homilies on the liturgical texts, to expound upon the dogmatic and moral richness of the Church in the liturgical setting.

Let us turn to the patron of all priests, St. John Vianney, for some insights into office, content, and style of preaching. Regarding the content of the faith, St. John Vianney, with great insight, realized that the greatest evil of his time—and perhaps of ours—is ignorance of the faith, that “ignorance is the mother of all evils.” Thus, he sought not only to preach but also to

¹¹ St. Augustine’s Seminary in Toronto sponsored a Preaching Conference in July 2014 and a Preaching Master Class in June 2015.

catechize so as to provide the foundation for the faith: “We are convinced... that this sin alone causes the loss of more souls than all the other sins together, because he who is ignorant does not realize the harm he does by his sin, nor the great good he thus forfeits.”¹²

His best-known biographer, Abbé Francis Trochu, goes on to describe the holy passion with which he instructed his parishioners, beginning with the youth. He gave his famous catechism lectures out of this concern. In order to inculcate the faith, “The man of God never wearied of repeating the same thing again and again.”¹³

In the method of preaching, we might once more look to the example of St. John Vianney. The preparation of the homily was one of vital importance to him. “M. Vianney’s only thought was the salvation of these poor souls. He knew that in the pulpit a priest fulfills one of the most important duties of his sacred office. This conviction fired his zeal and gave him courage.... Occasionally he worked for seven hours on end and far into the night.”¹⁴

Abbé Trochu reveals that to prepare his instructions, “He installed himself in the sacristy. Opening as it did on this Sanctuary, he would be labouring under the very eye of the divine Master” and that

He sought inspiration at the foot of the altar.... Before the Master, who knew how to utter the most sublime truths in such wise ways that fishermen, labourers, and shepherds were able to grasp them, he pleaded with tears that He would suggest also to him the thoughts and actions that would convert his parish.¹⁵

Bishop Sheen taught that if a priest is to make hearts catch fire, then the priest must go before the furnace, that is, the tabernacle. We have also learned that Pope John Paul II wrote his encyclicals before the Blessed Sacrament. A simplicity in speaking style is also recommended, and it has the benefit of taking the attention away from the priest to focus on Christ. In a matter of style, St. John Vianney stayed with simplicity:

¹² Abbé Francis, *The Curé d’Ars*, 128.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

What formed the subject matter of the sermons of this holy man who knew not the arts of human eloquence? He spoke for the benefit of his flock alone, and he did so with great clearness, directness, and without a shadow of flattery.... At times his manner was calm, gentle, appealing, for he was not only an apostle out to convert, he was likewise a shepherd and a father.... M. Vianney spoke their own language and used the expressions current among them. His language was at times so forcible that only the ardour of his zeal can explain and excuse it.¹⁶

One might argue that St. Vianney was able to use only simple language because of his intellectual limitations, but we find a similar approach taken by brilliant scholars as well. St. Augustine, one of the Church's greatest theologians and most eloquent preachers, himself preached in a colloquial style adapted to his audience. Agostino Trapè writes that Augustine, "although he does not scorn the tools of rhetoric, he aims primarily at holding a familiar conversation with the people...."¹⁷ He also adopted

... word-forms and expressions from colloquial usage.... He makes frequent use of assonance, alliteration, wordplay, and unpolished expressions. We today may find all this somewhat distasteful and be inclined to have our reservations. This is a legitimate reaction. But for Augustine they were all means in the service of his purpose, which was to impress the truth on the minds of his hearers.¹⁸

Because of the supreme importance of preaching, it would be good to look at some current commentaries of Scripture or other helpful books. Two helpful collections of commentaries on Scripture have now put together one-volume New Testament editions: *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament* (Scott Hahn) and *The Navarre Bible: New Testament* (Navarre University). *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible* is strictly a Scripture commentary, while *The Navarre Bible* has both Scripture commentary as well as many sources from Tradition (e.g., Church Fathers, Vatican II). A third, older collection is William Barclay's *The Daily Study Bible*. Perhaps one series with a strong liturgical background was mentioned earlier, Adrian Nocent's four volume *The Liturgical Year*, which includes an elaboration of the theology of the seasons and liturgical mysteries.

¹⁶ Ibid., 133-134.

¹⁷ Agostino Trapè, *Saint Augustine: Man, Pastor, Mystic*, 154.

¹⁸ Ibid., 155.

Perhaps the finest Church Fathers' commentaries on Scripture is the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, is a contemporary critical series that presents excerpts from various Fathers on different pericopes of Scripture— more and more Books of the Bible are being added to this series. The somewhat similar older version, Toal's *Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, with a translation of St. Thomas Aquinas's *Catena Aurea*, is now reprinted by Ignatius Press, while linking the old calendar to the present calendar, and is still quite useful. While based on the old calendar, its advantage is that it gives fuller texts of the Fathers rather than shorter excerpts as in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.

An outstanding series for daily meditation that also inspires ideas for homilies is Francis Fernandez's *In Conversation with God* (7 volume set), and some find Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen's *Divine Intimacy: Meditations on the Interior Life for Every Day of the Liturgical Year* helpful. Several outstanding theologians also have individual volumes of their sermons, including Pope Benedict XVI and Hans Urs von Balthasar. One should add an outstanding commentary on John in four volumes by Adrienne Speyr, *John*. The sublime insights from her Commentary remind us of those written by the Church Fathers. One might also enjoy the daily *Magnificat* "*Meditations of the Day*," as well as their works, like *Magnificat: Praying with Saint Matthew's Gospel*. One may find that if one continues theological reading that is very profound, it can inspire thoughts or insights for homilies.

H. Continuing Theological Reading

Bishop Fulton Sheen recounts gaining an insight through occasions of staying at parish rectories while giving talks or retreats. When he scanned the pastor's library of books, he often could tell approximately what year the pastor was ordained, for the lack of recently published books suggested that the priest had not done much theological reading since his ordination. For various reasons, many priests do not continue theological reading once they are ordained. Before we continue, it is helpful to first distinguish it from spiritual reading. Spiritual reading, which all priests and Christians should incorporate in their daily spiritual program, is distinct from theological reading, the reading of theological books or material that increases our theological knowledge base and gives us a deeper background and horizon. Since the priest is also teacher and preacher, then theological

expertise provides insight and background for the priest's homilies and his talks. Solid theological reading should also enrich his spiritual life.

A priest might justifiably ask, "Where would I find the time to do theological reading?" Yet, that is not the critical question— we make time for what we feel is important— it is whether the priest understands its importance, and thus whether he takes an interest in it. Regarding its importance, to know theology, analogous to knowing Scripture, is an extended sense of knowing Christ; regarding interest, we always seem to find time for the things we love, as some busy people make time for a hobby or sport they enjoy.

The key, therefore, is to develop an interest, and it is argued here that one can learn to develop an "interest" in an area that might initially be dry, such as philosophy. Without developing a deep interest, a priest is not likely to continue theological reading. Coming back to the question of finding time, it is understandable that priests might protest, as they generally find themselves busy and tired each day, such that they do not have time even to read novels (fiction), let alone do theological reading.

And here we come to the question of priority. Here is Pope Francis' thought on making time for the priority of preaching. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, he counsels that priests should make time to prepare homilies well, even if "less time has to be given to other important activities":

Some pastors argue that such preparation is not possible given the vast number of tasks which they must perform; nonetheless, I presume to ask that each week a sufficient portion of personal and community time be dedicated to this task, even if less time has to be given to other important activities. Trust in the Holy Spirit who is at work during the homily is not merely passive but active and creative. It demands that we offer ourselves and all our abilities as instruments (cf. Rom 12:1) which God can use. A preacher who does not prepare is not "spiritual"; he is dishonest and irresponsible with the gifts he has received.¹⁹

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 145.

Following this logic, that the preacher who does not prepare is “dishonest and irresponsible with the gifts he has received,” the priest who does not take the time to do theological reading reduces his preaching and teaching effectiveness, and also limits his spiritual growth, since theology feeds into spirituality.

To help make theological reading a priority, a strategy is necessary. First, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the priest must take an interest, and this can be done by choosing a theological mentor that one is drawn to. Then, it is helpful to set up a plan or goal for reading some important works within a specified time frame.

Finally, to get to theological reading, the priest ought to set fixed time each day for doing it. For sustained or substantial reading, a priest can find more time for this during his vacations and days off. The investment pays off handsomely. Three priests of the same generation in one diocese have witnessed to the impact on their spiritual life and priesthood from reading the works of Henry Cardinal Newman, begun during their seminary days. One can see how reading a deeply spiritual and immensely intellectual figure like Cardinal Newman can have such impact: many see a link between his teachings and the Second Vatican Council, and Ian Ker calls him the “doctor of the Second Vatican Council.”

What should you read and how much should you read? Two principles are helpful here. A Jesuit theologian who was previously a professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and who is a current member of the International Theological Commission offered this counsel to a student priest after a lecture: “We have little time to read. So read the very best.” The importance of this counsel is reflected in the well-known dictum, “Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are.” We become what we read: if we read mediocre material, our thoughts tend to be mediocre, and our intellectual content mediocre. Another Jesuit theologian offered an equally helpful counsel: choose one theologian to be one’s primary mentor, reflecting the wisdom of another dictum, “Beware the man who has read one book.” That is, beware the man who has mastered one author or one area, rather than the one, more eclectic, but who has dabbled superficially in various areas. A man with such mastery and depth is formidable.

Combining these two counsels is to choose one primary mentor but from among the very best, so that the reader is “mentored” into the great theologian’s profound vision and synthesis. The power of the influence of great theologians can be seen in the theological development of Cardinal Ratzinger as described in his autobiography *Milestones*, under the period, “Theological Studies in Munich.”²⁰ There he reveals the profound influence that various outstanding theologians have had on his development, such as Henri de Lubac, Henry Newman, and, above all, Romano Guardini. While this path does not preclude reading other authors, it preaches the superiority of mastering one theologian over superficial acquaintance with many.

Our theological Tradition is replete with outstanding minds with comprehensive theological visions that can serve as theological “mentors”: Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Henry Newman, and great 20th century theologians like Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Joseph Ratzinger (for Thomism, one might consider Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Étienne Gilson, or Jacques Maritain).

I. Spiritual Reading on the Priesthood

At this point, it might be helpful to mention some books on the priesthood, principally recent ones. It goes without saying that one begins with the documents of the Church on the priesthood, including the Holy Thursday Letters of recent popes, especially the body of letters given by Pope John Paul II.²¹ Theological works on the priesthood in English also abound.²²

²⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “Theological Studies in Munich,” in *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 46-60.

²¹ *The Eucharist and the Priest: Inseparably United by the Love of God* (CC, 2003); *Instruction: The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* (CC, 2002); *The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium: Teacher of the Word, Minister of the Sacraments, and Leader of the Community* (CC, 1999); *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest* (Various Congregations, 1997); *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (SCDF, 1994); *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (“On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone,” Pope John Paul II, 1994); *Pastores dabo vobis* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Pope John Paul II, 1992); *The Ministerial Priesthood* (US Bishops, 1971); *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (“The Celibacy of the Priest,” Paul VI, 1967); *Optatam Totius* (“Decree on Priestly Training,” Vatican II, 1965); *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (“Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests,” Vatican II, 1965); *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* (“On the Catholic Priesthood,” Pius XI, 1935).

The work of Federico Suárez, *About Being a Priest*, has been found to be an outstanding guide for priests. A warmly-recommended book for priests who wish to learn from the wisdom of Sr. Briege McKenna, who has ministered to priests for over forty years, is her *Miracles Do Happen*.

Timothy Cardinal Dolan's *Priests for the Third Millennium* is recommended for practical aspects and Bishop José H. Gomez's *Men of Brave Heart: The Virtue of Courage in the Priestly Life* emphasizes courage.²³ Highly recommended "classics" include Fulton Sheen's *The Priest is not his own*; Catherine Doherty, *Dear Father: A Message of Love to Priests* (as well as *Dear Seminarian*); Blessed Columba Marmion, *Christ: The Ideal of the Priest*; St. Joseph Cafasso, *The Priest, the Man of God: His Dignity and His Duties*; Alphonsus de Liguori, *The Dignity and Duties of the Priest*; Eugene Boylan, *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*; B. Harris Cowper, ed., *St. John Chrysostom on the Priesthood: In Six Books (1866)*.²⁴

There are additional helpful works of recent vintage. Two helpful brief works by two Cardinals are: Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, *Priests Among Men*; and James Cardinal O'Connor, "Always a Priest, Always Present: A Pastoral Letter to the Priests of the Archdiocese of New York." A more recent work, co-authored by a bishop member of the Focolare that draws from the strength of its charism is Brendan Leahy-Michael Mulvey's *Priests Today: Reflections on Identity, Life and Ministry*. One might consider other works by Timothy Cardinal Dolan: *Called to be Holy*; *The Diocesan Priest: Consecrated and Sent* (in collaboration with David Bohr). Other recent and somewhat distinct works include: Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, *The Joy of Being a Priest: Following the Curé of Ars*; Matthew Levering, *Christ and the Catholic Priesthood: Ecclesial Hierarchy and the Pattern of the Trinity*; Stephen Rosetti, *The Joy of Priesthood*.

²² For theological works on the priesthood, consider: Avery Dulles, *The Priestly Office, A Theological Reflection*; Thomas J. McGovern, *Priestly Identity: A Study in the Theology of the Priesthood*; Donald Wuerl, *The Priesthood: The Catholic Concept Today*; André Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers*; Jean Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*; Dermot Power, *A Spiritual Theology of the Priesthood: The Mystery of Christ and the Mission of the Priest*; Adolphe Alfred Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*.

²³ José H. Gomez, *Men of Brave Heart: The Virtue of Courage in the Priestly Life* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2009). Bishop Gomez is the local ordinary of San Antonio, Texas.

²⁴ Other older works on the priesthood include Ronald Knox, *A Retreat for Priests*; Eugene Boylan, *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*; Herbert Cardinal Vaughan, *The Young Priest: Conferences on the Apostolic Life*; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Priest in Union with God*; and Edward Leen, *The Voice of a Priest*.

For avoiding temptations in the priesthood, including a “messiah complex”, the following are suggested: Segundo Galilea, *Temptation and Discernment*; and again, Federico Suárez, *About Being a Priest*. In *A Priest Forever: The Life of Father Eugene Hamilton*, Benedict Groeschel tells the story of a priest who dies after ordination. For a healthy priestly lifestyle, see Cardinal Dolan’s two books.

For accounts of priest saints or holy priests, one might consider Michael S. Rose, *Priest: Portraits of Ten Good Men Serving the Church Today*; R.A. Hutchinson, *Diocesan Priest Saints*; Patricia Proctor, *101 Inspirational Stories of the Priesthood*; Francis P. Friedl and Rex. V. E. Reynolds, *Extraordinary Lives: Thirty-Four Priests Tell Their Stories*; Walter Gumbley, *Parish Priests Among the Saints: Canonized or Beatified Parish Priests*; Walter J. Ciszek, *With God in Russia*; and Francis Trochu, *The Curé d’Ars*. We may well consider four works of Pope Benedict XVI on the Early Church figures: ((i) *Jesus, the Apostles and the Early Church*; (ii) *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine*; (iii) *Church Fathers and Teachers: From Leo the Great to Peter Lombard*; (iv) *Doctors of the Church*).

Older autobiographies that should be considered are: St. Augustine, *Confessions*; St. Ignatius, *Autobiography*, Cardinal Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. For more contemporary saintly examples, one might then consider the autobiographies of Pope John Paul II (*Gift and Mystery*; *Rise, Let us be on our Way*) and Pope Benedict XVI (*Salt of the Earth*; *Milestones*; *Light of the World*) and Fulton Sheen (*Treasure in Clay*).

Here are some recommended works among those involving private revelation on the priesthood: Concepción Cabrera de Armida, *To My Priests*; and three works by Louise Margaret Claret de la Touche: *The Sacred Heart and the Priesthood*; *The Love and Service of God*; *Infinite Love*.

J. Spiritual Reading of the Lives of the Saints

One of the best ways to grow in lived holiness is for priests themselves to be inspired by the example of the saints, who are images of Christ. For priests in ministry, we can look to the great example of the patron of all priests, St. John Vianney, and of the incomparable Pope John Paul II. One under-rated twentieth-century model for priests worth looking to, but who

might fly under the radar, is Bishop Fulton Sheen. There is much, for example, that a young priest starting out can learn from his autobiography, *Treasure in Clay*. This includes his resolutions at Ordination, his tremendous zeal, his three loves, his preaching and teaching counsels, combining brilliance with piety, and ability to inspire holiness and love of the Church.

K. Hobby or Self-Improvement

During the period that the Church was dealing with the crisis of pedophilia, a Canadian seminary invited a priest psychologist to discuss certain aspects of that problem. One of the most insightful suggestions was that, if a priest has a hobby, he is less likely to fall. Whatever the reasons for this benefit, it behoves each priest to have some constructive recreation by which he renews himself, while improving himself in some area. We have already spoken of the benefits of continued theological reading. Other helpful hobbies include working on learning a language, taking interest in music or the arts (museum or art gallery), and enjoying nature (gardening, hiking, camping, bird watching).

2. Continued Progress

A. Seeing God Face-to-Face

Like Jesus, the lived holiness must above all be expressed by the face-to-face knowledge or intimacy with the Father. One of the key insights by Pope Benedict XVI in *Jesus of Nazareth* is Jesus as the “second Moses.” And Jesus is the second Moses in that, like Moses, He truly sees the Father *face-to-face*.

... “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren— him you shall heed” (Deut 18:15).... “and there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face-to-face” (Deut 34:10).... Until that hour, the great promise had remain unfulfilled. Now He is here, the one who is truly close to the Father’s heart, the only one who has seen him, who sees him and who speaks out of this seeing— the one of whom it is therefore fittingly said: ‘him you shall heed’ (Mk 9:7; Deut 18:15).²⁵

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 236.

In every debate with the Jewish authorities, Jesus points back to the Father and to the fact that He is the only One who has seen the Father. Because of that intimacy, Jesus has the authority and the power to draw others to the Father. What power might we expect from the priest, called to be “another Christ,” who has seen the Father face-to-face. We see an inspiring example of this power in the life of St. John Vianney, patron of all priests: “‘Monsieur le Curé,’ Catherine Lassagne told him naïvely, ‘other missionaries run after sinners, even into foreign countries, but as for you, it is the sinners who run after you.’”²⁶

But we must go further to understand what is happening in the face-to-face meeting with God. Again we turn to the example of St. John Vianney. St. Vianney attributed the efficacy of his ministry to long prayers of intercession and to penance in the early hours of the morning. In his priestly heart, he begged for conversion of his parish and for the Church and for the world:

Long before the first rays of dawn appeared on the horizon... M. Vianney, lantern in hand, passed from the house into the church. The good soldier of Jesus Christ was going to his post of intercessor for the people. He went straight up to the chancel, where he prostrated himself on the ground. There he poured out his heart, full of ardent desires, heavy already with many sorrows. During these silent hours of the night he prayed aloud that the Lord would show pity to pastor and flock alike. “My God” he pleaded, “grant me the conversion of my parish; I am willing to suffer all my life whatsoever it may please thee to lay upon me; yes, even for a hundred years am I prepared to endure the sharpest pains, only let my people be converted.” And he bathed the pavement with his tears. At break of day he was still at his post. “This could be seen by the light which shone through the windows.”

The hours of the morning were spent in like manner, unless duty summoned him elsewhere. For a sick-call there was no need to go to the presbytery— people knew where to find him.²⁷

²⁶ Abbé Francis Trochu, *The Curé d'Arx*, 259-260.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

Abbé Francis Trochu, his famed biographer, himself confirms our text quoted earlier: the people of Ars followed and listened to St. John Vianney because of his penances and, above all, because of his example.

B. The Priest's Shield: Continued Fidelity in Little Things

With increasing years in the ministry, the priest can easily allow priorities to fall by the wayside, and even become complacent. The diocesan priest, moreover, without an horarium like that of religious communities, is thereby exposed to more temptations and varying situations. Thus, he is more prone to fall if he does not establish boundaries or guidelines or some structure. What will protect him, be his shield, is Jesus' principle, "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much" (Lk 16:10). The principle then is not to focus on the big things (e.g., avoiding casinos, addictions), but instead on the beginning of little compromises (e.g., not praying some hours of the breviary or the Examen Prayer, being late for appointments, not returning calls, not starting early to prepare for homilies).

To protect his priesthood, the priest must stay as far away as possible from the cliff's edge so as to avoid any chance of falling off. Thus, if he notices that he has begun to pay for things from the parish account or funds, or perhaps develops an attachment to acquiring stipends from helping parishes or giving talks, he must immediately bring it out into the open in Confession or spiritual direction so as to not develop a bad habit. If he notices that he is getting too close to some attractive parishioner, it would help to reveal it to his confessor or a brother priest, and to immediately establish resolutions to correct that situation before it gets out of hand. If he notices that he is beginning to spend too much time by himself and isolating himself from other priests, then perhaps he may take that to Examen Prayer and his spiritual director and make resolutions, so that he may not end up living the life of a bachelor as a priest and turn to some escape to combat loneliness, like alcohol or pornography. Of all the areas that require fidelity, fidelity to the norms of the liturgy has to have a privileged place. This is because the liturgy, especially the Holy Eucharist, is the "source and summit of the Christian life." We are dealing with the All-Holy One, and that which involves adoration to Him is sacred. Here are a few suggestions for this area:

- *Prayer before and after Mass:* Experience shows that prayer, especially one's meditation, before Mass brings a certain recollection to Mass. The people of God are edified when they see the parish priest praying before the Blessed Sacrament.
- *Silence in the Sacristy:* It is suggested that the priest do all the preparations (checking up on the ushers, choir director, lectors) ahead of time and reserve the last ten minutes for silence as preparation for entering this august mystery.
- *No bantering during Mass:* Because the holy Mass is very sacred, priests should not be bantering with other priests at Mass— we do not build the parish around the witty and warm personality of the pastor, but around Christ.
- *Interventions at appropriate moments:* There are three moments normally reserved for interventions: at the beginning and end of Mass (after the Prayer after Communion), and during the homily. Interventions should normally be kept to those moments, allowing for exceptions, and should be brief. Likewise, the parish announcements and any talks should follow the Prayer after Communion.
- *Vestments:* Even when it is hot, the priest should wear a chasuble, not just a stole. In hot climates, the priest can wear a lighter alb and chasuble. Likewise, with concelebration, priests might consider, when there are sufficient chasubles, wearing a chasuble. Naturally, if one is celebrating Mass when camping, one can perhaps use only an alb and stole.
- *Maintain the standard elements:* There is a tendency to treat elements as optional if they do not seem essential. We ought to keep the following: entrance and Communion antiphons (if no hymns); bells at the proper moments; and using Lectionaries, not missalettes, to proclaim the Word.
- *Progressive Solemnity:* Feast days and Solemnities should be celebrated with greater solemnity. Suggestions include: lighting of four or six candles; praying the Roman Canon and the Nicene Creed, singing the Preface and other parts (e.g., *Agnus Dei*), having flowers or an image of the Event (e.g., Assumption), taking effort to give a special homily for that occasion, using incense, having a Gospel procession, and inviting a deacon to assist.
- *Servers trained:* It is very discouraging, and even disedifying, to attend special liturgies like the Easter Vigil where it is clear that the servers had not rehearsed and the celebrant is “pushing” the servers around to various spots during the liturgy. Servers should be constantly trained, and their serving vestments should be long enough, and if they can afford it, they should wear dress shoes.

- *Priests should gain some expertise in the liturgy:* It is understandable that some priests, for various reasons, especially after the Second Vatican Council, may not have a deep knowledge of the liturgy. Nevertheless, it would be vital for the priest, whatever limitations he may start out with, to develop a deeper knowledge of this area. He can begin with the Sacramentary itself (notes) and the *General Instruction to the Roman Missal*. Books on the liturgy, such as those by Bishop Peter Elliott, are particularly accessible and helpful for the practical aspects, like rubrics.

C. Incompleteness without Self-Giving

Bishop Fulton Sheen, in speaking about Jesus' "hour" (His sacrifice) speaks about the incompleteness in our lives without the cross and self-giving:

Nature abhors incompleteness. Cut off the leg of a salamander and it will grow another. The impulses we deny in our waking life are often completed in our dreams. Our mutilated souls in one way or another are trying to complete their incompleteness and to perfect their imperfection.²⁸

This incompleteness takes place at two levels. The first is a lack of the cross in our lives. Bishop Sheen teaches that giving ourselves to total indulgence is incompleteness. Referring to the current philosophy of self-expressionism, like "letting yourself go," "doing whatever you please," without any restraining of errant impulses, is incompleteness: "The truth is that the only really self-expressive people in the world are in the insane asylum. They have absolutely no inhibitions, no conventions, and no codes. They are as self-expressive as hell, i.e., in complete disorder."²⁹

"Another mark of incompleteness is a continual state of self-reference": the everyday example that Bishop Sheen adduces was that the youth of America in his time remain juvenile longer than in any other country because of the "progressive" education that neglects self-discipline, and he also mentions that "Many married women which have deliberately spurned the 'hour' of childbearing are unhappy and frustrated."³⁰ Whenever the cross is missing, there is no resurrection, and no life and vitality. When the Greeks asked to

²⁸ Fulton Sheen, *Seven Words of Jesus and Mary*, Garden City (New York: Garden City Books, 1953), 81.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

see Jesus, He surprisingly spoke about taking up their crosses, and this is perhaps because they wanted to make Him a teacher in Athens and not a Redeemer in Jerusalem.³¹

The second step is very critical. To overcome incompleteness, one has to both receive and give. A couple that does not receive God will end up with incompleteness and unfulfillment:

It takes three to make love, not two: you and you and God. Without God people only succeed in bringing out the worst in each other. Lovers who have nothing else to do but love one another, soon find there is nothing else. Without a central loyalty life is unfinished.³²

As much as one needs to receive God, one person also needs to give. Bishop Sheen makes the striking contrast between the Sea of Galilee, which is “always fresh and blue and gives life to all the living things within its sunlit waters,” because it gives its waters; and the Dead Sea, which can support no life in its waters or on its shores because it has no outlet.³³

“The habit of criticism is the best indication of an incomplete life.” When there is an incomplete life, we end up with three possible criticisms: criticism of others, which reveals something to which we are most unconsciously inclined; criticism of religion, with seeking of mystery in some other form; and the state of continual self-reference.³⁴ He makes a strong statement that when we are displeased with life, the problem is with ourselves, with the lack of giving and of the cross:

If nothing pleases you, it is because you do not please yourself. If you rarely find a person or thing you like, it is because you do not like yourself. Life does not allow egocentricity to establish its own order, for to life selfishness is disorder. But how shall this disordered self be oriented to others except by discipline. That is why in the center of the Kingdom of God there is a Cross.³⁵

³¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

³² *Ibid.*, 84.

³³ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-84.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

Beyond living the faith, the New Testament priest is called to be a “priest and victim,” that is, the priest is also a victim. That is why, as Bishop Sheen pointed out, when Peter correctly answered Jesus’ question that He was “the Christ, the son of the Living God,” Jesus revealed who the Son of God is: “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Lk 19:20-22). Bishop Sheen adds that Thomas the Apostle was correct in insisting after Christ’s death that “unless I see the wounds...,” for he would not believe in a God-made-man unless he saw proof of His love, that God is indeed love, by seeing His wounds. Bishop Sheen also lamented that after Vatican II, in the aftermath of the mass exodus of priests and religious, that many wanted Christ but without the cross. Our parishioners might also wish to see if we too are priest and victim, are one with Christ on the cross. They may ask questions such as these:

- Will you love the Church and obey her doctrinal teachings and liturgical norms?
- Will you take steps to protect your priestly celibacy?
- Will you be faithful to prayer, no matter what the circumstances, and intercede for us, especially at Mass and before the tabernacle?
- Will you go beyond administration (e.g., being consumed about paying off the parish debt) to be a shepherd to your people?
- Will you forget yourself and consider our needs?
- Will you as a good shepherd be courageous in correcting and protecting us as needed from false teachings?
- Will you celebrate Mass every day and arrange for Mass even on your day off?
- Will you put great emphasis on the sacrament of Confession and not tell us that we are confessing too often?
- Will you avoid finding your priestly fulfillment outside the parish and give us your wholehearted attention, the task entrusted to you by the bishop?
- Will you love us as “family,” and remember us even after you have moved to another parish?
- Will you keep your faith solid and grounded and teach us about Mary and the saints, love of the Eucharist, the Rosary, Christ’s Passion, the holy Father, about the last things, and spiritual warfare?

D. Opposition from the World

A priest can become discouraged before the increasing opposition of the world. In our times, the Church appears to have less and less impact on society. She is not only marginalized, as in the domain of science, but she is opposed, as in movements supporting abortion and same-sex unions. At the time of this writing, Ireland, a faithful defender of the Church for so many centuries, has seen its Prime Minister calling out the Church and demanding the breaking of the confessional seal for abuse situations, and Ireland has also just recently legalized abortion for cases a mother's life is deemed at risk.

There is a temptation to discouragement, despair, resentment, and to ask, "what is the point, why go on?" Fr. Jean d'Elbée offers some words of advice:

You must realize that throughout your life, at each step, you will find the Cross of your divine Model, your King, crucified and crowned with thorns, Jesus. Humiliation is a bitter Cross. Abandonment is a real crucifixion when it is rightly understood. Mass and Communion are inseparable from Calvary. There is no reparation without penance and sacrifice. In the apostolate the money to buy souls is suffering, accepted with love. Suppress the Cross in your life, and everything crumbles. The Cross is the structure. As it bore the Savior, it bears salvation, and so it must bear us also, and all our works.³⁶

The key is not ever to look at the cross without Jesus. Fr. d'Elbée points out that the cross brings many fruits: it proves our love for Jesus; it is His path, which He desires that all His lovers and disciples follow; it helps us detach ourselves from this earth to look at eternity; it is often a prelude to a great grace; "All love's chosen ones are given great trials"; suffering is an expiation for our sins; the cross is always given in love, within Jesus' design of love, it is a proof of our love for Him and His love for us; and it is a means for saving souls.³⁷

Let us also turn to the first homily in Cardinal Ratzinger's compilation of homilies in *Ministers of Joy: Scriptural Meditations on Priestly Spirituality*, that

³⁶ Fr. Jean d'Elbée, *I Believe in Love*, 195.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 196-203.

treats this very thorny issue that threatens to enervate us. He begins with a common theme he has developed, the very crucial insight of the paradigm of the mustard seed. What we tend to look for are great, visible victories in the world, where God normally works in a small and hidden way, as He taught in the parable of the mustard seed. In this context, we keep in mind as well that our current situation is no different than that of Jesus' time: Jesus Himself did not drive out the Roman conquering forces from their land, He did not preach outside of Israel, He failed in converting the Jewish masses, and died as a criminal on the cross. Yet, except in history books, all the great figures and movements of that time have disappeared from the memory of the living, while Christ's Church has spread to the ends of the world.

Cardinal Ratzinger teaches a second dynamic found in Jesus' principle, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). This means that the priest offers the grain of wheat that dies at the Eucharist, in which he himself must participate. In this dying, he knows the grain of wheat does not just point back to the cross (dying), it also points forward to the resurrection (rising, new life) and its hidden power. Cardinal Ratzinger adds that, in spite of the personal weaknesses of the priest, with this dynamic at work, the priest's words and work are capable of renewing and touching many, for example, those going through crises and those at their death beds.³⁸

E. Weaknesses and Defects can Enable us to Depend on God

It is helpful for priests to remember that we get holier as we grow older. As mentioned, St. Escrivá used to say, "People, like fine wine, age slowly," an insight also found in the teachings of St. John of the Cross. This is a consoling and encouraging insight, as we can be troubled by our own apparent lack of progress or by the continued presence of defects. It is helpful to know, as long as we are trying to remain faithful and are also docile, our Lord will lead us to the path of increasing holiness, especially as we give ourselves to our flock in the apostolate assigned to us.

³⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Ministers of Joy: Scriptural Meditations on Priestly Spirituality*, Ch. 1, "There are always Seeds that Bear Fruit for the Harvest," 11-23.

As we continue to struggle, it may be helpful to keep an important wisdom of life in mind. Rather than be troubled by our defects, perhaps we can come to accept them and see that grace will come through them. This is key and a great lesson the Lord taught the apostle Paul, who after learning to accept the “thorn in the flesh”, was able to proclaim, “I glory in my weakness.”

It is precisely through our weaknesses that we can learn to depend on God, and that God Himself can lift us up like a father picking up a child. Attaining the heights of holiness appears thus to presuppose knowing that life is “gritty and grimy,”³⁹ and that we should not be unduly troubled by the presence of weaknesses or character defects.

F. Suffering and Failure

It is a paradox, as St. John of the Cross describes, that we grow in the spiritual life and our ministry bears most fruits through suffering and failure. Pope Benedict XVI points to this truth in the lives of the prophets and of Jesus Christ:

Prophets fail: Their message goes too much against general opinion and the comfortable habits of life. It is only through failure that their word becomes efficacious. This failure of the prophets is an obscure question mark hanging over the whole history of Israel, and in a certain way it constantly recurs in the history of humanity. Above all, it is also again and again the destiny of Jesus Christ: He ends up on the Cross. But that very Cross is the source of great fruitfulness.... He himself is the grain of wheat. His “failure” on the Cross is exactly the way leading from the few to the many, to all: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12:32).⁴⁰

Those who have had the privilege of living through and seeing the last years of Pope John Paul II in his physical infirmity have had a living witness to this truth. George Weigel has noted that Pope John Paul II, as his incapacity grew, became more acutely aware that it is not “words that change the world but blood.” He remained ever the disciple of St. John of

³⁹ Fr. Thomas Rosica, a Basilian priest and Scripture scholar, spoke of the “griminess” of priestly life at an annual retreat for priests in Toronto.

⁴⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 189-190.

the Cross, who knew that it is only the Gospel of the cross, the Gospel of suffering, that brings Redemption. But even greater than the physical diminution that he endured are perhaps the many oppositions he faced as he strove to share his far-reaching insights to those within the Church: for example, the many canonizations because the world needs models; the need for conversion and for the Church to admit her human errors so as to reach out to our separated brothers and sisters to attain the unity desired by Christ; and to “propose and not impose,” instead of crushing all opposition in the episcopacy or those dissenting from the Church’s teaching in his respect for each human person. There is need for mortification in the priest’s daily life, both corporal and interior (Fr. Carvajal’s presentation in *Through Wind and Waves*, 181-185, is recommended). A very helpful presentation on the cross in our lives is given in a chapter in Fr. Jean d’Elbée’s *I Believe in Love* (“The Cross,” 195-218).

G. Conservative and Liberal

One can often find indications of a divide between the right and the left, conservative and liberal. The author, along with many in the Church, does not find this distinction satisfying nor helpful in resolving the difficulties of this tension. For one, this distinction derives from the paradigm of opposing ideologies within the political arena, and does not indicate the rightness of either side. Such opposing tendencies remind one of the political ideology of Marxism, that there should be a certain class struggle, in this case, within the Church. The “conservative” may love the liturgy, but not give much concern to the poor; the “liberal” may be concerned about social justice but seek to form the Church according to his own mind.

What is proposed is the principle *in medio stat virtus*, a middle ground that is actually a peak that towers above the two valleys (extremes), that is centered upon the Holy Spirit. For example, at a conclave, the electing Cardinals’ primary concern should not be whether a candidate is conservative or liberal, but should be about praying to find out who the Holy Spirit desires as pope. This was the path of Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, who, at the Second Vatican Council, did not concern himself about progressive or conservative factions in the Church, so much as seeing the Holy Spirit guiding the Council. Thus, it is suggested that a new paradigm be presented. One possibility is to use a balance of an alternate pairing that derives from faith

language (not political)— fidelity and openness: (i) fidelity to the Church, and (ii) openness to God’s action in the present. Fidelity retains and represents continuity (conservation); openness seeks to be led and represents docility (change): that is, both preservation and change.

(i) In this pairing, the foundation, where we begin, has to be fidelity to the Church. Now, since the Church represents Christ— nay, since the Church *is* the Body and Bride of Christ— she is in effect the presence of Christ in space and time. As such, obedience to the Church is obedience to Christ, viewed directly or indirectly: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Lk 10:16). One outstanding example of balance, of obedience with discernment, is St. Teresa of Jesus in her encounters with the Spanish Inquisition. She expressed her desire to be a true “daughter of the Church,” obedient to the extreme of burning the good books the Inquisition condemned.

(a) With regard to the disciplinary aspect, she responded by pure and simple obedience to all that was imposed by authority. She did not make subtle distinctions by asserting that one ruling had come from the Pope, another from.... (Many are doing this to-day, making distinctions between the Holy See, the Holy Father, officials of different Congregations etc. Distinctions of this type are so Jansenistic.)... She was already “a daughter of the Church” and wrote, “For the smallest ceremony I would die a thousand deaths.”⁴¹

Yet, there is also a discernment between the disciplinary aspect and the doctrinal aspect, which was not questioned here:

(b) But the doctrinal aspect was different. We must keep in mind that the Inquisition acted only in its proper field of discipline. It corrected abuses, punished those found guilty of heresy, but did not impose a kind of syllabus pronouncing on the questions under discussion between the *Letrados* and the *Espirituales*, questions relating to mental prayer...⁴²

Imitating St. Teresa of Jesus, the priest too wants to be a “son of the Church,” and to always act with a deep *sentire cum Ecclesia* (thinking with the

⁴¹ Otilio Rodriguez, *The Teresian Gospel*, 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*

mind of the Church) and deep sense of the Tradition of the Church, a deep sense of the universal Church. Yet, we also understand that the human side of the Church, as with the Inquisition, or today a functionary within a Vatican Congregation or a diocesan chancery, has limits and can err.

(ii) Where “fidelity” seeks to preserve, “openness” (the second element in this pairing) seeks to be led by slightest breath of the promptings and direction of the Holy Spirit in our time. Being led is more comprehensive than and distinct from a very formal or dogmatic obedience. Being led implies recognition and distrusting of our weakness and turning to God, seeking only to be an instrument— it is docility and surrender. It implies change, for the Church is a living organism, and like an embryo of an animal, does not only retain its original identity in her development but also develops in her organs and limbs. Thus, while the Church’s teaching never changes in its essence, the Church adapts and speaks to each age, and is open to the new tasks and charisms given by the Holy Spirit Himself.

Thus, to be true to Christ and the Holy Spirit, the disciple of Christ and son of the Church must be open: to the new lay movements in their different forms, including the Charismatic Renewal (approved by the Church as a work of the Holy Spirit); to the Church’s call to look seriously at the possibility of evolution, and given the approval of Henri de Lubac and Bishop Fulton Sheen, keeping in mind the Church’s monitum, to the possibility that Teilhard de Chardin could be in the main correct in his thesis; to the call of the Church to seek unity through ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue; to sound new approaches in theology, following the example of Pope John Paul II, who employed phenomenology to further the cause of the faith (but we must, like Paul, “test everything”); to seeing the Second Vatican Council and her teachings as a great gift; to Pope John Paul II’s call to a New Evangelization in the third millennium; and to Pope Francis’ call to live poverty and love those who are poor and oppressed.

H. 30-Day Ignatian Spiritual Exercises

Priests and seminarians who have had the privilege of participating in the 30-day Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius offer fulsome praise for the great experience and the many benefits received. It is said that the graces received in this exercise are what that person needs at the time, and they are usually

tremendous graces. One priest confessed that the graces he received from this retreat rivalled those he received at his priestly Ordination; a transitional deacon raved about his experience of the Spiritual Exercises at the Institute of Priestly Formation in Omaha.

This, of course, is no surprise to those who follow the Ignatian charism. St. Ignatius of Loyola revealed that the Spiritual Exercises are a great gift from God to the Church, and he considered it the best gift that he could give to anyone (this was what he said to his former confessor from Paris, and was the way he wished to thank him). Jesuits themselves go through the Spiritual Exercises twice during the course of their formation. Strong programs for sabbaticals, such as the one at the North American College in Rome, can renew the priest; but the most powerful and transformative during a sabbatical might be the thirty-day Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

Let us pause to note a significant benefit of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. It has proven to be an outstanding instrument to inspire Christians to give themselves totally to Christ—this is its principal goal. Within that retreat, he is inspired to follow Christ, culminating in the meditation on the “Call of the King.” In essence, the exercise of seeing the King (Christ) going to battle, and asking his soldiers if they would come with Him and share all the hardships and dangers of going out on the field of battle, with the promise of his friendship and eternal gratitude.

It is my Will to conquer all the land of unbelievers. Therefore, whoever would like to come with me is to be content to eat as I, and also to drink and dress, etc., as I: likewise he is to labor like me in the day and watch in the night, etc., that so afterwards he may have part with me in the victory, as he has had it in the labors.⁴³

For the priest, in his love for and desire to join this King, his response can be the inspired prayer of oblation of St. Ignatius:

Eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation with Your favour and help, in the presence of Your infinite Goodness and in the presence of Your

⁴³ For the writings of St. Ignatius, including the *Spiritual Exercises*, *Reminiscences*, and *Diary*, see St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings* (Toronto: Penguin Classics, 1996), with “Call of the Earthly King” found on pages 303-304.

glorious Mother and of all the Saints of the heavenly Court; that I want and desire, and it is my deliberate determination, if only it be Your greater service and praise, to imitate You in bearing all injuries and all abuse and all poverty of spirit, and actual poverty, too, if Your most Holy Majesty wants to choose and receive me to such life and state.⁴⁴

This call is nothing other than the Gospel and what Christ Himself lived: “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me” (Jn 12:25-26).

3. Temptations in, and Digressions from, the Exercise of the Priesthood

A. Loss of the Transcendent Dimension of Priestly Identity

Four areas can pose particular challenges for the priest. First, there has been much confusion about the identity of the priest in the years following the Second Vatican Council. There are two extremes to be avoided: seeing the mission as deriving from the People of God, and the opposite, acting with a certain superiority and authoritarianism (clericalism). The mission derives from Christ and the Spirit, with a real authority that is exercised in service. The bishop and priest are both truly spiritual fathers.

Yet, while this call and mission does not make them superior to their people, their office is higher as shepherd and as “*alter Christus*,” and thus they are called to greater holiness. Henri de Lubac speaks of this at some length about “The Fatherhood of the Clergy” in his book *The Motherhood of the Church*. He writes that history shows that it is not the hierarchy, but holiness that has proven to influence the Church:

... it is still easy to demonstrate, throughout the history of the Church, that the most active and influential members of this great body have often been laymen or priests who did not belong to the “hierarchy.” What

⁴⁴ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, in “The Consideration of the Kingdom,” from Louis J. Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago, IL: The Newman Press, 1951), 45. For a contemporary work on *The Spiritual Exercises*, you may consider David L. Fleming, *Draw me into your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises* (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources), 1996.

greater or more fruitful initiatives could be found, for example, than those of Benedict of Nursia, Francis of Assisi or Ignatius of Loyola?⁴⁵

In a clear-sighted historical analysis, Cardinal Ratzinger identifies the misdirection taken in the disastrous post-Vatican II digressions from the true nature and exercise of the priesthood.

In a homily on the priesthood, Cardinal Ratzinger recovers two dimensions that are vital: reclaiming the link from the Old Testament for the true identity of the priesthood and reclaiming the sacred. He links the post-Vatican II loss of the identity of the priesthood to the rejection of the Old Testament background of the priesthood, along with a veering in the New Testament to an anti-ritual emphasis on purely human love:

... a main reason for the crisis of the image of the priesthood that has its roots in exegesis and theology was the separation of the Old Testament from the New, with their relationship coming to be seen only in the dialectical tension and opposition of law and gospel.... Anyone who prays the priestly Psalm 16 with the other psalms related to it, especially Psalm 119, will find one thing has become quite obvious: that the fundamental opposition and contrasting of ritual worship and prophecy, of priesthood and prophecy or Christology, quite simply collapses.... The Old Testament belongs to Christ and in Christ to us. It is only in the unity of the two testaments that faith can live.⁴⁶

In fact, in this disastrous separation, Christology “meant the final and definitive transcending of all priesthood, the abolition of all boundaries between sacred and profane, and also the turning away from the entire history of religion in its various forms and the idea of priesthood.”⁴⁷ The result was a new form of priesthood that was based on prophecy and not ritual, and with a “pure ethic of shared humanity that found God not in the temple but in one’s neighbour.”⁴⁸ Cardinal Ratzinger is pointing to a flattening of the transcendent or vertical and a turn exclusively to the horizontal or human that focuses on social justice. For Cardinal Ratzinger, “The reclamation of the Old Testament also entails overcoming the

⁴⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 108.

⁴⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Ministers of Joy*, 120-122.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

denunciation of the sacred and the mystification of the profane.”⁴⁹ The world thirsts for the transcendent, and when the Church— and priests in particular— go into the world and are formed by the world instead of transforming the world, then the world suffers:

... “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). But this dynamic element of mission, this inner openness and breadth of the gospel cannot be translated into the formula: “Go into the world and yourselves become the world, go into the world and confirm it in its secularity.” The opposite is the case. There is God’s holy mystery, the mustard seed of the gospel, which does not collapse with the world but is destined to penetrate the entire world.⁵⁰

To do this, we must “rediscover the courage for the sacred, the courage to distinguish what is Christian: not to fence it off but in order to transform, to be really dynamic.”⁵¹ He quotes Eugène Ionesco, one of the fathers of the theatre of the absurd, in a 1975 interview, that captures the absurdity of this trend:

The world is losing its way, the Church is losing itself in the world, the priests are stupid and mediocre... they are happy just to be ordinary people like all the other mediocre left-wing petty bourgeois.... Soon for the communion of bread and wine people will set up a bar and offer sandwiches and Beaujolais. This seems to me to be incredibly stupid, to indicate a total lack of *nous*.⁵²

Ionesco concludes that “Fraternity is neither mediocrity nor fraternization.... But meanwhile we need a rock.”⁵³ Our people, real people living in the world, have a great need: “... it becomes clear that one cannot serve this world with a kind of twee banality. It needs to be transformed, not confirmed; it needs the radicality of the gospel.”⁵⁴ Our people thirst for the transcendent; they seek to be fed.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 124.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 125.

B. Relying on Human Effort (Activism, Horizontalism)

A second temptation is to substitute human effort for divine workings. Derek Prince, an Evangelical expert on curses, discovered this truth when a community he was working with fell apart spectacularly because of this failure. Where human effort, and not God’s work, is dominant,

Theology will be exalted above revelation;
intellectual education above character building;
psychology above discernment;
program above the leading of the Holy Spirit;
eloquence above supernatural power;
reasoning above the walk of faith;
laws above love.⁵⁵

The priest, if he follows this path, will be tempted to get caught up with this or that good program, putting primary emphasis on programs for evangelization, youth, and the parish. One of the best pieces of advice given to this author as a newly ordained priest was this insight: “When you preach, many people will hear you. But if you want to touch hearts, do so in the confessional, one by one.”

Archbishop Charles Chaput expressed a similar sentiment in a public interview (“fireside chat”) that was the evening section of a Symposium, “Faith in the Public Square.” When asked what the Church needed to do in the new evangelization, he gave an unexpected reply. Where most were likely expecting some new thought on use of the public square, his response was something to the effect that “We do what the Church has always done: build up the Church brick by brick.”⁵⁶ This approach focuses not on changing others, but on changing oneself first.

Have no doubt that it is in the degree to which you change yourself that everything around will change. A new world will not be remade except if you become yourself this “new man,” of whom St. Paul speaks, “created according to God in justice and holiness of truth.” If you are just, you will

⁵⁵ Derek Prince, “Legalism, Carnality, Apostasy,” *Blessing or Curse: You can Choose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2006), 183.

⁵⁶ Archbishop Charles Chaput, “The Relationship between Law and Morality” (Colloquium at the “Faith in the Public Square” Symposium— celebrations on occasion of the Centenary of St. Augustine’s Seminary, St. Michael’s College School for the Arts, August 6, 2014).

radiate justice; if you are merciful, you will radiate mercy; if you are truthful, you will radiate truth; if you are peaceful, you will radiate peace. Yes, change yourself by letting Jesus transform you into Himself by love.⁵⁷

The big pitfall here, instead of changing self first (holiness), is the temptation of activism, to allow the busy ministry to consume the priest, often resulting in the neglect of other priorities. The result is that “father” tries to fix problems and change others.

The problem with activism is not just that it can cause imbalance in our human and spiritual life, and even burnout; most importantly, it also deprives us of the all-important union with God. It has been the discovery of some in the intercession ministry that, without union with the Blessed Trinity, their work becomes ineffective— it was not built upon contemplation. Activism is a distortion of a profound reality: we rely principally on ourselves instead of relying on the Lord (Jn 15:5: “apart from me, you can do nothing”). We must learn the efficacy of not depending on ourselves; of getting out of the way to allow God to do the work. Jesus Himself taught the apostles this lesson when they were unable to cast out a demon, which also applies to the priest’s dependence on God’s action in his ministry: “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.” (Mk 9:14-29).

C. Fear in Protecting the Flock

This leads us to the third difficulty, the fear of challenging his people when there are issues of concern. In those situations, the priest’s love for Christ and for his people must be the primary concern, and not the opposition he might face. A new pastor can run into problems in a parish when the former pastor was not faithful to the Church’s teaching or was lax in his faith life. St. John Vianney is very firm in this regard:

“If a priest is determined not to lose his soul,” he exclaimed, “so soon as any disorder arises in the parish, he must trample underfoot all human considerations as well as the fear of the contempt and hatred of his people. He must not allow anything to bar his way in the discharge of duty, even were he certain of being murdered on coming down from the

⁵⁷ Jean d’Elbée, *I Believe in Love*, 160.

pulpit. A pastor who wants to do his duty must keep his sword in hand at all times.”

“Did not St. Paul himself write to the faithful of Corinth: ‘I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls, although loving you more, I be loved less.’”⁵⁸

The priest can seek to imitate St. John Vianney, who was opposed by some parishioners because of his efforts to covert the parish. When a petition to oust him from parish accidentally ended up in his hands, he signed it.

D. Danger of Routine

A fourth common area or challenge is the temptation of the demon who seeks to transform evangelization into a routine and duty. The following text offers food for thought.

On the contrary, spreading the Good News ought to be the principal source of joy for the minister. Collaborating in the coming of God’s kingdom and working in the vineyard of the Lord should be a constant experience of happiness and inner fulfillment for the minister.

... [The labourers in the parable who were hired earlier in the day] had not understood that the wage was unimportant. Neither was it the expression of true compensation for their work. Their reward and compensation were the act of having dedicated the entire day in the field of the Lord, with the joy and happiness that it produced....

... Part of their happiness is seeing the good that God does through them. They humbly give thanks to the Lord because Christ chose them as his free and responsible instruments to “bear fruit that will remain” (Jn 15:16). At the same time, without losing their peace and joyful gratitude, ministers must also humbly ask for pardon. Due to their personal failures and lack of holiness, God has not been able to accomplish all the good that he would have liked. Because the ministers are not better, many people whom they serve are not better, remain unconverted, do not have hope restored.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Francis Trochu, *The Curé d’Ars*, 169.

⁵⁹ Segundo Galilea, *Temptation and Discernment*, 39.

E. A Priest Must be Grounded

A fifth area is one that is a very subtle temptation. It is a necessary foundation for the priest to have saints as mentors and intercessors. The temptation is to choose “angel saints,” who have great mystical experiences (e.g., St. Teresa of Jesus) or accomplished heroic deeds like martyrdom (e.g., Canadian martyrs). For example, one Catholic woman was moved by the heroic example of Chinese Catholic martyrs under the Communist government (forced marches, some dying on the way), yet her spiritual director found that she was failing in some basic ways in the spiritual life. When one is “grounded” and follows the path of Nazareth, then one is attracted to the saints who had hidden lives and were often overlooked. It was remarkable that two retreat directors giving retreats at a seminary in the same year highly praised the trio of Polish saints: St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Faustina, and St. John Paul II, saints who can be easily overlooked because they are “devotional.” Both retreat directors seemed grounded: devoted to Mary and the Church, and were very aware of their personal weaknesses. It is a healthy sign to be attracted to little “Thérèse” because of her attraction to being little and unknown and for her personal love for Jesus. A priest should have special attraction to St. John Vianney, as patron of all priests, who was banished to a little country parish and even looked down upon by fellow priests because of his poor education and attire. It is good to be attracted to saints who have a special love for our Lady, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Padre Pio.

CHAPTER 8

CROWN: NEW EVANGELIZATION

(Christ's New Apostle)

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! (Lk 12:49-50)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (Mt 23-37)

The crown of the Christian's spiritual life is concretely expressed by the innermost longing of the heart of Jesus: "I came to cast fire upon the earth." Throughout His earthly life, how He wished this fire were already blazing, and today too, how He is "constrained" (in agony) until it consumes the whole world and He gathers Jerusalem as a "hen gathers her brood under her wings." The "fire" here refers to the Holy Spirit Himself, and Jesus was expressing His burning desire that the Holy Spirit would descend and consume all hearts. One diocesan priest, inspired by the words of St. Catherine of Siena, "My spirit is fire," chose for his Ordination holy card priestly motto these words of Jesus, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth." A few years later, one of his priest classmates shared how he wondered why this priest would choose a text that brings up allusions to the fires of purgatory and hell. This classmate was surprised to find out that the fire in question is the Holy Spirit, who as the consuming "Living Flame of Love" of heaven, wishes both to possess all hearts and make them kindle with fire, so that they can join Christ in bringing the world to the Father.

To see something of the power of this "fire" when it possesses a soul, we might look at St. Maximilian Kolbe. Already as a student in Rome, he was evangelizing on the streets and had conceived of a sodality of the Militia of the Immaculate (*Militia Immaculata*) before he was ordained. On his return to Poland, he set up the great "City of the Immaculate" (*Niepokalanow*) near Warsaw,¹ and heeding the clarion call of the Holy Father for missions, went

¹ *Niepokalanow* was a self-supporting community with 762 inhabitants, and included a seminary, a mission house, a then-modern printing establishment, and a radio station.

off to Japan like another Francis Xavier to build a second such city at Nagasaki (*Mugenzai No Sono*); he did all this with tuberculosis that led to his functioning on only one lung. André Frossard, one of his biographers, gives a little taste of this zeal in his work to evangelize through a Catholic newspaper, *Knights of the Immaculata*, that promoted love of Mary and conversion of all souls to Christ:

A little before Christmas 1921, Kolbe cured or not, received permission to return to Cracow. He went back to the Franciscan fold with a project that would arouse mixed interest within the order. He was no longer content with the door-to-door apostolate and the railway symposiums; he wanted to circulate a newspaper, as if to cast out a net. In the beginning it would not be a very big trawl; he will be casting over a rather modest range. In short, it was to be a small journal. The layout was already in his head. There would be a few pages; the paper would be the least expensive possible; the cost of composition would be minimal and the editorial costs nonexistent....

... For intellects clouded by the related strains of materialism and ideology, salvation could be found only in the faith. The *Knight* [newspaper] would tell them so, in the language of chivalry, which is the language of prayer and honour. As for the editorial format, it would be devoid of useless complications. Kolbe's instructions to his contributors were short and clear. With this formidable candour, he told them: "Do not write anything that could not be signed by the Virgin Mary."²

If being consumed by this "fire" is the crown of the priestly identity and work, it explains why some do not make great spiritual progress. If the design in everything is that "the first in intention is the last in execution," it implies that the intentionality is all-important and essential at the outset. Concepción Cabrera de Armida teaches about a triptych within Christian life: God is love; the path is crucified love; and the center is Christ.³ The intention or goal has to be love of souls; the path has to be crucified love; and the means has to be Christ, which entails arriving at the sense of total helplessness on our part and total dependence on Him. We fail to grow

² André Frossard, *Forget not Love: The Passion of Maximilian Kolbe* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 75-76.

³ Concepción Cabrera de Armida, ed. M.M. Philippon, *Conchita: A Mother's Diary* (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul's, 2014), 136-145.

because we do not even think “big”— the salvation of souls; even if we seek this goal, we may not choose the path of crucified love; and then, it has to be not primarily through the priest’s talents or human activity and projects but through Christ.

1. Pope John Paul II as a Model Apostle of the New Evangelization

Given this urgency, let us see how we can implement this new evangelization. We can look to the lives and teachings of two figures filled with fire: Pope John Paul II (partly from Pope Benedict XVI’s vision of John Paul II) and St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

A. Pontificate, Example, and Teaching of John Paul II as Prepared by the Holy Spirit for the New Evangelization

If it is true that the Holy Spirit has prepared us in a cosmic way for a new visitation by Christ, a new Pentecost, and a new sending forth of the “twelve” in a new evangelization, with a renewed instruction, *duc in altum*, then it logically follows that He has prepared the general, John Paul II, as He has prepared each priest, for the third millennium. We can translate some of John Paul II’s spiritual program into a program for priests, and we can do this at two levels: (1) from his teaching on the priesthood, and (2) from the example of his life.

(1) *Pope John Paul II’s Documents*

In regard to his teaching on the priesthood, one must refer to his principal document on the priesthood, the post-synodal exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992); but this is a larger treatise that is not easily summarized. The collection of *Letters to my Brother Priests 1979-2001*,⁴ Letters for Holy Thursdays for that period, can be helpful but not as comprehensive, given that they were written individually for each year. Instead, for the purposes of a summary view, we refer to another series of Catecheses on the priesthood given at General Audiences in 1993, *Priesthood in the Third Millennium: Addresses of Pope John Paul II 1993*.⁵ These 18 Catecheses from his

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Letters to my Brother Priests 1979-2001* (Princeton, N.J.: Scepter Publishers, 2001).

⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Priesthood in the Third Millennium: Addresses of Pope John Paul II 1993* (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1994).

General Audiences are particularly helpful here, as Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan (the Pro-Nuncio to the United States, 1990-1998), noted in the Foreword of this Collection: “They deserved particular attention, because of their organic unity and exhaustiveness.”⁶ These talks represent the faith of the Church on the priesthood, similar to Vatican II’s document on the priesthood, *Presbyterorum ordinis*.

Yet, a glance at the titles and subtitles of these talks reveals something of the vision of the priesthood for Pope John Paul II. What draws our attention is the emphases that we discern:

- a) *Primary Emphasis is on Priestly Nature, Identity, and Tasks* (note his focus on Christ): “Sharers in the Priesthood of Christ,” “Preachers of the Gospel,” “Sanctifiers through the Sacraments,” “Shepherds to the Community,” “Consecrated to God,” “Consecrated to Christ through Celibacy,” “Without any Political Mission,” “Servants of Christ’s Flock,” “Not Choosing God but Chosen by God.”
- b) *Within that Emphasis, the Eucharist is highlighted above everything else*: “Ordained to Celebrate Mass,” “Spiritually Rooted in the Eucharist,” “Discovering Priestly Identity in the Eucharist,” “During Mass, Aware of an Infinitely Surpassing Gift.”
- c) *There is a Special Concern for Unity*: “Union with Their Bishops and Their Fellow Priests,” “United to Bishops in Charity and Obedience,” “Charitable Cooperation among Brothers.”
- d) *Special Aspects, like our Lady and Prayer, are Highlighted*: “Devoted to Prayer,” “Specially Linked to the Blessed Virgin Mary,” “Following Christ as Model of Priestly Poverty and Detachment,” “Granted the Gift of Celibacy through Humble Prayer.”

There is a simplicity in these Catecheses, though based upon the clear teaching of the Church (note his many references to Church documents), a simplicity that makes one think that John Paul II is simply describing what he himself lived. This is especially the case when he speaks of the centrality of the holy Mass and visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

⁶ Ibid., Foreword, 14. In seeking to delineate the thought of Pope John Paul II, we are intentionally and clearly setting aside a number of fine documents produced by the Congregation for the Clergy, such as *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (1994); *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* (2002); *Adoration, Reparation, Spiritual Motherhood of Priests* (2007).

(2) *Pope John Paul II's Life*

Beyond the writings of John Paul II, we look to the example of his life for a renewed evangelization as of a modern Paul. One could look to his autobiographical works: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994), *Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of my Priestly Ordination* (1996), and *Rise, Let us be on our Way* (2004). These however have many autobiographical details and are more difficult to mine for a program of priesthood. Nevertheless, let us draw out general highlights from his many biographies.

Spirituality of Accompaniment

Let us begin with the key element of John Paul II's faith that must be highlighted, as it appears to help form the person he became: the spirituality of accompaniment. Professor Stanislaw Grygiel— whose family has been friends with John Paul II since his days as a youth— relates the core of the Pope's path.

It is one he learned from Jan Pietraszko, a great priest and bishop, now a Servant of God. To him, John Paul II once said, "Bishop Jan, I learn theology from you," and wrote in a telegram on the occasion of the bishop's death, "You showed me the way to young people."⁷ Grygiel wrote the following about Pietraszko's method:

It had no conceptually developed method. To put it simply, he was always with us young people, not only in church. He prayed with us, dined with us, meditated and took recreation with us. Looking at him, we saw a fascinating way of being in the world. Being fascinated, we looked for the spring from which he, on his knees, drew water. From a priest who is not on his knees, it is possible to learn to drink fancy, artificial beverages from the bottle, but never pure spring water.⁸

We note in passing the distinction made between the priests based on whether they are "on his knees" (pray). The spirituality of accompaniment presupposed a matrix or culture steeped in God, and this is one of the

⁷ Włodzimierz Rędzioch, *Inside the Vatican* (April 2010): 52.

⁸ Stanislaw Grygiel, "The Pope who looked to the Laity, the Friend in whom I recognized God's Faithfulness," in Włodzimierz Rędzioch, ed., *Stories about Saint Pope John Paul II: Told by his Close Friends and Coworkers* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015).

profound insights of Pope John Paul II. Grygiel writes again with keen insight:

John Paul II and Bishop Pietraszko were the ones who made us see how culture consists of knowing how to cultivate the earth on which man grows and matures “so as to rise again”... Culture, they tell us, cannot be reduced to learning. On the contrary, nothing is more dangerous to society than learned men who are without culture. Because only culture is life-giving, because the purpose of culture is “to rise again.” Culture is either paschal or it is not culture.⁹

To be able to help many of the youth, John Paul II himself was steeped in culture, formed by being open to many positive influences: his faith, the Polish culture, his father, Cardinal Sapicha, his professors, Jan Tyranowski (who introduced him to the mystical teachings of St. John of the Cross), Polish saints like St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Faustina among others, Vatican II, and theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar. God formed him and prepared him in a certain matrix, and he was open to be formed as God led him. The danger is to be drawn by good things, like love of the poor-marginalized and the desire of being well-informed, and yet not be open to being formed by people and influences that God places immediately around us.

We can draw from Professor Grygiel’s insight: “Pastoral care is not a theory, but something which involves living together. Theories are just to be memorized. Pastoral care demands wisdom that originates from people living for one another. Wojtyla knew this very well.”¹⁰ It is a good thing when a priest, like John Paul II, is able to be very faithful to contemplation and also have friendships with and closeness to his people, especially with the young. This must however be a disinterested love, a love that avoids seeking attention and their esteem.

The manifold, zealous activity of John Paul II reveals a shepherd’s heart. We witnessed, among others, the following: his pontificate dedicated to the implementation of the teachings of Vatican II; his evangelical journeys; renewed catechesis, which includes the encyclicals; dialogues with Eastern

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Włodzimierz Rędzioch, *Inside the Vatican* (April 2010): 53.

Churches, other Christian denominations, Jews, and non-Christians; concern for the poor and suffering (e.g., seeking forgiveness of crushing international debts) and engagement on the world scene to alleviate suffering and to fight for issues of faith and morality; and publicly acknowledging the sins of the Church.

In John Paul II's personal life, we see the following elements: the primacy of faith with a unity of life (that enabled him to confront great obstacles and yet to proclaim, "be not afraid"); the contemplative dimension (John of the Cross); an apostolic spirit (e.g., his many papal journeys); a deep humanity (e.g., intellectual and cultural background); a solidarity with workers (consider his own experience of working in the chemical factory and his allying himself with the Polish Solidarity movement); dialogue (with Jewish friends and with enemies, like Nazis and Communists); a strong piety (spiritual direction, Confession, and devotion to Mary, saints, and martyrs); love of the poor and downtrodden; an interest in youth and families (accompanying youth, especially through the World Youth Days); and his openness to all (his ability to listen, to make each person feel as if he is the only person in the room).

B. Pope Benedict XVI's Understanding of Pope John Paul II's Example

We include here the insights of Pope Benedict XVI as they reflect the person and path of John Paul II. He himself gave an address on the new evangelization to a world gathering of Catechists in Rome in 2010: "In the face of a growing indifference to God, the new evangelization must not be about a social or political structure, but the person of Jesus Christ":

Human life cannot be realized by itself.... How does one learn the art of living? Which is the path towards happiness? To evangelize means: to show this path— to teach the art of living. At the beginning of His public life Jesus says: I have come to evangelize the poor (Lk 4:18); this means: I have the response to your fundamental question; I will show you the path of life, the path towards happiness— rather: I am that path. ¹¹

¹¹ "The New Evangelization: Building the Civilization of Love," EWTN, accessed November 7, 2015. https://www.ewtn.com/new_evangelization/Ratzinger.htm. The Address is composed of two sections: Section I: "Structure and Method in the New Evangelization": Structure, Method;

The following are six summary points drawn from this address. These elements summarize the teachings and mirror the example of John Paul II.

(1) ***The New Evangelization is God's work.*** There is a very important difference to note between the respective approaches of Satan and Christ. Satan offers vast kingdoms (the third temptation of Jesus in the desert), but Christ describes his kingdom with *the parable of the mustard seed*. We hope that it will grow into the largest possible tree to shelter many, but it always begins with the humble, littlest of seeds. In *God and the World*, Pope Benedict XVI already discusses the importance of the beginnings through a “mustard seed.”

In this connection the Lord uses the image of the mustard seed, as being the smallest of all grains or seeds, out of which in the end a tree will grow in which all the birds of the air will be able to nest. The mustard seed comprises, on the one hand, smallness—wherein I am wretched—but at the same time the potential for growth. In that way there is in this mustard seed a profound depiction of faith. Faith is seen thereby not as the mere acceptance of certain propositions, but is the seed of life within me. I am only a true believer if faith is present within me as a living seed, from which something is growing and which then truly changes my world and, in doing so, brings something new into the world as a whole.¹²

If we develop the seed of faith within us, then it “truly changes my world and, in doing so, brings something new into the world as a whole.” So we must fight against the temptation of impatience and of big plans, of attracting crowds like tele-evangelists in large masses and conventions. While we must make use of modern technology and methods of making ourselves heard,¹³ as the Church herself has encouraged— which is still the level of the “means,” the secondary one— holiness is the principal goal, as

and Section II: “The Contents Essential for the New Evangelization”: Conversion, the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ, and Eternal Life.

¹² Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World*, 46.

¹³ The Holy Father is calling upon priests to make use of the internet and modern technology to reach people with the message of Christ: “Priests are thus challenged to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audio-visual resources (images, videos, animated features, blogs, websites) which, alongside traditional means, can open up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelization and catechesis.” Message of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 44th World Communications Day, “The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word,” 16 May 2010.

Pope John Paul II teaches in *Novo millennio ineunte*. Furthermore, the antichrist works in his own name, but we work in God's name. This means that we must not push ourselves forward (preen).

(2) In terms of the correct lifestyle for evangelization, Don Didimo said, "Jesus preached by day; by night he prayed." The word of announcement must always be "***drenched in an intense life of prayer***"— this mirrors John Paul II's intense prayer life and contemplative spirit (see (4) below).

(3) ***Jesus' entire life led to the cross.*** Pope Benedict XVI said, "Jesus did not redeem the world with beautiful words but with his suffering and passion. His passion is the inexhaustible source of life for the world."¹⁴ St. Augustine, interpreting John 21 (feed my sheep), says that the mandate to shepherd is intimately connected to the prophecy of Peter's martyrdom that followed. Here, we recall Pope John Paul II's discovery of the centrality of the "gospel of blood" (living through 2 totalitarian regimes, loss of his entire family, assassination attempt on his life, Parkinson's disease, etc.)

(4) ***The new evangelization is incarnated in the very life of John Paul II.*** We ourselves have witnessed John Paul II's recollection at Mass, for example, how he was totally imbued in prayer and in communion with God, as is evident when he is leaning on his crozier, with his eyes tightly shut and his heart totally awash in God. The youth who see this are moved, for they see Christ living again in the person of this man. And they witnessed a deeper transformation. As a younger pope, John Paul II was able to reach out by his smile and his words; in his later years, burdened by illness, he spoke less and lived his teaching in his illness. This is the goal of our life, to move away from a ministry where words dominate.

(5) ***You must begin with conversion, repentance.*** Conversion means to come out of self-sufficiency to discover and accept our poverty. "Unconverted life is self-justification (I am no worse than the others); conversion is humility in entrusting oneself to the love of the Other, a love that becomes the measure and the criterion of my own life." This is often where we fail in our Christian life.

And this entails an examination of conscience: there is no access to God

¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, Address to World Gathering of Catechists, Rome, 2010, n. 2.

either in the Old Testament or New Testament without the prescription of John the Baptist and Jesus, “Repent.” This is why John Paul II, on the eve of the Jubilee, insisted on an examination of conscience. All of us are responsible for the present situation in the world.

(6) ***We may face uncertainties*** when we “throw out into the deep.” We have many doubts and questions and uncertainties about how to go about this new evangelization. But so did the apostles in the first evangelization when they were told, “Go out into the whole world, baptizing them in the name of the Father...” Only when we throw out into the deep will we engage the power of Christ. As he did to the first apostles, he now says to His new apostles, the second universal wave, “throw out into deep.”

Pope John Paul II renews the call to once more “start afresh again” (*Novo millennio ineunte*). Jesus’ Resurrection itself is a call to evangelization. The Second Vatican Council recalls in *Ad gentes* and *Lumen gentium* the constant teaching of the Church that the Church is missionary in nature, and that if she stops being missionary, she stops being “Church.”

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted the core of Christ’s entire mission and the deepest desire in his heart, “I came to cast fire upon the earth...” (Lk 12:49-50). Those who love Jesus imitate Him. And zeal for souls is that which most pleases the heart of Jesus— it is Christ’s very love in His Sacred Heart for His own. We find this zeal in all friends of Christ.

2. St. Thérèse of Lisieux as Another Model Apostle of the New Evangelization

One might immediately ask why, when treating of models for the priesthood, we select St. Thérèse of Lisieux, even if she may be “the greatest saint of modern times” (Pope St. Pius X).

Three immediate reasons come to mind: first, she is the patroness of missions, which alone links her intimately with the new evangelization; second, she saw her primary work as intercession for priests; and third, she had a great desire in a good and spiritual way to become all things for the work of faith: missionary, priest, martyr, etc. An example of her influence on priest-saints is St. Maximilian Kolbe, who was devoted to her, and who like her sought to convert the world:

As we have seen, Kolbe had been devoted to her since his youth, long before she was declared “patroness of the Missions.” These two spirits had to meet: they had in common the ardent desire to convert the earth, not by trying to impose any doctrine on men but by winning them to love, by love.¹⁵

From the spirituality of St. Thérèse, we can draw out four pillars of the new “apostles,” ones that are foundational and also interior.

(1) ***Eschatological Vision***. First, the foundation of St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s holiness appears to be her eschatological vision. Many are not aware that the foundation of her profound spirituality is strongly tied to her longing for eternity. If we recall St. Thérèse’s words in her *Autobiography*, and the prominence she gives to the influence of Charles Arminjon’s book,¹⁶ we shall understand its centrality. Here are two further pieces of evidence, unpublished until recently, which confirm this insight and also indicate the extent of his influence upon her.

This book has been lent to Papa by my dear Carmelites, and, contrary to my... custom (I didn’t read Papa’s books), I asked to read it. This reading was one of the greatest graces of my life. I read it by the window of my study, and the impressions I received are too deep to express in human words. All the great truths of our religion, the mysteries of eternity, plunged my soul into a state of joy not of this earth. I experienced already what God reserved for those who love Him (not with the eye but with the heart), and seeing the eternal rewards had no proportion to life’s small sacrifices, I wanted *to love, to love Jesus with a passion*, giving Him a thousand proofs of my love while it was possible. I copied out several passages on perfect love, on the reception God will give His elect at that moment *He* becomes their Reward, great and eternal, and I repeated over and over the words of love burning in my heart.¹⁷

One can see how the thought of eternity and its rewards for our small sacrifices ravished her heart, and made her resolve “*to love, to love Jesus with a*

¹⁵ André Frossard, *Forget not Love*, 114.

¹⁶ Charles Arminjon, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Life to Come* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2008). This book was only recently translated into English.

¹⁷ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, trans. John Clarke, *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996), 102-103.

passion, giving Him a thousand proofs of my love while it was possible.” This idea of earthly temporality and pilgrimage is strong her spirituality.

At the age of five and a half, she saw the sea for the first time, and her sister Pauline explained the path of light reflected on the sea like that of gold “was like God’s grace that illumines here below the path of faithful souls”: “Then I pictured my own soul as a tiny barque with graceful white sails, floating upon this golden stream, and I determined never to steer it out of the sight of Jesus, so that it could sail swiftly and tranquilly towards the heavenly shore.”¹⁸

Her other mystical experience of eternity with her sister Céline mirrored, in the mind of St. Thérèse, the experience of the ecstasy of St. Augustine and St. Monica at Ostia. St. Augustine and St. Monica, as they contemplated and spoke of heaven, were lifted up in a transport of love. St. Thérèse compared the experience of these two sisters to that of St. Augustine and St. Monica, which also assisted them to detach themselves from this world.

St. Thérèse’s vision anticipates the emphasis of the Second Vatican Council. *Lumen gentium*, described by one commentator as the hub of the 16 documents produced by the Second Vatican Council, highlights the Pilgrim Church, on its way to the heavenly home, in Chapter VII: “The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and its Union with the Church in Heaven.” The fulfillment only takes place in eternity.

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things. At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ.¹⁹

The document indicates that the final age has arrived, but it is eschatological, moving in a revolution towards its final goal:

¹⁸ L’Abbé André Combes, *The Spirituality of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: An Introduction* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1950), 8. Those seeking greater insight into St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s life and spirituality might consider the French collections of her manuscripts, like Jean-François Six, *Thérèse de Lisieux: La Confiance et L’amour* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1997).

¹⁹ *Lumen gentium*, n. 48.

Already the final age of the world has come upon us and the renovation of the world is irrevocably decreed and is already anticipated in some kind of a real way; for the Church already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect. However, until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, has the appearance of this world which is passing and she herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God.²⁰

(2) ***Victim of Love for Christ.*** The second aspect of St. Thérèse should be the heart of the priest, who is called to be “priest and victim. St. Thérèse was heart-broken at seeing Jesus’ blood being wasted:

I was heart-broken with grief at seeing this Precious Blood falling to the ground with no one troubling to gather it up. I resolved to remain always in spirit at the foot of the Cross, in order that I might collect the divine Dew of salvation and afterwards pour it forth upon men’s souls.... since that day, Our Lord’s dying words: ‘I thirst,’ have always been resounding in my heart and have enkindled there my Beloved to drink; I myself felt parched with thirst for souls, and I wished at all costs to snatch sinners away from the everlasting fires of hell.²¹

She was not satisfied to become a victim to God’s justice that is, to repair for the injustice done to God; her sacrifice was victimhood to make up to Christ, for His desire for our love and to pour His love into our hearts:

O my divine Master! I cried from the bottom of my heart, is it Your justice alone that shall receive victims of holocausts? Has not also Your merciful love need of them? Everywhere it is misunderstood, rejected... The hearts, upon which You long so generously to bestow it, turn aside to creatures and, for the miserable pleasure of an instant, ask happiness from them instead of throwing themselves into Your arms and accepting the sweet torrent of Your infinite love. If Your Justice— which is on earth— needs to be satisfied, how much more does Your merciful love long to take souls into its embrace, for Your mercy rises up to the heavens.²²

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Manuscripts*, quoted in André Combes, *The Spirituality of St. Thérèse*, 75-76.

²² St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Manuscripts* 248, quoted in André Combes, *The Spirituality of St. Thérèse*, 47.

God, whose very essence is love, is not loved. St. Thérèse wished to correspond to this love and give Him a place to alight:

It seems to me that if you were to find souls who would offer themselves as victims of holocaust to your love, You would consume them with the flame of love and would rejoice that the streams of infinite tenderness should no longer be pent up in You.²³ O Jesus, allow me to be this happy victim: consume Your little sacrifice with the fire of divine love.²⁴

(3) ***Intercessor of Love for the World.*** An extension of the victimhood of love is the importance of intercession and sacrifice. She first learned the importance of sacrifice as a child when she interceded for a prisoner on the way to execution. She used to say to Céline, her sister, “let us pray for priests.” Two famous phrases synthesize her zeal: “I will drop roses from heaven,” and “I will spend my heaven in doing good on earth.” She desired to save all from the beginning of time to the end of the world.

Yes, I will pass my heaven in doing good upon earth.... No, I shall not be able to rest until the end of the world, as long as there are souls to be saved; but when the angel says: Time is no more, then I shall be able to take rest. I shall rejoice because the number of the elect will be complete, and all will have entered into happiness and peace. My heart thrills at the thought.²⁵

We are all aware of her great confidence in God’s love for us. She had said that when she died, she would have nothing to give our Lord because she was too small, she would simply rely on His mercy. Her humility grew as her love increased: she offers the infinite treasures of His merits, as well as the merits of all the angels and saints, and unites them to her offerings. It is in virtue of her vocation and her union with our Lord that she claims kinship with our Lady, the angels, and the saints. She makes Mary the channel of her gift. We may also consider looking at St. Teresa of Jesus, whose foundation of many convents provides an inspiring story of zeal.²⁶

²³ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, quoted in André Combes, *The Spirituality of St. Thérèse*, 50.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

²⁶ Teófanos Egido, ed., *Santa Teresa de Jesús: Las Fundaciones* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1983).

(4) ***Possessed by Love upon the Cross.*** Fourth, St. Thérèse models the path of being possessed by divine love and the path of trial and purgation that it entails. She describes what it is like to be on fire with divine love. Here is a passage that she copied out from the fifth conference, “On Purgatory,” of Dom Arminjon’s Book, that is a quotation from St. John Chrysostom, that she kept in her *Manuel du Chrétien*, her prayer-book at the Carmel:

The man who is on fire with divine love is as indifferent to glory or to contempt as if he were the only man in the world. He despises temptation. He has no more feeling of pain than if it was crucifying a flesh that was not his own. All that is delightful to the world has no attraction for him.... Such are the effects of divine love, even upon this earth, when it truly takes possession of a soul.²⁷

St. Thérèse’s life was marked by suffering. She lost her mother at the age of four, had trials at school and a sensitive personality, went through a period of serious illness during adolescence, lost her father after entering Carmel, not being able to care for him as he was dying. She entered the austere life of Carmel at Lisieux at the tender age of 15. Her trials helped her attain detachment from the world and longing for heaven. In this victimhood of love she offers Him her suffering that recalls the dark nights:

Sometimes it seems that the little bird... cannot believe that anything else exists except the clouds that envelop it.... This is the moment of perfect joy for the poor, weak little thing.... What happiness for it to remain there nevertheless and to gaze at the invisible light that hides from its faith.²⁸ It is no longer a veil. It is a wall that rises up to the skies and covers the stars of the firmament.²⁹

3. Difficulties for Priests in the New Evangelization in Today’s Secular Era

In a priests’ regional meeting with their Archbishop, when the latter opened the floor at the close of the meeting for questions, a younger priest lamented the situation in which priests were unjustly attacked by the media

²⁷ Charles Arminjon, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Life to Come*, xiv.

²⁸ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Letter 175. *Manuscrits autobiographiques* (Lisieux, 1956), 52.

²⁹ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Manuscrits* 248, quoted in André Combes, *The Spirituality of St. Thérèse*, 61.

due to the pedophilia committed by a few priests. The Archbishop gave an insightful response: such attacks in fact constituted a tribute to the priesthood, for the world looks for more from priests, holding them to a higher standard and greater accountability. This deep concern arising from the many pressures that priests today face should be addressed a little more fully here, if only summarily, especially in light of the scandals of abuse perpetrated by a small proportion of priests.

(1) A consoling response to the above priest's concern can be found in an address given by Archbishop Timothy Dolan (now Cardinal) of New York on May 31, 2010, at a lecture to mark the Year for Priests in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, County Kildare (Ireland).³⁰ Among the several key insights raised by Archbishop Dolan, one of the most memorable relates to being "grounded," a lesson he learned from a priest's response of how he was faring (after the scandal caused by the previous bishop in Milwaukee):

"Thanks for asking," he [priest to Archbishop Dolan] replied, rather, to my surprise, upbeat and chipper. "Actually, considering all the fodder" - - he actually used another word but we're in mixed company -- "we've been through, I think, thank God, I'm doing pretty good. I find myself more *grounded* than ever." Hmm ... I was fascinated by that phrase, "more *grounded* than ever ..." and asked him to elaborate. "Well, for one," he began, "I'm grounded because the trauma of these months has literally dropped me to my knees, to the ground, in more and better prayer." "Two, I'm grounded because I have grown in my humility, which comes from the Latin word for soil, earth, ground." "And finally," he went on, "I'm *grounded* because I've had to rediscover the foundation, the base, the ground of my very life: my faith in and love for God, my very identity as a child of God, saved by His Son, reconfigured to Jesus at the very grounding of my being as a priest." And then, in a finale I'll never forget, he concluded, "So, my new archbishop, thanks for asking. To answer your question as to how I am? Lightening has struck me these recent months, but, don't worry, I'm fine! *I'm grounded!*"³¹

³⁰ "Archbishop Dolan: God is the only Treasure People Desire to Find in a Priest," The Pelican Group, accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2010/05_06/2010_05_31_IrishCatholic_Addressof.htm.

³¹ Ibid.

Thus, like this wise priest from Milwaukee, priests troubled by the clergy sexual abuse scandals can turn them into a blessing, a way to renew his priesthood. Archbishop Dolan entitled the talk, “God is the only treasure people desire to find in a priest.” He points to three requirements for priests today: “prayer, humility, and a rediscovery of identity.” And how can we be grounded, besides through virtues? We are grounded in our priestly identity as priests: Not “‘I am Maximilian Kolbe,’ nor ‘I am prisoner number 1408,’ nor ‘I am a friend and would like to take his place in execution.’ No. He simply replied, ‘I am a Catholic priest.’”³² The priest is to give God to the world.

(2) Archbishop Dolan goes one step further, by emphasizing the key for a priest to renew his priesthood— recovering his priestly identity. He emphatically delineates a clear distinction: “Priesthood is not, first and foremost, something we *do*, but *someone we are*.” He elaborates further at length on this all-important point:

Thus, the priesthood is a *call*, not a career; a *redefinition* of self, not just a ministry; a *way of life*, not a job; a *state of being*, not a function; a permanent, lifelong *commitment*, not a temporary style of service; an *identity*, not a role. (By the way, the loss of this, what we call “ontological” appreciation of priesthood applies as well to marriage, religious life, and, for that matter, to Christian, ecclesial identity conferred in baptism, but you didn’t ask me to speak on that.)

If the very value of my priestly vocation depends on *what I do*, where I’m assigned, how the people affirm me, how my bishop treats me, what the newspapers report about us, what horrible sins brother priests may have committed, what negligence was shown by their bishops, how much I get out of it, or how high or low morale may be at a given time -- if the very value of our priesthood depends upon those external forces, however dominant they may be; if, in a word, my value depends on what I *do*, sooner or later we’ll get frustrated, cynical, exhausted, crabby, bored, and tempted. Our value must come from *who we are*. Pope John Paul II was onto this when he commented in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* that the towering temptation we face today is to prefer *having* and *doing* to *being*.³³

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Given the tremendous trials priests face today, if our priestly identity revolves around function, we will surely fall; if our priestly identity revolves around our identity and our love for Christ, then we shall fall on our knees, which is where we belong. As John Paul II teaches, “the towering temptation we face today is to prefer having and doing to being”— we must avoid this at all costs.

(3) Given the difficulties priests face today, perhaps we can suggest a few other thoughts. Most priests know from experience the difficulty of seeking holiness, and especially of trying to heed the call of Pope John Paul II to labour zealously in the new evangelization. Certain practical suggestions for the apostle of Christ are offered here:

- First, some have tried and have found spiritualities or communities to be a great aid. One seminary rector has suggested to his seminarians the possibility of attachment or affiliation to some religious community (e.g., of third orders), sodalities or groups (*Militia Immaculata*), or new lay movements (e.g., Madonna House, Focolare, Communion and Liberation).
- Second, while we correctly dwell on spiritual points or relational aspects in our Examen, it is helpful to examine ourselves on zeal or the “apostolate” (apostolic spirit) as the key element. For example, besides our ministry to the converted (e.g., parishioners), what are we doing to bring Christ to those who do not know Him? We can beg the Lord for zeal, which overcomes apathy and self-engrossed introspection. We often tend to hold back, but find that our Lord blesses our efforts and provides what is necessary. There can be two kinds of tiredness: one of resentment and one of joyful tiredness that is filled with peace.
- Third, true zeal puts prayer and discipline first, ahead of energy and running around, which can turn into activism. One religious sister giving a conference expressed the conviction that sloth can express itself as much in activism as well as in avoiding prayer.
- We remember that zeal for souls is accompanied by the cross. If our expectation in the ministry is fulfillment and immediate results, then we may be disappointed and misunderstand the role of intercession.

Final Counsel: Marian Consecration

The *Militia Immaculata* of St. Maximilian Kolbe teaches that the world will be saved by consecration, specifically, consecration to Jesus through Mary.³⁴ St. Louis de Montfort also teaches this, and has stated that, in the final age, Mary will raise some of the greatest saints the Church has seen.

God has entrusted all into the hands of the “Mediatrice” or “Dispenser” of all graces. It is to her that the battle has been entrusted, as indicated in the opening prayer of the *Tessera* of the *Legion of Mary*: “Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as sun, terrible as an army set in battle array,” mirroring *Song of Solomon* 6:10: “Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?”

We turn to the book of Revelation that sets the context for all Christian life. The battle has begun with Woman in the twelfth Chapter of the *Apocalypse* or *Book of Revelation* 12:1-6:

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery....

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The *Book of Revelation* recounts a battle at the beginning, the child being attacked is obviously the Christ child, the mother symbolizes both the Church and Mary. Regarding Mary, it indicates that she has overcome Satan, identified here as the ancient Serpent of the garden of Eden. In his defeat by Mary and her child, being thrown into Hell, Satan now continues the battle with Mary’s children: “Then the dragon was angry with the

³⁴ Militia of the Immaculata Canada – Consecration.ca, <http://www.consecration.ca>.

woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” (Rev 12:17). The entire battle of humanity finds its beginning and its context in that opening battle with Mary, and it is the one and same battle, and she leads the battle. The battle that humanity faces has three enemies indicated by Scripture: the flesh, the world, and the devil. But the greatest by far is the devil, and exorcists relate how powerful Mary is in Deliverance Ministry and in Exorcism work. Pope John Paul II has already consecrated the world to Mary, but each parish, group, and child of God can do so individually.

More concretely, as we speak of our Lady and her role in the conversion of the world, we must highlight once more the power of the Rosary, especially the family Rosary. St. Louis de Montfort tells us in the *Secret of the Rosary* that our Lady has revealed that, if priests continually preach on its recitation, the world will change.³⁵ Mother Teresa of Calcutta tells us that our Lady has specifically asked her to focus on teaching them the family Rosary, that it will bring them to salvation.

³⁵ For “Marvelous Effects,” see thirty-first to fortieth Rose, in St. Louis de Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary* (Charlotte, NC: TAN, 2013), 74-86.

PART III

HORIZON OF ETERNITY

“I am the Alpha and the Omega”

(Rev 22:13)

CHAPTER 9

MISSION IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY

When I was fourteen and had this passion for learning, God added honey and oil to the wheat of *The Imitation*. I found this honey and oil in Father Arminjon's book, *The End of this World and the Mysteries of the Future Life*. Reading it was one of the greatest graces I've known. All the great truths of religion and the secrets of eternity were there and filled my soul with a happiness not of this world. I saw already what God has in store for those who love Him. When I realized how trifling are the sacrifices of this life compared with the rewards of heaven, I wanted to love Jesus, to love Him passionately, and to give Him a thousand tokens of my love whilst I still could.¹ (St. Thérèse of Lisieux)

At fourteen, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus read a book her father had borrowed. The book, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Life to Come*, consisted of nine conferences given at the Chambery Cathedral by Fr. Charles Arminjon, held in high regard by bishops and Cardinals. Reading this book touched the depths of her soul: "This reading was one of the greatest graces in my life"; "the mysteries of eternity, plunged my soul into a state of joy not of this earth"; "seeing the eternal rewards had no proportion to life's small sacrifices, I wanted to love, to love Jesus with a passion." Soon after, she would ask her father permission to enter the cloistered Carmel at Lisieux. The strong impression eternity made on Thérèse's soul is common to saints: a profound love of Jesus and of souls that is founded upon a dominant orientation to eternity.

The new Christ, and particularly the priest, called to lead others, will find that a strong orientation to eternity becomes a strong foundation for the edifice of his spiritual life and a much needed stimulus in the work of the new evangelization. Let us examine this fecund insight in three Parts. Part I present the consequences of the loss of an eschatological orientation in theology before 1950 (Yves Congar), in a personal life (Carlos Eire), and its power in spiritual life (St. Catherine of Siena). Part II depicts a soul that has been captured by love that is eternal, St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Part III

¹ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Story of a Soul*, 55-56. Fr. Charles Arminjon's book has been translated into English: *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Life to Come*.

presents a rich eschatological and Trinitarian theology centered on love in Hans Urs von Balthasar's "Trinitarian Inversion" and nuptial vow at Calvary.

I. The Loss of the Eschatological Dimension

A. The Loss of "Le Sens Eschatologique" in Theology (Yves Congar)

Many theologians in the early twentieth-century have noted the need for a major renewal of the impoverished theology of the time. In the Catholic Church, it was Yves Congar, one of the preeminent theologians of the twentieth-century, who raised the alarm on the greatest lacuna: the loss of the eschatological dimension (*le sens eschatologique*) in Christian theology, that impoverished theology greatly. He perceived that this loss derived from a "laicisation of Eschatology" in the seventeenth-century, when religion came to be handled primarily as worship and moral obligations, and from a humanist eschatology that was developed based on reason and progress, which went hand and hand with a denial of the transcendent.² For Congar, it was precisely the loss of the teleological (tending towards a goal) aspect of eschatology and history that was the real tragedy of the last few centuries. The "Four Last Things" (death, judgment, heaven, hell) came to be treated in a purely chronological way and both theologically and pastorally much in the manner of an appendix. He found that some of the most-read theologians of his time, including Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and Charles Journet, were lacking in this dimension of faith. Hans Urs von Balthasar, taking up an apt image of Ernst Troeltsch (influential German scholar), remarked that the work in Catholic eschatology was being carried out behind closed doors.

Fortunately, many factors led to a re-discovery for the feeling for eschatology, such that in 1951 Congar was able to say that it was no longer a "poor cousin" in the theological enterprise. In 1966, he proclaimed that the new importance of eschatology must be counted among the most

² This section on Yves Congar relies on Charles MacDonald, *Church and World in the Plan of God: Aspects of History and Eschatology in the Thought of Père Yves Congar O.P.*, *Regensburg Studien zur Theologie Band 27* (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1982). Though Congar never developed a formal treatise on history and eschatology, the importance of eschatology for his thought is illustrated by the fact that "to a great extent Congar's views on the laity follow from his conception of history and eschatology" (p. 2).

decisive developments in the last half-century, and specifically, “perhaps the newest and most promising characteristic of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*.”³ Vatican II made it one of its touchstones with an entire chapter within its central document, *Lumen gentium*, dedicated to “The Pilgrim Church.” Through various influences, Congar feels that Catholics “now see better that Christianity and the Church, even while being in this world are not of this world, are not made for it, and are in essence, the preparation and the expectation and, to a certain extent, the commencement of the world of eternal life, by the confession of which we terminate our Credo.”⁴

One must begin by seeking to understand Congar’s insight into why eschatology is so vital. Its incorporation is crucial because the end (destiny) with which eschatology concerns itself is not only the chronological end, but also the *dynamic dimension of meaning-giving end or the purpose in history*, which is present not only at the end of time, but is active throughout the entire historical process:

According to Christian revelation, the plan of God and the world in which it is realised are going towards a goal and an end. According to the two meanings of the word [eschatology], goal and end will be the final point and the last chapter of the history in which we are involved; but they are also and especially that towards which this history tends, in such a way that *the end or the goal, in attracting it (history) towards itself, explains and qualifies the entire succession of things. Spiritual history is explained by its goal, the present by the eschatology.*⁵ (emphasis added)

To this end, Congar teaches what Vatican II taught, that we have “to return to the sources,” to find in Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church the true meaning of eschatology. In Scripture and the Fathers, all of history is seen as a dynamic movement, a revolution, rapidly drawing to a fulfillment. It means too that the world is transitory and fragile, and seeks what the heart yearns for, the full reality that is God. The end is the goal that attracts, explains, and qualifies history: it is “the very meaning of the movement of history, that which explains the entire mystery of the Church: It is thus

³ Yves Congar, *Le Diacre dans l’Église et le monde d’aujourd’hui*, in *Unam Sanctam* 59, 1966, 127.

⁴ Yves Congar, *Sainte Église*, 1947, 535.

⁵ Yves Congar, *Jalons*, 649, quoted in MacDonald, *Church and World in the Plan of God*, 73.

something which is operative in the present order and which cannot be truly understood except as the goal of its (the present order) movement.”⁶ We see an analogy with the Old Testament as having no meaning in itself unless its yearning for the coming of its Messiah and His kingdom is fulfilled—it is the cry of the liturgy, *maranatha*, “Come, Lord Jesus.” It is hard to express the centrality of this goal any more explicitly.

Our vision thus must be one of movement towards a *fulfillment*. The end gives direction and consistency to the historical process; but at the same time, it is only upon the completion of this history that the depth of eschatological meaning will be made clear. This eschatological movement has its beginning in the creation of man in the image and likeness of God, with the entire human history from the beginning until the consummation of the world *moving inexorably towards a fulfillment*. Congar employs many terms to express the polarity between protology and eschatology (first and last things), such as, promise and fulfillment, from the seed to the complete revelation, or, as he often says, a movement from Genesis to the Apocalypse. Protology and eschatology thus become two coordinates of the plan of God; the Church is to be understood within the *movement* of one to the other. But for the reasons mentioned above, all ontological situations in this life as to be understood *in the light of fulfillment*, so that the eschatology pole is more important (than the protology pole).

Yet, the key to a renewal of theology in regards to recovering the eschatological dimension for Congar lies not in simply “restoring” eschatology—it was rather through a *re-centering on Christology*. The “Return to the Sources” (*Ressourcement*), which was the most dramatic development of French theology in the period during and after World War II, was seen by Congar as the avenue through which the Christological foundations of the Church could be more firmly established. If indeed Christ is the Head of the Mystical Body, then the Church has the task of continually re-centering herself on this invisible Head. “*Ressourcement*” must then be accompanied by “*Recentrement*” (“re-centering”) in order to effect “a return to the essential, which is Jesus, especially in His central mystery, which is

⁶ Yves Congar, *Sainte Église*, 1949, 600, quoted in MacDonald, *Church and World in the Plan of God*, 73.

Easter.”⁷ For Congar, “*Ressourcement*” with a “re-centering” on Christ becomes the source of the critical thoughts with which he approaches his ecclesiology, and puts him in a position to propose solutions to the burning problem of the post-war period in France, namely, the relationship between the Church and the world.

To see how powerful a renewal is accomplished by re-centering on Christ, we can look to how Christ dominates the vision of Paul and his eschatology:

For he [Paul] was not a “theologian who thought in terms of aeons,” *but a preacher of Jesus Christ, who has come and is yet to come*. Here is the reason why this eschatology is ambivalent and fits into no single schema, and why he can employ the eschatological categories at one time in a present, and at another time in a future sense, apparently without concerning himself about the “unsystematic” character of it. *The revelation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah promised by God to Israel determines and creates Paul’s historical consciousness and eschatological thought, and not the reverse*. Who Christ is and what he does, what the relationship is between the time of salvation that has been entered upon with him and the future still to be expected, all this is not determined by eschatological-theological presuppositions, but is only gathered by the apostle from the unexpected and overwhelming manner in which God in Jesus Christ has given and will yet give the fulfillment of the redemptive promise.⁸ (emphasis added)

Against this Pauline vision, we discern more clearly the poverty of the manual theology, in which christology is not the sun around which other planets revolve but is merely one theological discipline among others; and, on the opposite side, of a contemporary theology that does not begin with and revolve around Paul’s focus on Christ (e.g., not beginning with Christ but with the universality of grace accessible to all). In Paul and the Church Fathers, it is Christ who fills their spiritual and theological vision: beginning (point of departure), middle, and end.

In sum, Congar desired that eschatology be treated less as the chronological end of history, and *more as the purpose or goal of history, which influences everything*

⁷ Yves Congar, *Témoignage Chrétien*, July 7, 1950, quoted in MacDonald, *Church and World*, 75.

⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 53.

that takes place in time. Congar's own Christology provides the foundations: the fundamental points of orientation are given by Christ's Ascension (received Lordship over every creature) and the Parousia (Christ's Kingdom becomes the Kingdom of the Father). All of history stands between these two moments in the mystery of Christ, and it is the function of the Church to be active during this "in-between" time, a service that is mainly religious — a key characteristic of an eschatological orientation is that it draws us to service, as we will see in St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

Yet this theological vision becomes abstract and merely intellectual unless it is centred on Christ (Congar's "Recentrement") such that it explains Christ's calling Himself the Resurrection (Martha) and the Bread of Life in John. This can only be explained if the Father has made us for Christ (Col 1), and our hearts only find rest in that love and union, as expressed by Paul ("My desire is to depart and be with Christ," Phil 1:23) because he had encountered His love: "and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

B. The Loss of the Eschatological Dimension in Personal Life (Carlos Eire)

Yves Congar's insistence on the vital necessity of recovering the *sens eschatologique* in theology may seem like a purely academic concern until we see the dramatic crises it engenders when experienced in concrete life. The case described by Paul Griffiths offers a striking picture of existential angst that results when one rejects Christian eschatology.¹⁰ He points to the example of Dr. Carlos Eire, a Yale professor and the author of the 2003 National Book Award winner *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy*. What is deeply ironical is that Dr. Eire himself wrote a very competent history of the symbiosis between eternity and practices, with the conundrum of having rejected the Catholic beliefs in eschatology of his forebears.¹¹

⁹ He presents three dimensions of Christology: "Alpha and Omega," "Pleroma," and the "triple Offices of Christ."

¹⁰ Paul J. Griffiths, "From Eire to Eternity," Review of *A Very Brief History of Eternity* by Carlos Eire, *First Things* 199 (Jan 2010).

¹¹ Carlos Eire, *A Very Brief History of Eternity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

On the positive side, to Eire's credit, he effectively depicts the symbiosis between ideas of eternity and particular forms of largely Christian culture over the last two millennia.¹² His helpful historical survey covers four periods: "Eternity Conceived" (500 BC - 500 AD); "Eternity Overflowing" (500 AD - 1500 AD); "Eternity Reformed" (1500 AD - present); "From Eternity to Five-Year Plans" (present). Of eternity (or *forever*, as he sometimes calls it), Eire affirms: "Its subject is the largest of all, which has taxed minds great and small for centuries, and will *forever* be of human interest, intellectually, spiritually, and viscerally."¹³ His research clearly establishes the vital role of an orientation towards eternity.

Eire provides an insightful description of the four periods of the Church's understanding of eternity and the evolution that led to the disappearance of its place in the Church's history. (i) In the first period, eternity begins to shape the temporal and material life as some places and objects come to be regarded as more intimate with eternity than others. As the dead, the inhabitants of eternity, increasingly come to be seen as present to and in communication with the living, shrines and churches are built, pilgrimages are established, and the economy of relics begins to flourish. (ii) In the second stage, Eire depicts monasticism as an institutional form transitional between eternity and temporal: the monastic religious are, in some sense, already dead and partakers of eternity. In addition, the development of sacramental liturgy during this period focuses on the making present of eternity to the temporal, which ideas about eternity influence the temporal, including material culture and politics.

(iii) In the third stage, covering the period from the Reformation until now, Eire argues that the Reformation "effectively removes the ligature between the living and the dead, and, by doing so, also removes one of the most important connections between time and eternity. The calendar—once a complex dance between time and eternity that constantly reminded those who used it, by way of feasts and fasts, of their connection with eternity—is largely shorn of such reminders."¹⁴ (iv) The fourth stage is that which we inhabit now, at which, at least for the elites of the West, there is effectively

¹² Paul J. Griffiths, "From Eire to Eternity," 46-48.

¹³ Carlos Eire, *A Very Brief History of Eternity*, 15.

¹⁴ Paul J. Griffiths, "From Eire to Eternity," 47.

no commerce between time and eternity. The dead are buried apart from churches, the saying of Masses for the dead dwindles, and we become immovably certain of our own separation from eternity, of our deep and insurmountable transience. Eire also adds a brief survey of what some contemporary physicists are saying about time. Eire's fine study comes to our aid by making abundantly clear the vital place of eternity in the first two eras, and the consequent tragic fallout of the lack of eternity since the Reformation.¹⁵ The evidence is clear.

It is stunning to see, despite his intellectual clarity, as Griffiths observes, the tragedy in Carlos Eire's personal life from the rejection of the truths of the last things. One begins to see the difference between knowledge and faith, between the head and the heart. No reason is given for it, but Eire has apparently rejected his Catholic beginnings with its faith in eternal truths, writing that "we" cannot any longer adopt the religious solutions of our forebears.¹⁶ He is a man who is outraged that he must die, that he must cease to exist, a complaint all the more bitter in light of the fact that the cosmos has lasted billions of years, which compared to eternity is itself nothing. Griffiths questions Eire's contradictory position, his rejection of the answer (that is, eternity itself) while he agonizes about eternal non-existence, comparing his position to a person refusing the dentist's ministrations and then complaining about a toothache.¹⁷ While Eire's father found a "resolution" in reincarnation, "This solution appears unavailable to Eire, as does Christianity's hope for eternal life. When these are removed, all that is left is regret and fear and anger..."¹⁸

His rage is expressed tragically thus: "I don't know about you, but I can't wait *forever*, and I rage, rage against the tick, tick, tock, and anything else so pathetic, so much a reminder of the Big Sleep and the grim reaper's inexorable approach"¹⁹; and again, "I don't know about you, but I'm

¹⁵ Carlos Eire, *A Very Brief History of Eternity*, 209-219.

¹⁶ "[Rimbaud's] Mocking Descartes and Christ at the same time, he could moan, along with Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and all the new atheists: 'I believe I am in Hell, therefore I am. This is the catechism at work. I am the slave of my baptism. You, my parents, have ruined my life, and your own,'" Carlos Eire, *A Very Brief History of Eternity*, 226.

¹⁷ Paul J. Griffiths, "From Eire to Eternity," 46.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁹ Carlos Eire, *A Very Brief History of Eternity*, 27. This hopelessness is punctuated especially in his closing Chapter, "Not here, Not Now, Not Ever," 220-227.

outraged by a universe that exists eternally, but only allows me a scrap of time.”²⁰ There is a salutary lesson here. There is a great gap between intellectual knowledge and acceptance by faith, which is based upon the authority of Christ through the Church, and the practice of it. This rage of Eire can only be explained by the fact that he is made for eternity and cannot attain it on his own; but even more that he is created for an encounter with the Eternal One and to be filled and possessed by Him (Christ). An intellectual knowledge does not suffice; only a self-surrender in faith and love can open the door to the eternal One.

C. The Power of Seeing Life against Eternity (St. Catherine of Siena)

In contrast to the despair and rage found in Carlos Eire, we find in St. Catherine of Siena a persona who dominated her age and whose “source of strength” was precisely her orientation to eternity. In her successful task of encouraging Pope Gregory XI to return the papacy to Rome, she was met with many concerns and objections from this vacillating Pope. With infused wisdom, she responded to each question, sometime with quotes with Scripture. In the face of her indomitable will and inspired wisdom, the Pope exclaimed with sudden insight into the secret of her power: “That is the source of your strength... You look at everything *sub specie aeternitatis*” (through the aspect of eternity).²¹

These words of Pope Gregory XI reflect how the power of the great St. Catherine of Siena flowed from an eschatological vision, seeing everything in the light of eternity. When Pope Gregory XI, his fleet detained at Genoa, and his spirit willing to capitulate to worries about his reception from the Romans, he found her there and gained strength once more from her words of great simplicity, directed always to the eternal divine will:

I know little about the many problems and dangers awaiting you... but it is clear to me that they should never be judged from the viewpoint of success. Success, like blessedness, is with God alone. Therefore it matters little whether you win or lose, but much that you should do the Will of

²⁰ Ibid., 217.

²¹ Louis de Wohl, *Lay Siege to Heaven: A Novel about St. Catherine of Siena* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1960), 313; for more background of contact with the Pope, see also 272-273, 282-283, 287-288, 296.

God. To die doing the Will of God is a thousand times better than to live doing your own will.²²

In St. Catherine, we find this longing for eternity has to with the longing to be united with Christ in eternity— she longs for death. When faced with imminent martyrdom from a roving band in her native Siena, she gladly prepared herself for death, but God intervened, and later she wrote to her director: “My eternal Spouse played a great joke on me.”²³ After dying from contracting the plague, she was brought back to life through the prayers of her friends, and she cried for three days, because “*vidi arcana Dei*” (“I have seen the secrets of God”), God Himself.²⁴

Her union with Christ enabled her to hold the head of a young man being executed by beheading and to see his soul entering Christ’s heart.²⁵ The secret of St. Catherine of Siena lies in the second of two pillars that Jesus Himself taught her, to keep her eyes always on Jesus, that He would look after all very carefully:

“Daughter, think of me; if you do this I will immediately think of you.” Catherine understood: she thought only of Him; and she came to realize how He always thought of her: and in this exchange by which divine love in a certain sense elevated the creature to the level of the Creator... she saw that love which, if it made God human, made man godlike. Thenceforward Catherine took no thought at all of what she ate or what she drank or of what happened to her; she left it all to Him.²⁶

This eschatological orientation, found in all saints, is, it would appear, foreign to most Christians. We tend to live our lives in a very staid, linearly-chronological manner: living each day without concern for the end, so that our end arrives like an appendix to a book. If eternity is the goal and fulfillment of human life, then it should direct and animate our entire life, which can transform all facets of human life.

²² Ibid., 313.

²³ Ibid., 335.

²⁴ Ibid., 115. Please note that in St. Raymond of Capua’s *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 2003), p. 169, these words were spoken after a rapture.

²⁵ Ibid., 221.

²⁶ Igino Giordani, *St. Catherine of Siena* (Boston, Mary: Daughters of St. Paul, 1980), 37.

When we see things in a cosmic way, we find that our entire history has an upward, powerful movement toward a fulfillment, analogous to Teilhard de Chardin's vision depicted in Bishop Attila Miklós-házy's description:

The Church and all creation is on the way to fulfillment: it is always the pilgrim Church, with the Eucharist as food as we move towards distant goal, and the Paschal mystery as the dynamism of the present. The Church is in process of becoming (evolution) and of self-reform: she cannot forget the future, but she must have a fruitful dialogue with the present; she must constantly reflect on herself to avoid being overcome by worldly elements and losing her essence.²⁷

If St. Catherine of Siena's orientation to eternity was the "source of strength" of this dominant figure of the fourteenth-century, we can imagine what such a power it would have given Pope Gregory XI to renew the Church and what fruitfulness and spiritual efficacy it can give priests today in their ministry.

II. St. Thérèse's Heart Captured by the Eternal Eagle

For key elements of a renewed eschatological theology, we look to lived example of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, because she was captured by love, which, in a deep insight, discerned to be "eternal." It is possible that, besides Fr. Arminjon's book on the Four Last Things led her to a profound sense of eternity, the supernatural outlook of the *Imitation of Christ*, which she had memorized, may also have helped to reinforce this eternal outlook.

Within that framework of her life, we find three key elements: deeply imbued with a sense of eternity; the discovery of love as her vocation and the spousal experience of her heart being captured by the divine Eagle; her desire to pour herself out on earth until the end of time to save souls. These essentially are the three elements we find in Jean Mouroux's depiction of St. Thérèse's understanding of eternity: (i) orientation to eternity, (ii) captured by the love of Jesus, and (iii) the love of souls.

²⁷ Attila Miklós-házy, "Eschatology" (class lecture, Toronto School of Theology at the University of Toronto, Grace and Glory: SAT 2331S, Toronto, Ontario, 1978).

1. Orientation to Eternity

Many Catholics have found great fruit from reading her autobiography, but are likely to be unaware of her profound orientation towards eternity. Even as a child, with little culture, she lived for eternity with an intensity, a certainty, and a determination that were extraordinary:

She was convinced from early childhood that she would live for only a short time. She never asked to die young and never feared “a long life.” But God Himself has given her this conviction. As a result, life for this “aged child of twenty” (L. 213) seemed to be “an instant between two eternities,” (L. 118) and her soul was fixed on eternity from the time she first began to “meditate” in the corner of her room (M.A. 79). She was consumed with this thought: “It [Life] is a mirage, a dream” (L. 158). She loved the words of Psalm 89, 4: “A thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past”... Life is only a day, “a single day” (L. 198, 363) and “tomorrow is eternity” (L. 311, 363). It seems to her that life is not only passing but has *already passed*. “The shape of the world is passing... Soon... *all will have passed*” (L. 115); “even as this year has passed, our life will also pass, and soon we shall say: *it is pas!*” (L. 143).²⁸

To summarize, life for St. Thérèse, set against eternity, was so short that it seemed like “an instant between two eternities” and, in her longing, “tomorrow is eternity,” it seemed that the present life as but a “mirage” and has already passed. Like St. Catherine of Siena, she too longed for death to be with Christ. She was given a conviction that she would die early and wrote that it was a great grace to die in the springtime of her life. Mouroux cautions us against misunderstanding St. Thérèse:

It is a serious mistake to see in these words only the *trite theme* of the shortness of life. In fact the all-pervading significance of “passing” for her is the hold of eternity on time; *because Thérèse touches eternity and lives in it, everything else appears to her to be vanishing*. At the heart our life is an *eternal reality*, the reality of Infinite love.²⁹ (emphasis added)

“Because Thérèse touches eternity and lives in it, everything else appears to her to be vanishing,” and thus the heart of reality is “Infinite love.” One

²⁸ Jean Mouroux, “Eternity and the Triune God,” *Communio* 18:1 (Spring 1991): 131.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

wonders whether this outlook was cultivated from the great losses in her life and the consequent detachment they engendered: death of her mother; loss of her “second mother,” Pauline, to the Carmelites; the serious sickness she endured; the gradual depletion of her family to religious life; leaving her father for Carmel; and perhaps even her father’s death. These may have opened and softened the soil of her heart to receive eternal love.

2. *Won Over by the Love of the Eternal Eagle*

We discern a second step, that of love. Describing her search for that which would fulfill the quasi-infinite desires to do all for Jesus, she finds the answer in that which is the core of all vocations and which is eternal—love:

With amazing sureness she realized that Love is the *substance* of every vocation, the *only* worthwhile reality, the “*all-embracing*” absolute. “I realized that Love embraced every type of vocation, that Love was everything, and included all times and all place.” And she adds the decisive phrase: I realized “... *in short, that it is eternal!*” The discovery of eternity, therefore, is the acme of her personal revelation. Love is the measure of everything else and is not measured by anything; it transcends everything by the fact that it is an infinite act.³⁰

Mouroux notes that the sudden appearance of the present tense amid all the imperfect tenses indicates that eternity suddenly loomed up as the answer to her search. At some point, perhaps early in her life, there is a discovery of the love of her spouse, Jesus, that it is eternal. She described her entry into Carmel at the age of fifteen as entering a “desert,” to await the nuptials with the Eternal one. The spousal love of Jesus has captured her heart, as is evident from the oblation she makes to make reparation for the love that He is not receiving from mankind:

All this implies that Thérèse identifies her personal love with the love which burns in the heart of the Church and, ultimately, with the Love who is *God Himself*, the living, transforming fire of eternity. There is only one thing for Thérèse to do; to offer herself as a holocaust to this Love, to let herself be won and carried off by the “eternal Eagle,” to fly “on the winds of the divine Eagle to the *eternal furnace* in the bosom of the blessed Trinity”.... Thus *the meaning of time is transformed, and time itself is profoundly*

³⁰ Ibid., 131-132.

revitalized. A single instant is enough for God to do his work: "... So, in an instant you can prepare me to appear before You" (*M.A.* 320). Every instant of life becomes weighted with eternity.... The soul is able to love and save other souls by bringing the eternal love within it to fruition....

Finally, life, the fruitful dream, is united and made eternal by awaiting the "return of the bridegroom"... on that tomorrow, "the day of eternal nuptials"... and even more by the passionate desire to *see at last*, unveiled forever, *that hidden countenance*, that Holy Face which is always hidden here below. "A radiance, half-veiled, is emitted from the lowered eyes in the Face of my Fiancé"... but she will see Him unveiled on the day of eternity.³¹

Love of Souls

St. Thérèse discovered the "eternal Eagle," was won over by His infinite love for her, and allowed herself to be possessed by Him, and as a result discovered eternity in time. Now we discover a third step: love of souls. We find that Thérèse enters eternal love only to let others enter, to bring, as it were, time into eternity.³² This is a common trait we find among the great friends of God: they now possess the heart of the "eternal Eagle" and so possessed by the fire of His Holy Spirit that their hearts become enflamed for the salvation of the world. We are familiar with the astonishing words expressed in the last weeks of her life:

I know that my mission is about to begin, my mission to make people love the Good God as I love Him, to give my little way to souls.... *Yes, I wish to spend my time in heaven doing good on earth*.... No, I shall not rest until the end of the world, so long as there are souls to save. When the angel has said: "Time shall be no longer" (Ap 10, 6), then I shall rest and take delight, because the number of the elect will be complete and all will have entered the state of joy and repose. My heart tingles at the thought...³³

Thérèse has grasped the mystery of eternity, the mystery of the eternal God, that descends to draw us up again. The source of the mystery is by definition the mystery from which springs mankind, called, fallen, and

³¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Novissima Verba* (May-September 1897), 81-82; quoted in Jean Mouroux, "Eternity and the Triune God," 133.

redeemed. In entering the eternity of the Blessed Trinity, we also receive in our hands the world's process of becoming and we can participate in the redemption of sinners—until the angel says, Time shall be no longer!

The words of this little book [*The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life*] are better than any learned text in helping us to grasp, in a soul that is completely transparent, *the presence and absence of eternity at the heart of our faith*, the desire for eternity and the refusal ever to anticipate it; in short, the tension between the Presence and the Absence of the Beloved, in sorrow, in joy, and in peace, which is the mysterious core of Christian eschatology.³⁴

St. Thérèse had discovered the One who professed His love for her at the cross, and enchanted by His love, abandons herself, allowing herself to be possessed by that Love, which is eternal. Filled with that Love, her heart lives in eternity even on earth and desires what His heart desires, the salvation of the world. For this, even in heaven, until the angel says that time is no more, she will consume herself in love; for “love is eternal.” The Catholic and the priest need above all to have a concrete experience like St. Thérèse of the discovery of eternity and of Christ’s personal spousal love or friendship—everything else follows from this:

“... and seeing the eternal rewards had no proportion to life’s small sacrifices, I wanted to love, to love Jesus with a passion”; “*Yes, I wish to spend my time in heaven doing good on earth.... No, I shall not rest until the end of the world, so long as there are souls to save.*”

St. Thérèse’s has described herself as a bird captured, now we wish to build a theology of the Eagle who captures; she has lived the anthropology possessed by grace (Holy Spirit), now we wish to develop the salvation arising from the Holy Spirit being poured forth through the pierced heart.

III. A Renewed Eschatological Soteriology (von Balthasar)

A Renewed Eschatological Vision

The neglect of eternity in theology may derive from the separation of nature and grace into two compartmentalized realities found in the neo-Thomistic

³⁴ Jean Mouroux, “Eternity and the Triune God,” 133.

theology, a unity that contemporary theologians have sought to restore (e.g., Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel* and Karl Rahner's "Hearers of the Word"). In the typically linear or chronological conception of view salvation history, that results in the two separate compartments of creation and redemption, the Christian naturally finds himself moored in the immediate earthly reality, and begins to consider eternity principally as he approaches his death. For a renewal in theology, there needs to be a unified vision that is centered on love, and specifically Trinitarian love.

Nicholas Healy's article on Hans Urs von Balthasar's vision, "Inclusion in Christ," depicts such an integrated soteriology in three steps: Christ's work as an inversion to the Holy Spirit such that Love descends from eternity in an unheard-of kenosis (Incarnation); makes an eternal vow at Calvary as the eternal Bridegroom; and draws up the Mystical Bride into Himself (Trinity communion), all the while the Son's actions within the Trinity being replicated in His humanity.³⁵

These pillars provide the christological counterpart to the three grace elements of St. Thérèse of Lisieux's itinerary: orientation to eternity corresponds to von Balthasar beginning with a descent of the Word; her being captured by love corresponds to the vow of love made by the Eagle at Calvary; and her zeal for souls corresponds to Christ assuming His Mystical Body to heaven.

We note here three major contemporary shifts in the theology of von Balthasar. First, he shifts from God to the Trinity. Second, he begins within the Trinity and employs a parabolic movement of descent to ascent, that ends with Trinitarian communion. Third, there is a radical shift from Thomas' God as "being" (Thomas' teaching that God's "*ens*" is His "*esse*") to God as infinite love, as we shall see when he refers to Christ's vow on Calvary. The reader is encouraged to be patient in wrestling with the depths of the thought of a profound theologian, but which should prove fruitful.

³⁵ Nicholas J. Healy, "Inclusion in Christ: Background to a Christian Doctrine of Providence," *Communio* 29:3 (2002) 469-489.

A. Holy Spirit through Trinitarian Inversion Assumes the Mystical Body

(1) Trinitarian Inversion

Let us give the theological background for the unheard-of Trinitarian inversion in which the Son submits to the Holy Spirit. Now Scripture presents two different perspectives on the active agency of the Incarnation: Phil 2:6-8 suggests that the active agent of the Incarnation is the Son Himself, who empties Himself and takes upon Himself the form of a servant; Luke's Gospel suggests that it is the Holy Spirit who plays the active role in mediating between the Son and the human nature assumed ("The Spirit will come to you and overshadow you," Lk 1:35).

We observe a theological development from Aquinas to Kasper, then to von Balthasar. Walter Kasper has critiqued Thomas' position (Incarnation is action of the Son), bringing to bear a wealth of scriptural references: "The Spirit is, as it were, the medium in which God acts in and through Jesus Christ and in which Jesus Christ by willing obedience is the response in personal form."³⁶ Von Balthasar accepts Kasper's thesis of the agent of Incarnation being the Holy Spirit but introduces the following qualification that includes Thomas' emphasis on the Son's involvement: "But in this activity on the part of the Spirit, the Son is already obedient, insofar as he entrusts himself to the activity of the Spirit in accord with the Father's will."³⁷ It is not that the Son of God in his humanity merely passively lives in and under the mission of the Holy Spirit (Kasper), but also that the Son Himself within the Trinity already expresses His divine relation to the Father by obediently "allowing" Himself to be sent and incarnated through the creative activity of the Spirit: "the Son's obedience does not come after an Incarnation actively brought about him; rather, His soteriological obedience starts with the Incarnation itself."³⁸

³⁶Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns & Oates, 1976), 251. We know that the Incarnation takes place only with the person of the Son, but it is also a work of the entire Trinity, with each divine person participating in it according to His particular "mode of being."

³⁷Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. III (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 186.

³⁸Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. III, 184-185. "Here we see how Balthasar differentiates himself from Kasper, that the mediation of the Holy Spirit ensures and bears witness to the fact that the Son's 'obedience' in the Incarnation is truly filial, that is, trinitarian,

While the decision to redeem creation in this way was undertaken by the “counsel” of all three Persons of the Trinity, the action of the Spirit in this plan precedes in a certain way that of the Son, who lets Himself be incarnated by the Holy Spirit:

What is most confusing is *the inversion in the saving economy of the relationship between the Son and the Spirit*. Whereas within the immanent Trinity, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (or through the Son), the Son becomes man *through* the Spirit and is guided in his mission by the same Spirit. He who in the self-emptying of his divine form places himself under the will of the Father, he also allows the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and who is at the Father’s disposal, to have power over him as a “rule” of the Father’s will. He does this in order to allow this Spirit resting upon him in all fullness to stream out from himself at the end of his mission in death and Resurrection (and in the Eucharist): And the direction of this outpouring goes as much toward the Father (“into your hands...”) as toward the Church and the world (“and thus he breathed upon them...”). In this inversion it is clear that the Spirit is taking part in the historical events of the divine economy.... When the Trinity’s personified love becomes visible as fruit and gift in the Holy Spirit, the love between Father and Son appears not only complete beyond itself but also opened up beyond itself.... The Spirit is the inner essence of God’s communication *ad extra*.³⁹

Von Balthasar developed an insight of Adrienne von Speyr, that the Spirit acts as the rule of the Father by which Jesus lives out His incarnate mission (see His Baptism and His “being led” into desert): “the Spirit takes over the function of presenting the obedient Son with the Father’s will in the form of a rule that is unconditional and, in the case of the Son’s suffering, even appears rigid and pitiless.”⁴⁰

Here we must consider an obvious objection. Would such an inversion call into question the received order of Trinitarian processions, the Son being

and not merely an expression of His human nature.” While the Apostles Creed, “*et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine*,” points to the active agent at the Incarnation as the Holy Spirit, the Son is also an agent of the Incarnation, in exercising this agency in the mode of a *divine obedience whereby He lets Himself be sent*.

³⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology: Spirit and Institution*, vol. IV (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 231-235.

⁴⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. III, 188.

prior to the Holy Spirit? Von Balthasar denies that such is the case, that it in fact “enables Christ effectively to translate in terms of the economy both the fact that the Father is the sole source of the Godhead as well as the Son’s co-spiration of the Spirit.”

He supports his argument by the distinction between Christ’s two states (kenosis-exaltation), in which Christ’s relation to the Spirit differs in each state:

The *status exinanitionis* [state of kenosis] corresponds to the fact that, within the immanent Trinity, the Son receives everything from the Father, including the capacity to co-spirate the Spirit. The *status exaltationis* [state of exaltation], on the other hand, is an expression of how complete and fruitful the Father’s gift of Himself to the Son is. That is, as the perfect image of the Father, the Son is capable of participating in the Father’s giving at an equally creative and “divine” level in the form of a return gift that is the Holy Spirit. As the “fruit” and gift of the groundless love between Father and Son, the Spirit testifies to the ever-greater aspect of God’s being love. The depths of the reciprocal giving of Father and Son are laid bare in the movement from Crucifixion to Resurrection, when the Spirit is given back to the Father by the Son. The ultimate fruitfulness of Jesus’ death is revealed after the Resurrection, when the Spirit is poured forth by the Risen Lord upon the disciples.⁴¹

It is difficult to understand the depth of the Son’s submission to the Holy Spirit. With the Son, there is not only a concrete obedience to the Father in becoming incarnate; but there is also an ongoing submission to the Holy Spirit throughout Christ’s human life, which is what gives Christ’s faith and obedience their archetypal character.⁴²

This radically differs from the commonly-perceived idea that Christ acts by His own divine power in His human life (e.g., miracles):

Christ’s obedience with its very concrete temporal dimension... is thus made possible by the Holy Spirit who takes the form of an objective and inner rule guiding Jesus toward his full stature as eschatological savior. It is only at the end of his historical trajectory that Christ becomes the

⁴¹ Nicholas J. Healy, “Inclusion in Christ,” 477-478.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 478.

source of the Spirit for all times and all places, through his resurrection. He is not established from the beginning as the “Son of God with power” (*status exaltationis*) but only at the end of an existential journey of kenotic obedience (*status exinanitionis*) which gives to the grace of union its historical and archetypal character.⁴³

Now we perceive the power of such an infinite kenosis. The *status exaltationis* corresponds to the Son’s active participation in the production of the Spirit. At Jesus’ consummation of His mission in the transition from death to Resurrection, He breathes forth the Spirit to the Father as He within the Trinity but now also upon the world. As the risen Christ (*status exaltationis*), Jesus is able to dispense the Spirit freely as the fruit of His work of redemption: “We see in [risen] Jesus the one who, even as man, has control of the Spirit and sovereignly breathes him into the disciples (Jn 20:22). His sovereignty is such that He can entrust the Spirit to His Church, so that... she can share in His Resurrection freedom and communicate the power of the Spirit.”⁴⁴

Returning to the Trinity, the ultimate exaltation of Jesus’ human existence occurs when it is taken into the Trinitarian processions to the extent of breathing forth (also in His humanity), together with the Father, the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit. However, the Spirit poured forth upon the Church is “coextensive with His fleshly and historical existence, and, in that sense, there occurs an ‘opening’ of His life and His body to the Church.”⁴⁵ In short, our entry into the Trinitarian relations occurs through Christ’s mysteries.

It is difficult to wrap our minds around the staggering dimensions of what has taken place in the Trinitarian inversion. Beyond the commonly-viewed image of the annihilation of the Son of God in his humanity on Calvary is an universe-shattering inversion with its totality of dispossession of divine self in the kenosis of the Son that inverts the Trinitarian order (“He did not consider himself equal to God,” Phil 2:6)—the Word becoming a slave of

⁴³ Marc Ouellet, “L’existence comme mission: L’anthropologie théologique de Hans Urs von Balthasar” (Ph.D. diss., Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1983), quoted in Nicholas J. Healy, “Inclusion in Christ,” 478.

⁴⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: The Action*, vol. IV (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 364.

⁴⁵ Nicholas J. Healy, “Inclusion in Christ,” 482.

slaves to the Holy Spirit, all for love, like Jacob becoming a slave to Laban to win Rachel (Gen 29:1-30).

(2) *Inclusion in Jesus and His Mysteries through the Holy Spirit*

A number of consequences follow from the Trinitarian inversion that is a massive overturning of heart of reality (Trinity) and opens a flood of grace—the Holy Spirit, who is the “Gift” of all gifts. The Holy Spirit in turn brings us back to the Son by inserting us historically into the Son. The claim that, thanks to the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation is “historical” has profound implications for the nature of the world’s “inclusion in Christ.” Looking with “pneumatological eyes,” the historical life of Christ is not simply a past event, but is “open” to an ever-new unfolding in time:

In other words, the Holy Spirit allows the life of Christ to be extended in history as the life of the Church, the mystical body of Christ. Reciprocally, through the *mediation of the Church, the concrete history of the world can be eschatologically “assumed” into the person of Christ and thus into the trinitarian life of God. There is an inexhaustible depth to Jesus’ incarnate life— there is time and space enough for the whole drama of world history to be gathered into his life.* However, in order for this life to be “opened” so as to include the whole of history, Jesus must “return” to the Father through death and Resurrection. Both the “opening” of Jesus’ life and his “return” to the Father are accomplished in the Holy Spirit and the eucharistic Church—the twofold gift that is poured out at the consummation of Jesus’ mission. As the divine “fruit” of the reciprocal love of Father and Son within the Trinity, and as the “fruit” of Jesus’ human and divine self-surrender, the Spirit initiates creation into the inexhaustible realm of the divine exchange of trinitarian life by making creation into the body of Christ.⁴⁶ (emphasis added)

The inversion is mesmerizing: for the Holy Spirit is the bond that unites Father and Son, and in turn unites us to the Father but in the Son. The key to the universalization of Jesus’ individual life is to see that His “consummation” of His mission is fruitful of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who universalizes Christ in us and draws us into Him and His mysteries; or more deeply, uniting mankind to Christ as His Bride and His very self (Body), and living His very mysteries:

⁴⁶ Ibid., 479.

It is the Spirit, then, who leads the Church into all truth. But... the Spirit does not issue a new revelation, but makes known the depths of what Christ has accomplished. The Spirit does not work next to or after Christ, but in and with Him. It is the concrete and historical life of Christ that the Spirit reveals, and so it is the concrete and historical life of Jesus into which the Christian is baptized. Thus, to enter into Christ's life is to enter into all the particular aspects of existence from His birth to His hidden life, to his expropriation and death. There is no aspect or detail of Christ's historical life that does not represent an infinite source of life for the ongoing mission of the Spirit and the Church.⁴⁷

The depth of what is taking place in this "inclusion in Christ" can easily escape us. If the Eucharistic image of the Pelican wounding her breast to feed her chicks with her own blood can touch us deeply, how much more should Christ as a "mother" feeding us with His very being: His sonship and divine life, through two mothers of the Church and Mary, through the sacraments which are a gift of Himself, and sharing His very mysteries, so that we can relive His very life and retrace the steps that He took first. Baptism truly begins the "incorporation" to Christ. Within Christ's Mystical Body, we are drawn into the Trinity.

B. Christ's Sacrifice on Calvary has the Form of a Marriage Vow

In this third step, we arrive at the summit that gives us the context: Christ's act of kenosis, above all on the cross, is the act of a Bridegroom giving His eternal yes or vow of love to His Bride, the Church. Healy develops von Balthasar's analogy of how every true love has the inner form of a vow. The work of Jesus Christ can be seen as a vow, which contains all that He had done and promises a full future— it comes down to love. Here is von Balthasar's claim about the essence of love, that *true love wishes to surrender itself eternally (see this as applied to Christ)*:

One can never be content with an act of love performed for the present moment only. Love wants to abandon itself, to surrender itself, to entrust itself, to commit itself to love. As a pledge of love, it wants to lay its freedom once and for all at the feet of love. As soon as love is truly awakened, *the moment of time is transformed for it into a form of eternity*. Even erotic egoism cannot forebear swearing "eternal fidelity" and, for a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 482.

fleeting moment, finding pleasure in actually believing in this eternity. How much more, then, does true love want to outlast time and, for this purpose, to rid itself of its most dangerous enemy, its own freedom of choice. Hence every true love has *the inner form of a vow*. It binds itself to the beloved and does so out of motives and in the spirit of love.⁴⁸

Much of von Balthasar's *The Christian State of Life* is an attempt to unfold this claim for the evangelical vows of religious life, but this insight into the nature of a vow applies equally to spousal love. Of interest here is the relation between the historical life (both past and future) of an individual and the concrete "moment" of exchanging vows. The first thing to be noted is the sense of totality, in which every aspect of a person's being is gathered up and included in the gift: "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (*Song of Songs* 6:3). The gift must be both *irrevocable and total*.

Von Balthasar follows St. Ignatius in viewing the early stages of human existence as preparation for the momentous occasion of divine election and the consequent choice to enter a vowed state of life (consecrated or married). Everything is preparation for the self-surrender, one that can only be compared to death. For example, for marriage, all of the past experiences and memories are now understood in their true significance: "one's past is the soil that will make possible a new and fruitful form of life in communion with the other."⁴⁹

Yet, the moment of self-surrender involving a "death to self" in the exchange of vows is life-giving. This new form of life is another way of saying that one's future is also included within the self-surrender of a vow. It is a commitment that embraces whatever happens— whatever illnesses or blessings may come, will now unfold within the relationship of communion that is constituted by the vows. This includes, above all, the greatest gift, presupposing an openness to the future gift of children, who will be the very incarnation of newness and surprise. Romano Guardini avers that "in the experience of a great love, all that happens becomes an event inside that love." In the form of a vow, a great love is able to include all that has happened and all that will happen. Every event is simultaneously

⁴⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 38–39.

⁴⁹ Nicholas J. Healy, "Inclusion in Christ," 484.

an unveiling of the depths of what has already been given in the form of a vow. In short, what is given to another in this once-for-all gift is precisely a life. Thus, with the marriage consent, the couple surrenders themselves and accepts all that the future will bring.⁵⁰

Applying this to God's union with us, we can speak mystically of the relation between Christ and the world as a spousal relationship. The marriage between God and the world is consummated, in an initial "yes," with Jesus' own words at the end of His mission, "*consummatum est*" (Jn 19:30). The difficulty is that Christ is given a mission that circumscribes world history: He has to "return" to the Father with all of creation. Applying von Balthasar's fruitful conception of a total self-surrender that takes the form of a vow, we can say that Christ's mission is in fact consummated at the hour of His death, *but in the form of a promise or vow, a covenant of new life in communion with Him.*

As we saw with Guardini's words earlier, "in the experience of a great love, all that happens becomes an event inside that love." Then the Holy Spirit and the Church (symbolized by blood and water) are given as the fruit of Jesus' death; the Spirit and the Church are the form and fruit of the God-man marriage covenant in its historical unfolding. Everything that happens in the *future* life of the spouses will be the unveiling of the hidden depths of what has *already* been given in the once-for-all exchange of vows at Calvary.

The newness of the Holy Spirit and His mission of guiding the Church into "all truth" (Jn 16:13) is simultaneously an unveiling of the true depths of Jesus' self-surrender as a revelation of the Father's love, a self-surrender that comprises the past, present, and future. The Holy Spirit is both the "gift" and "fruit" of the mutual love between Father and Son and is also the ultimate gift that is bestowed as the "fruit" of Jesus' life-giving death.⁵¹

Thus the key to the "universalization" of Christ's grace to humanity, that does not dilute particularity (Jesus' one historical life), lies in the fact that Jesus' "consummation" of His mission at Calvary is fruitful of the Holy Spirit and the Church, a fruitfulness that is not added from outside but is in a certain sense "beyond" the mission:

⁵⁰ Ibid., 484-485.

⁵¹ Ibid., 485.

[w]e see that the Spirit universalizes precisely by including everyone in Christ's mission through the Eucharist— a feat that the Spirit can perform precisely insofar as the Eucharist is the crystallized fruit of the particular birth, life, death, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth as the expression of his eternal relation to the Father within the mutual love of the Holy Spirit.

We thus come to the core of our proposal: the providence exercised through and by the *Kyrios* [*Lord*] is the *Kyrios himself in his paschal mystery*, as this is eternalized by the Spirit. History itself is created for, and made possible by, this eternalization— itself the ultimate expression of the Son's eternal, world-grounding self-reception from the Father, revealed through his mission to be the same act whereby the Son, together with the Father, eternally "spirates" the Spirit as the ultimate gift of love.⁵²

To summarize, von Balthasar's soteriology precludes a vision of two separate compartments. It begins with the Trinity and ends with the Trinity, with an overall trajectory of love that descends to take up the Church in its ascent. Reliving his kenosis as Son before the Father to receive the capacity to spirate the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, the Son's kenosis in the Incarnation, obeying the Holy Spirit as a rigid rule during His life, and above all in His oblation on the cross, Christ has acquired in His humanity the capacity to spirate the Holy Spirit to the Father and to the Church.

The spirated Holy Spirit in turn assumes mankind into Christ and His mysteries, so that as to universalize Christ's form in each, especially through the sacraments, and above all through the Eucharist (become what we eat). It is the sacrifice on Calvary, seen as a nuptial vow by Christ to His Bride, in which all He did before was preparation to make this vow, and all that follows His sacrifice in salvation history is included in that eternal vow. The Holy Spirit and the Eucharist especially enables the Bride to give our "yes" to His "yes," and enter into a marriage covenant with Him, to become His very self and Mystical Body, live His very mysteries (inclusion in Christ), and be drawn into the Trinity.

Hans Urs von Balthasar's elevated vision provides the backdrop or theological foundation for a horizon of eternity, in which, as for St.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 486.

Catherine of Siena and St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the shortness of life and the little one offers in this life is insignificant compared to the divinization God has prepared for us are perceived, and, above all, the inversion of the Trinity by Christ to provide the spousal union with Christ that also makes us sons and daughters of the Father (“*fili in Filio*,” children in the Son).

CHAPTER 10

THE NEW CHRIST AND THE LAST THINGS

(Death, Judgment, Purgatory, Heaven, Hell)

All the great truths of religion, the mysteries of eternity, plunged my soul into a state of joy not of this earth.... I copied out several passages on perfect love, on the reception God will give his elect at the moment he becomes their reward, great and eternal, and I repeated over and over the words of love burning in my heart. (St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, Third Ed, ICS, 102)

In the previous chapter, we gained an insight into the vital need for a deep orientation to eternity (Yves Congar's *sens eschatologique*). We also saw how reading Fr. Arminjon's *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life* for St. Thérèse fuelled her passion for eternity and the love of Christ above all passing things, and in the extended text of the same quotation above, she adds: "I copied out several passages on perfect love, on the reception God will give his elect at the moment he becomes their reward, great and eternal." The priest gaining familiarity with the Four Last Things may similarly find his spiritual life enflamed; and armed with greater knowledge, discover that he is able to direct those entrusted to him towards eternity and also reassure those who might have apprehensions about death and judgment.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief theological synthesis for the priest and all new Christs— it represents a shift from the previous two Parts of this book to theology. While there are two eschatologies (individual and communal), for the sake of brevity, this chapter will devote its attention only to the individual eschatology at death, as the eschaton events require much additional elaboration. This chapter in large part incorporates lecture notes of Attila Miklósházy (text boxes).¹

¹ Bishop Attila Miklósházy, "Eschatology" (class lectures, Toronto School of Theology at the University of Toronto, Grace and Glory: SAT 2331S, Toronto, Ontario, 1978). Permission was granted in May 2016 to incorporate Bishop Miklósházy's notes in this book. The author have drawn from diverse other sources a long time ago and is unable to find the citations.

I. A RENEWED CHRISTOLOGICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL FOCUS

Renewal with Three Integrations within Eschatology

In the renewal of theology of the Second Vatican Council, there have been three remarkable “integrations” (syntheses): an overarching synthesis of the various theological disciplines; a christological concentration; and an eschatological recovery or restoration.

(i) Overarching Synthesis of Theological Disciplines

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the individual theological disciplines were treated like compartmentalized or autonomous disciplines, e.g., sacraments was treated on its own, with little reference to christology or ecclesiology. If we can discern the great benefits of the integration we are witnessing in the medical field (e.g., coming together of various specialists as a team to treat a patient with a near-death car accident trauma with multiple injuries), then we can imagine the great value of the synthesis of the diverse domains of theology attained by contemporary theology. For example, how much richer is it to link the presence of Christ to the Church and the sacraments under “sacramentality” (as extensions of Christ’s presence): Christ as “Primordial Sacrament,” the Church as “Universal Sacrament of salvation,” and the seven sacraments as recapitulating all into Christ’s Mystical Body.

What makes this overarching integration possible are the next two sub-integrations: (ii) A “christological concentration,” in which everything finds its center again in Christ; (iii) an “eschatological recovery,” of linking theology again to eternity, re-establishing the overarching tension of the “already but not yet” vision of salvation history.

(ii) Christological Concentration: Christ the “Eschatos” Explains All the “Eschata”

Hans Urs von Balthasar offers a phrase that captures succinctly how God is the axis and core of all the final events: that God as attained is heaven, as lost is hell, as revealed is judgment, as purifying is purgatory. We can substitute Christ into this statement, as the Father works through Christ:

God is the “last thing” of the creature. *Gained, he is heaven; lost, he is hell; examining, he is judgment; purifying, he is purgatory.* He is to whom finite being dies, and through whom it rises to him, in him. This he is, however, as he presents himself to the world, that is, in his Son, *Jesus Christ*, who is the revelation of God and therefore, the whole essence of the last things.² (emphasis added)

The etymology of “eschatology” proves helpful: the Greek “*eschat-*” is the stem for “final” or “last.” Thus, *eschaton* refers to overall final event of Christ’s second coming, while *eschata* refers to the individual “last things” at the “eschaton” (e.g., resurrection, judgment). But the key is the *Eschatos*, the “last One,” Jesus Christ, or as Nicholas Healy summarizes: “God is the ‘last thing’ of the creature... in his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God and, therefore, the whole essence of the last things.”³ Thus the final events are only *eschata* (“last things”) insofar as they relate to their finality—Jesus, the “Last One.”

This “christological concentration” in eschatology of Christ being our all applies to our entire Christian life. The Church Fathers teach that we are in relationship to the Father insofar as we are united to and inserted in Christ in His Mystical Body: “being with Christ” is the condition for seeing God and going to the Father. Thus the key to Christian life and our finality is “being with Christ.”

(iii) Eschatological Recovery in Christ: Four “already but not yet” Dimensions

The key to a fruitful understanding of the last things is to integrate four dimensions within the prism of eschatology as an “already but not yet”: (a) the present time is cupped towards eternity, as Jesus’ coming has unleashed a revolution driving salvation history towards eternity; (b) grace is linked to glory because “grace is the seed of glory” (Aquinas); (c) Christ’s coming in the liturgy is already a proleptic “second coming”; and, (d) Christ, the Omega (“*Eschatos*”) is the key to the individual last things (*eschata*). The key to this entire integration is the aforementioned “christological concentration.” It is

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Some Points of Eschatology,” *Explorations in Theology: The Word Made Flesh*, vol. I (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 260–261.

³ For further development on von Balthasar’s eschatology, one might consider Nicholas J. Healy, “The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Being as Communion,” Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16.

based upon Christ's unifying central role that is evident from Scripture: "I am the alpha and the omega" (Rev 22:13) and "I will draw all things to myself" (Jn 12:32)— Christ is the Creator (beginning), incorporates in grace (in-between), and is the ultimate goal (end).

II. INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY AT DEATH

A. DEATH

Pastoral Question: *What can the priest preach about in a funeral homily for an untimely death (e.g., of a child or by suicide)?*

For most, facing death poses the most troubling predicament of our lives. Of all things in the world only death is not uncertain, says Augustine; and according to Aquinas, of all human evils, death is the worst, for by it we are robbed of what is most lovable: life and being. Modern existentialist philosophers tend toward a very dim view of death. For Sartre, death is the final end, and for Camus death is the fundamental crime (but Heidegger sees death as a constitutive part of life, not merely the end of it). Yet, we find that believing in immortality, an existence beyond death, can reinvigorate one's outlook on life. When Oliver Pilat of the *New York Post* wrote to Jacques Maritain in 1952 asking if there is "something intellectually disreputable in talking about immortality," Maritain's response was consoling, including the comforting knowledge that it brings strength to sacrifice oneself for superior causes and hope to look forward to meeting God.⁴ Thus, like Paul, the Christian's dominant disposition toward death should not be fear but rather great joy in seeing death primarily as an encounter with Christ, whom we love and long to be with: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil 1:23).

Individualistic Approach to be Overcome

Nevertheless, in spite of this Christian desire to "be with Christ," we must admit that at the human level death remains a foreboding mystery. For some, it can be overwhelming because of fear of the suffering that can accompany death (e.g., cancer), from a desire to live longer, or a fear of

⁴ Jacques Maritain, Letter to Oliver Pilat, University of Notre Dame website, accessed July 16, 2016, <https://www3.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/jm312b.htm>.

judgment. Since Christian faith should bring a certain confidence, one asks whether the interior conflict at the thought of death derives partly from a major deviation from what was formerly a communitarian vision of eschatology to an individualistic approach. Very devout people at death can become exclusively focused in on themselves, unlike St. Thérèse, who would not take rest till the work of redemption was completed. The primary concern as Christians should not be our personal salvation but the hope for the salvation of all (von Balthasar). Jean Daniélou has captured succinctly the Christ-like approach:

Too often we think of hope in too individualistic a manner as merely our personal salvation. But hope essentially bears on the great actions of God concerning the whole of creation. It bears on the destiny of all humanity. It is the salvation of the world that we await. In reality hope bears on the salvation of all men— and it is only in the measure that I am immersed in them that it bears on me.⁵

Since we desire to know what happens at death, Pope Benedict XII's apostolic constitution, *Benedictus Deus* (1336), clarifies once and for all that, after a Particular Judgment following death, the soul immediately (*mox*) goes to its destination, heaven (some via Purgatory) or hell. Let us now examine the hope-filled vision of Christian death: origin, final option, Christ's sacrifice, meeting with God, loving call of God to our eternal destiny, and confidence before its awesomeness.

Theological Review

The Nature Of Death

Scripture reveals clearly that death, with its classical definition of separation of body from soul, is *a result of sin*. It indicates that the soul (the spiritual life-principle of man) breaks from and assumes in death a new and different relationship to the body. Before sin, there would have been no death, but only a transformation, a rebirth to eternal life, without rupture or suffering, without the decay of the body and the disruption of relationships. After sin, death is a brutal

⁵ Jean Daniélou, *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953), 340.

⁶ Attila Miklósházy, "Death," SAT 2331S: Grace and Glory.

break, the body ends in corruption when its physico-chemical synthesis is exhausted. Why did God permit this death as a brutal break?: because of sin, because we wanted to go on our own way (see temptation of the Serpent). Physical death involves the destruction of the body (material dimension), spiritual death is the loss of God in grace, and eternal death is the eternal loss of God (hell).

The Church rejects two disputed theories: that there was always death from the beginning (before Adam's sin); and a version of a final fundamental option that James O'Connor notes is very platonic: "body is an impedance to the operation of the human soul," arguing that it may often be harder to make such a decision when one is dying.⁷

The Christian Concept of Death

Death from a biological viewpoint is the end of the human life-force. According to Scripture, it is also an act of God, the judgment of God upon sinful mankind. Human death is the climax of life, with a long prelude during life: with our own trials, illnesses, sufferings, and afflictions, as signs of our dying (cf. 2 Cor 4:7-18). *Thus death is something always present in human life;* it characterizes our humanity. But, through redemption, there is also a participation in Jesus' death through faith and Baptism (Rom 6:1-11), which is intensified through the other sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Death is a *meeting between God and man*. We cannot escape His call and we will be alone in this meeting with God. We die alone: the loneliness of death is total; but the pain of separation is a real expression of our bond with those we love.

In death *we experience our creatureliness and our finitude*. It is a mysterious, personal transformation. We leave history, family, and friends behind, which is the bitterest pain of dying. Hence death has the character of penance and expiation. Man, who was always tempted to be "like God" (Gen 3), now experiences the ultimate humiliation. This is all included in accepting death in willing obedience with Christ: "Father, not my will but yours be done!" (Mt 26:39). This is the highest act of love, the highest act of worship.

Christ's sacrifice has transformed our destiny. Christ accepted death in full obedience to the Father, thereby recognizing the Father as the Lord. His willing submission to death was the climax and consummation of His whole obedient life. In this act

⁷ James, O'Connor, *Land of the Living: A Theology of the Last Things* (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publ. Co., 1992), 70-73.

of death He transcended Himself unconditionally and so fulfilled Himself perfectly. The sign of this was His Resurrection.

Christ has now made His obedience and love of God into a new force operative in history for all time, a new inner principle of salvation: the mystery of death and resurrection are united in His obedience. This became a potential for human life, *but each individual must surrender personally to Jesus Christ*. In such a surrender (opening up), the Holy Spirit is given to man to enable him to live and die in and with Christ. In death of each individual, the dynamic of Christ's surrender reaches its concretization.

Death is a loving call from God, an invitation into His own divine life. It is a heavenly birthday (*natalicial*). Christ comes to take us into His glory (cf. Heb 2:10; 3:6; Jn 14:2f.; 1 Cor 5:17). We return home after the pilgrim life and we say: "Into your hands I lay down my life" (Lk 24:36). I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ (cf. Phil 2:3; 1 Cor 11:26; 16:22f.; Acts 22:21).

Death still retains, however, its awesomeness. It contains an element of fear, awaiting God's judgment has its anxiety which can be overcome only in loving confidence: the death of the faithful is a death in the Lord (cf. 1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:15). Those who live and believe in Christ will never die! (Jn 11:25f.; 2 Tim 2:11; Rom 6:8): "Trust in God always, trust also in me!" (Jn 14:1). Christ assured us that we will have abundant life (Jn 10:10). "There is no room for fear in love" (1 Jn 4:18). Anxiety should change into great longing, the *maranatha* cry: "Come Lord Jesus!"

While there is no direct proof in Scripture or Tradition for the theory of a "*final option*" (that God offers to everyone a final opportunity to accept Him), it has a sound philosophical and Christological basis. St. Catherine of Siena revealed that God taught her that we will have a final opportunity to accept Him. An indirect argument could be deduced from 1 Tim 2:3-6, which deals with God's universal salvific will. It seems that this is the only theory that makes God's will effectively operative to everyone before death. It offers to everyone a real opportunity for personal salvation, an opportunity to encounter Christ, who is the only Mediator to God, offering sufficient grace for salvation, chosen freely and consciously.

This final option also befits God's love and mercy (argument from fittingness); and to be granted this opportunity of encountering Christ befits our freedom and dignity to end our life in this way, actively consummating it.

B. PARTICULAR AND GENERAL JUDGMENTS

Pastoral Question: What can the priest say to someone in Confession who expresses doubt about whether God will forgive a past serious sin?

Catholic Tradition maintains that immediately upon death each individual is judged definitively by Christ regarding the person's eternal destiny. The criteria for judgment is love (Matthew) or acceptance of Christ, faith (John). The Christian finds great solace in the awareness of two facts: judgment has been made already in Baptism and Confession, which are anticipations of the Particular Judgment (when God completely forgives, redeems, and makes us just); and even more reassuring is the knowledge that Jesus is not judgment but "sheer salvation" (God sent His Son not to condemn us, as Jn 3:16 teaches; and "Neither do I condemn you" in Jn 8:11), and our sins are like grains of sand against the infinite expanse of God's mercy. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus had no fear of death: for she lived in the arms of Jesus in life, so that He will find her there also at death; and she realized that she was too small to merit anything and at death would look to God as a Father whose mercy will provide all to His child.

We note that, besides Particular Judgment, which concerns the individual, Scripture and the Magisterium teach that there is also a General Judgment at the eschaton which concerns humanity as a collective unity (family). The reason for a communal judgment is fourfold: after the Particular Judgment, there is a continuous accumulation of new effects from each person's life, with social and historical ramifications for good or bad; those who thirst for justice in this life will be acknowledged before all; the truth of all actions will be made manifest; but above all, God's justice and might should be revealed and acknowledged by all ("all knees will bend"), showing that God was always in control.

Theological Review

Scripture

In the Old Testament, God is manifested as Judge, though not specifically at death. Divine retribution there operates within the limits of present life. Signs of a favorable judgment were prosperity, posterity, longevity (cf. Ps 1:1-3; 36:18-25; Prov 22:4);

while unfavourable judgment was manifested through a wicked life, early death, having no descendants (cf. Job 15:20-21; Ps 139:12; Wis 3-5). This view, however, was challenged by the problem of innocent sufferers (Job 9:22). Some Old Testament texts even seem to suggest a Particular Judgment at death (Sir 21:9; Job 17:4; Isa 14:11).

In the New Testament, there is no explicit teaching on Particular Judgment (there are explicit references to the General Judgment), but *it is manifestly implied in several texts*:

- The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), who enter immediately after death to their different rewards.
- The Penitent Thief (Lk 24:43).
- The admonitions to penance (Mt 3:7-10; Lk 3:7-9).
- Exhortation to enter by the narrow gate (Lk 13:24-28).
- Paul's longing to depart and be with Christ (Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:6ff.).
- John seems to speak of 2 judgments: one in this life, another at the end. But judgment in this life (unbelief) implies another, Particular Judgment at death.

We can be sure that all will be judged.

Erroneous Opinions

According to some Protestant authors (J.A.T. Robinson, R. Aldwinckle), it is unjust to make the moment of death the time of final judgment; for them, such a judgment will take place only at the Parousia.

Catholic Theology

Particular Judgment of individuals at death, though not a dogma, is a theologically certain opinion, indirectly inferred from Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium. Catholic theologians today put the emphasis more on the individual person's self-assessment, than on God's judging. But perhaps a *golden mean* is necessary between self-judgment and God's judgment. Though we may make an adequate assessment of ourselves in death, we cannot make an adequate assessment of what we deserve! Only God is competent to assess us and to assign us reward or punishment that is proper. In other words, God not only can, but does and will judge. In the Bible judgment is more than merely a judgment of condemnation. When I make my final decision, God's judgment of me is no longer provisional (as during my life-time), but definitive and irrevocable. God, not man, has the final word, and this is the Particular Judgment!

Particular Judgment

At death, man is given a final opportunity to make a choice for or against God. It is God who gives man the grace of this final option. If man accepts the divine self-communication, then he belongs to God forever; if he rejects it, he is forever separated from God, and God will not offer Himself again.

In this judgment, *man accepts the measure of God as it appears in Jesus Christ*. The light of Christ falls on man, such that he sees with the greatest clarity and affirms or disavows what he has chosen. All the motives and actions of his earthly life come before his gaze. He sees himself unmasked, he becomes his own judge. Intrinsically, the finality and irrevocability of our status comes from our own decision and self-judgment; extrinsically, it comes from God's judgmental will ratifying and implementing our decision. Judgment has a twofold meaning: liberating or damning. For those who accepted the judgment of God in Baptism, Confession, and conscience, the particular judgment is liberating; it has the character of forgiveness and interior renewal, producing real freedom, liberation.

General Judgment

The Person of the Judge: Sometimes the Judge is the Father (Rom 2:5f.; 3:6; 14:10), at other times it is Christ (Mt 7:21ff.; 13:41; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 4:4; 2 Tim 4:1). God accomplishes His work through Christ. At the hour of Judgment, Christ alone will appear and the whole creation must listen to Him.

Persons to be Judged: All men and women and the fallen angels; the whole world will be judged. The redeemed will be judged, but they will also be judges themselves (Mt 25:32; 1 Cor 6:2; Rom 2:6; 2 Tim 4:1; 2 Cor 5:10). Certain types of people are singled out: "God's judgment will fall on fornicators and adulterers" (Heb 13:4); those who judge others: "As you judge others, so you will yourselves be judged" (Mt 7:2); those who had no mercy: "In that judgment there will be no mercy for the man who has shown no mercy" (Jas 2:13); teachers: "We who teach shall ourselves be judged with greater strictness" (Jas 3:1); "Above all he will punish those who follow their abominable lusts. They flout authority; reckless and headstrong..." (2 Pet 2:9-10); and the fallen angels: "God did not spare the angels who sinned, but consigned them to the dark pits of hell, where they are reserved for judgment" (2 Pet 2:4).

The Norm of Judgment: There are three economies: the Mosaic Law (Rom 2:12); the Natural Law (Rom 2:14f.); and the Law of the Gospel (Jas 2:12), especially how they have judged others (Rom 2:1ff.; 14:10ff.; Jas 2:13). Above all, it will be taken into account whether they were loving or indifferent to others (Mt 25:42.45), how

they have obeyed the Gospel of Jesus (2 Thess 1:5-9), and whether they accepted Jesus (Jn 12:4.8). In other words, they will be judged according to the *standard of love* (the main commandment), their knowledge of Christ, and any charitable actions directed towards Christ.

The Subject of Judgment: The General Judgment will make public the objective merits or lack of merit which individuals had within history. Previous individual judgments will not be re-examined or corrected, just confirmed. The General Judgment will satisfy our wounded sense of justice in this world. Then we will be perfectly satisfied; hence we can look forward with trust to this day. The Judgment will expose the objective rightness and wrongness of historical consequences of all events, regardless of the intentions of the individuals. Christ's judgment will provide an explanation of history: *many negative things in history will be seen as positive and beneficial, while seemingly favorable things will be proved as hindrances of progress.* Judgment will also reveal the true value of man's cultural, scientific, artistic and philosophical creations, institutions, religious systems and movements, struggles, wars, revolutions, etc. Sins, repented in the past, too will be made public, not for shame and confusion, but to reveal God's mercy, goodness, and glory, who can bring out good even from evil things.

The Event of Judgment: The Book of the Apocalypse uses dramatic, mythological images. In reality, *Judgment consists in a flash of illumination, wherein everyone can see in an instant the whole course of history and his own part in it.* One will be enabled to judge the things rightly according to the divine plan of salvation, so that this will give an incentive to submit immediately to judgment. No one could resist this enlightenment, nothing remains unclear or obscure (1 Cor 4:3ff.). In the Book of Life everything will be disclosed (Apoc 13:8). As it was said before, the norm of judgment will be love, personified in Jesus Christ. Everyone will be appraised according to the service he rendered to his fellow human beings, who represent Christ (Mt 25).

Absolute Future: Judgment at the Second Coming has a two-fold meaning: revealing merits and guilts; and fixing the corresponding destinies. It will begin the Absolute Future, not the end of the movement towards Christ. Evil will be eliminated, but the movement will proceed in love uninterruptedly without end. In the General Judgment, Christ brings to fulfillment the commission received from the Father, definitively establishing what God has primarily intended: the family of persons joined to the persons of the Holy Trinity and to one another in everlasting knowledge, love, and joy.

C. PURGATORY

Pastoral Question: *What can the priest say to RCLA candidates who have some fear of Purgatory and do not understand why it is necessary?*

Meaning of Purification

The topic of Purgatory is likely to be a murky one for Catholics. Gerhard Cardinal Müller, former prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Faith, writes that we can have a distorted view of mercy as an “end-of-season sale,” where God lowers the bar and leaves us in a state of adolescence, instead of healing and elevating us to live divinely as children of God.⁸ The logic for the necessity of Purgatory is captured in the late Cardinal O’Connor’s episcopal motto, “There is no love without justice.” That is, God is love in His essence, but justice is a necessary attribute of love. Man carries the burden of an inescapable responsibility for his actions. Man’s defects and imperfections cling to his character until death, and they are not removed automatically at death. That is, sin (*peccatum*) causes not only a state of guilt (*culpa*) but also punishment (*poena*).

In the renowned conferences that he gave as a retreat to Pope Paul VI, Karol Wojtyła spoke with a similar insight on the mystery of purification: it is out of *the need for man to be spiritually prepared for union with God in charity*. The pains of purification are caused by *love, the burning desire to change oneself to be suitable for Love*. Let us correct a possible misconception. Purgatory is not a temporary version of hell; there is a world of difference between the eternal pain of loss in hell and the temporary pain of loss in Purgatory:

The two pains of loss differ immensely in rigor, duration, and in consequences: the damned have lost hope and charity; they blaspheme without ceasing; they have a will obstinate in evil; they never repent; they desire universal damnation. The souls in purgatory have assured hope and inamissible charity; they love God; they adore divine justice; they are confirmed in good; they repent profoundly; they love all God’s children.⁹

⁸ Gerhard Müller, *The Cardinal Müller Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 209.

⁹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Everlasting Life: A Theological Treatise on the Four Last Things* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1991), 165.

There is thus a world of difference between Purgatory and hell. A state whose centre is love and another whose centre is hate cannot be compared. The justified are alive in the love of Christ. When there is a delay in reaching the possession of the Beloved, there is sorrow, a sorrow that purifies.

St. John of the Cross offers a profound understanding of Purgatory's pains: the Holy Spirit is "the flame of living love" that purifies the soul to enable it to reach the perfect love of God, both on earth and, where necessary, after death. In this way, he established a certain parallelism between the purification associated with the so-called "dark nights" and the passive purification of Purgatory, healing by the Holy Spirit for union.

Need for Satisfaction for Past Sins and the Remaining Venial Sins and for Rectification

The Thomistic background of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's *Everlasting Life* dispels unclarity.¹⁰ He points to St. Thomas Aquinas' expounding the theological reasons for Purgatory in his *Commentary on the Sentences*. After giving authoritative arguments from Scripture, he explains that, even when contrition has forgiven mortal sins and destroyed eternal punishment, it often happens that the temporary punishment due to these sins remains to be endured, as well as venial sins. This theological reason, founded on the necessity of satisfaction, is demonstrative for Garrigou-Lagrange, and destroys the foundation of the Protestant negation of Purgatory.

This theological reason is founded on what Scripture says concerning penance. Looking at the Old Testament, we see that, even after the remission of guilt, there often remains a temporal punishment to be endured: Adam cultivating the soil in the sweat of his brow; Moses not being allowed to enter the promised land; and David being punished with the death of his son from Bathsheba.

The New Testament gives ample evidence for the necessity of satisfaction or reparation. Jesus Himself and His apostles preached the necessity of penance and of good works to satisfy for sins already forgiven. St. Paul speaks of labors, of watchings, of fasting, which the Church has always considered as

¹⁰ We might also look to Anton Pegis, ed., *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas: The Summa Theologica, The Summa Contra Gentiles* (New York: Random House, 1948); J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1996).

worthy fruits of penance. We often read in Scripture that almsgiving delivers from the pain and suffering due to sin: “The chief reason for the existence of Purgatory is the one we have now expounded, namely, the necessity of satisfaction for sins, mortal or venial, already forgiven. Purgatory is a place of satisfaction [reparation without merit], which applies what was lacking on earth in the line of satisfaction.”¹¹

There are two other reasons: remaining venial sins; and the remains of the sins, the attachment to created good, that draw us back to sin:

That venial sins do remain is not doubtful. St. Thomas says: “A man lies in sleep, in the state of grace indeed, but with venial sin, which will not be remitted without contrition. Many souls in the state of grace retain numerous venial sins at the moment of death.”

On the “remains of sin” St. Thomas speaks as follows: “Mortal guilt is forgiven when grace turns the soul to God, the soul which had been turned away from Him. But there may remain an inclination toward created good. This inclination, this disposition caused by preceding acts, is called the remains of sin. These dispositions grow weaker in a soul that lives in the state of grace. They do not have the upper hand. But they do solicit the soul to fall back into sin....

But does not extreme unction [Anointing of sick] remove these consequences? We answer: first, some die without this sacrament; secondly, some do not receive it with full dispositions. Extreme unction, fortifying the soul for the last struggle, hinders disordered habitudes from harming us at the supreme moment. But these habitudes still remain, like rust. And nothing soiled can enter into glory.¹²

Purgatory's Chief Pain: Delay of Beatific Vision

A very insightful teaching is that Purgatory's chief pain is not the actual purification but the delay of the beatific vision. Furthermore, this delay of the beatific vision differs notably from that of *Sheol* before our Lord's death: the former was a punishment inflicted not on their person but on their human nature not yet perfectly regenerated; the latter delay in Purgatory is truly a suffering, the chief of the purgatorial sufferings.

¹¹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Everlasting Life*, 162.

¹² *Ibid.*, 162-163.

St. Catherine of Genoa, who experienced on earth the pains of Purgatory, explains to us why the smallest suffering in Purgatory is more severe than great suffering on earth because of the delay in the beatific vision: “Souls in Purgatory unite great joy with great suffering. One does not diminish the other. No peace is comparable to that of the souls in Purgatory, except that of the saints in heaven. On the other hand, the souls in Purgatory endure torments which no tongue can describe and no intelligence comprehend, without special revelation” (*Treatise on Purgatory*, chap. 14).

Privation of the beatific vision is painful in the same degree as the desire of that vision is vivid for two reasons: negatively, its desire for God is no longer retarded by weight of the body, by the distractions and occupations of this terrestrial life; positively, its desire of God is very intense, because the hour has arrived when it would be in the enjoyment of God if it had placed no obstacle by the faults which it must expiate. The souls in Purgatory grasp much more clearly, by reason of infused desires, the measureless value of the immediate vision of God, of His inamissible possession. Hence it has a hunger for God which it cannot experience here on earth. It has failed to prepare for its rendezvous with God. Since it failed to search for Him, He now hides:

Thus... the separated soul has an insatiable hunger for God. It understands much better than it did on earth that *its will has a depth without measure, that only God seen face to face can fill this will and draw it irresistibly*. This immense void renders it more avid to see the sovereign good....

... The absence of this vision, when its hour [death] has arrived, causes the greatest pain. Souls in purgatory feel most vividly their impotence and poverty.

We often hear it said that in the souls in purgatory there is an ebb and flow. Strongly drawn toward God, they are held back by the “remains of sin,” which they have to expiate. They cannot rush to the goal which they so ardently desire. Love of God does not diminish their pain, but increases it.¹³ (emphasis added)

For those who wish some insight from private revelation, the treatise of St. Catherine of Genoa, dictated in ecstasy, has always been highly esteemed by theologians, who find therein a supplement to theological science:

¹³ *Ibid.*, 169.

Chapter 9. Heaven has no gates. Whoever will can enter there, because God is all goodness. But the divine essence is so pure that the soul, finding in itself obstacles, prefers to enter purgatory, and there to find in mercy the removal of the impediment.

Chapter 10. Their greatest suffering is that of having sinned against divine goodness, and of still finding those rusty “remains of sin.”

Chapter 11. The soul feels God’s loving attraction. But it feels also its own inability to follow this attraction. If it could find a purgatory still more excruciating, where it could more quickly be purified, it would at once plunge into it.

Chapter 12. I see the rays of faith which purify the soul, as fire in a crucible cleanses gold from dregs. When the soul is entirely purified, the fire can no longer cause pain....

Chapter 17. Illumined on the necessity of reparation, they would cry out to men on earth: “O wretched creatures, why so blindly attached to things that pass? Why not make provision for the future? You say perhaps: ‘I will go to confession, I will gain a plenary indulgence, I will be saved.’ But remember that the adequate confession and the perfect contrition, required for gaining a plenary indulgence, are not easily attained.”...

Chapter 19. These purgatorial pains... I have myself experienced these last two years. All consolation, corporal and spiritual, has gradually been taken from me. To conclude, only God’s omnipotent mercy can cure human deficiency. This transformation is the work of purgatory.¹⁴

As noted in “Chapter 17” above, we must be careful to avoid flaunting God’s commandments and relying on Confession without conversion, especially in regard to not being faithful to the daily sacraments: “If Purgatory is less severe for souls who have sinned only by feebleness, it must be more rigorous for those who have for a long time failed in Confession and Communion.”¹⁵

¹⁴ St. Catharine of Genoa, “Treatise on Purgatory,” *Dict. de Spiritualité*, s.v. “St. Catharine of Genoa,” quoted in Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Everlasting Life*, 191-192.

¹⁵ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Everlasting Life*, 171.

II. DESTINATIONS

A. HEAVEN

Pastoral Question: *How can the priest in a homily exhort parishioners to long for heaven?*

We long to finally see and be with God (*Maranatha, come Lord Jesus*), to experience the ineffable union (“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,” 1 Cor 2:9), to be transformed into God (*theosis*), and to participate in the Trinitarian communion. Five dimensions are elaborated: christological (in Christ), theological (beatific vision), ecclesiological (communion of saints), anthropological (human fulfillment), and cosmological (universe). The images from Scripture are particularly profound.

Scripture & Theological Background

NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament is a treasure trove of references to heaven. In the Gospels, Jesus comes down from heaven, so heaven is opened with Him (Mt 3:16; Acts 2:2). He came from the Father and will return there again (Jn 6:62). Jesus is the Bread from heaven (Jn 6:32-35). After His return to heaven at the Ascension, and from the Father’s right hand, He sends us the Holy Spirit. He goes up to prepare a place for us in heaven (Jn 14:3). With Jesus’ Ascension we too ascend with Him (Jn 6:62; 13:1; Heb 9:11-12; Rom 8:29). From there He will come again at the Parousia which we eagerly await (Mk 14:62; Mt 25:32; 1 Thess 1:10; 2 Thess 1:7).

Jesus often spoke about the Kingdom of heaven which is the Kingdom of the Father (Mt 25:34; 1 Cor 15:24). His Father is the Father in heaven. We will have our reward in heaven, where our treasures are and cannot be lost any more (Mt 6:20; Lk 12:33). Heaven is eternal life (Mt 18:8ff.; 19:29; 25:46; Jn 3:15ff.; Lk 16:9). In heaven there will be a wedding feast (Mt 25:10; Lk 14:15). Heaven is also the consummation of salvation-history, *the new heaven and new earth* (Isa 65:17; Rom 8:19-23; 2 Pet 3:13). It is the *New Jerusalem* (Apoc 3:12; 21:3.10). There will be no death, no suffering (Apoc 21:4ff.). God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).

For Paul, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20f.). In heaven we receive an incorruptible crown (1 Cor 9:25), our reward (1 Cor 3:8; 15:41), and participation in God's glory (Rom 8:18). Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, what God has prepared for us in heaven (1 Cor 2:9). In heaven we will be home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:7), and we will know God and see Him face to face (1 Cor 13:12). According to John, heaven is eternal life, which already begins here through believing in Jesus, Baptism, love, and the Eucharist (Jn 5:24; 3:5.16). Heaven is knowing God (Jn 17:3). In heaven we shall be like Him (1 Jn 3:2).

THEOLOGY: THE NATURE OF HEAVEN

Heaven is not a specific place; it rather expresses God's sovereignty, the divine power that rules over all. Entering heaven means going to God; it is not a spatial movement but a special mode of fulfilled life, created by Christ through His Resurrection. Christ's Resurrection marks the beginning of heaven, its fullness is reached with the completion of the whole Mystical Body of Christ. Like the richness of a diamond that can only be gleaned from looking at different facets, so there are five "facets" of heaven: christological, theological, communal, anthropological, and cosmic.

Christological dimension of heaven: Heaven is where the risen Christ is. Jesus was carried up to heaven at His Ascension, He went to the Father (Jn 16:5.10.18; Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9-11). Ascension is the transfer of His risen body to heaven, to the world of the divine; it involves His corporeal survival and final glorification. Ascension is Christ's exaltation (Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Rom 8:34; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55). Christ is placed above the angels, sitting at the right hand of the Father (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2); He is the High Priest who intercedes constantly for us (Heb 4:14; 6:19); He is enthroned there with full power (Mt 28:18). From there He sends the Holy Spirit to us (Jn 15:25; 16:13-15); He mediates, prays, offers the perpetual sacrifice (Jn 17:17-24). He is there as the head of His Church, He who redeems, saves, sanctifies, blesses, gives life, sustains (Eph 1:17.20.22; Rom 8:39; 1 Cor 1:4-5; 2 Cor 15:21; Gal 2:4.17; 1 Tim 1:14; see also LG 7; *Mystici corporis*).

Heaven is for us being with Christ (Jn 14:3), who says to us, "Come to me!" For Paul, his deepest yearning is to be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17f.; 2 Thess 2:1; Rom 6:23; Phil 4:19; Col 3:2ff.). Here on earth we

are “in Christ,” in heaven we will be “with Christ.” Meeting with Christ fulfills the hunger and thirst after righteousness (cf. Beatitudes). The Eucharist is the anticipation of this satisfaction which prepares us for the heavenly banquet. The Body of Christ (Church) comes to its fulfillment, yet each one will retain his individuality (cf. receiving a new name, Apoc 2:17). There will be a complete intimate union, yet the differences in nature will not be eliminated (Lk 19:25; Mt 24:47; 25:21ff). The glorified Lord is the Lamb who now mediates the perfect glory to His members (Apoc 5:1-14). Heaven is to know Christ: “This is eternal life, to know Jesus Christ” (Jn 17:3).

This is not intellectual knowledge, but the union of two persons in love (like Adam and Eve “knowing each other”), symbolized by marriage. There will be a personal, intimate union between Christ and us; whatever is His is also mine: the whole world, all beauty and riches. Now all this is hidden, but in heaven all will be manifest and experienced: “When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order is gone, and a new order has already begun” (2 Cor 5:17).

Theological dimension of heaven: Beatific vision of God. The encounter with Christ is not the last step towards fulfillment. Christ remains always the Mediator, the Way who leads to the Father (Jn 14:2). He invites His friends to the feast at the family table of God, thereby mediating to them the Father’s love (Mk 10:14; Mt 12:28; 22:1-14; Lk 12:37; 22:26ff; Jn 13:1-17; 14:2). *This heavenly banquet is the symbol of infinite joy and happiness with the One who is the dearest to us:* “Happy is the servant whom the Master finds alert when He comes; I tell you this: He will buckle His belt, seat them at table, and come and *wait on them?*” (Lk 12:37); “He will come and have supper with us” (Apoc 3:20). Then God will manifest Himself as the “Thou” to whom we tend by the structure of our interior being. *So heaven is an exchange of love between God and man:* “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And having thee, I desire nothing else on earth. Though heart and body fail, yet God is my possession for ever” (Ps 73:25-26).

This exchange of love is called the beatific vision of God. To see Him, the hidden One, was always the universal human goal (cf. Ex 33:17-23; Ps 17:15; Jn 14:8). Although man has by nature the capacity for the vision of God, he receives the beatific vision from God as a gift. In the Old Covenant it was said: “No man can see God and live” (Ex 33:20); in the New Covenant Christ declares: “Blessed are the pure, for they shall

see God” (Mt 5:8). God will show Himself directly to man, and man will look continually on the face of the Father (Mt 18:10). *But the vision will be granted only to those who give themselves unreservedly to God.* We can have no idea of this future now, but when it is disclosed to us “we shall be like Him, and we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn 3:2): “Now we see only a puzzling reflection in a mirror... but then we shall see face to face” (1 Cor 13:11f).

This will be a loving gaze, not a rigid spectacle. It will never become boring or simply a passive watching, but the highest activity, a dynamic penetration into the depths of the infinite God, growing, climbing without labor and pain. Always new horizons will open up, new dimensions, and it will never stop. Every goal reached will indicate a new and exciting beginning. We will see God’s essence and His attributes in concrete realization: His mercy, justice, power, glory, love. We will see the three divine persons in their relations, the creative love of God and His salvific activity, His fatherly providence, and the mysteries of Incarnation, Redemption, grace, Eucharist, Mystical Body, the Communion of Saints, etc.

Thus, the beatific vision is a joyful, life-giving exchange between God and man. It is a personal, not merely an intellectual, act leading to union. It will be a complete, yet not a comprehensive, vision. It will not mean any diminution of the divine transcendence. Man is not transformed into God but is raised to a higher level in his nature as man by the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*). *He is enabled to know and to love with that very knowledge and love that belong to God.* The vision of God contains an act of knowledge and act of love; both are included. According to Scripture, *it is the heart of man, the very center of man’s being, that sees God.* Paul says that knowledge will disappear, but love will endure forever (1 Cor 13:8-13). *The exchange of love will take place in a form of conversation through and with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Our conversation with God is a participation in that Trinitarian dynamic which evolves between the Father and the Eternal Word in the Holy Spirit.* Yet, God still remains ultimately a mystery (transcendence!) even in the beatific vision. This, however, will not disappoint us. Gazing upon the face of God constitutes man’s highest happiness, it is gazing upwards towards the Beloved. This absolute veneration of God is adoration and love, the perfect worship. Man experiences this love as a reality greater than himself (Apoc 4:11; 5:9ff).

Communal dimension of heaven (communion of saints). An essential element of heaven is the union of the blessed (and of angels!): “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Ps 133:1). *The deepest desire of ours is the longing for union and love, to give and receive love.* The person in heaven does not live alone with God but in a community of brothers and sisters. Scripture describes this in the metaphor of gathering around the dining table, the heavenly banquet. Each arrival of earthly friends increases their happiness and they will meet persons whom they have never met before. Yet, no “I” will be fused with any “thou” in complete unity; the “I” remains “I,” the “thou” remains “thou.” Thus even here every person remains a mystery to every other, but this does not lessen their happiness. The element of awe in love remains (cf. Mk 12:18-27). But we will find ourselves in the persons we love. They will be part of our eternal happiness. For lovers, even this world can be already transformed by the light of their love. Everything could be changed through this radiating love: the street, the town, the day. The loved one’s name is written on every stone and tree. We will experience this warmth, the richness of love in one another. Past events will be re-lived in a never-ending joy. What was difficult and sacrificial here on earth will become a joyful, victorious remembrance. Encounter with the saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the others, and also the angels, constitute an inexhaustible pleasure in heaven.

Anthropological dimension of heaven: In Heaven, all our good desires will be fulfilled and far surpassed (“eye has not seen”): happiness, unity, peace, truth, beauty, a sense of fulfillment, no regrets, etc. Between earth and heaven, there is a radical discontinuity and a fundamental continuity: as between hiddenness and manifestation, beginning and fulfillment, the “not yet” and completion. (cf. 1 Jn 3:2). One will arrive at the Father’s house (Jn 14:2), to the realization of all his hopes, desires, to his goal, to his homeland (2 Cor 5:4). All our desires will be fulfilled: the Samaritan woman will receive the living water, the people in Capernaum will have the bread of life, the fishermen will have their nets full, the shepherds will have a great flock and green pastures, the merchant will find his precious pearl, etc.

Heaven means also freedom from distress and suffering. We will be liberated from temptation, sin, and death. Even the recollection of sins will intensify the happiness in heaven the joy of being saved (cf. Mt 12:24-50; 5:5-10; Mk 10:24ff.; Lk 6:20-26). The chosen ones will find

their consolation, they will be satisfied (Mt 5). God Himself will wipe away all tears, bind our wounds, and soothe our pains. There will be no more death, no mourning, weeping, suffering, hunger or thirst, tension or division (Apoc 21). In addition, we will be showered with gifts: “A draught from the wellsprings of life will be my free gift to the thirsty” (Apoc 21:5-7). To the victorious He will give fruits from the tree of Life, the crown of life, a hidden manna, a white stone with our name written on it, authority over the nations, the morning star, a white robe, being acknowledged as God’s own, names written in the Book of Life, a place at God’s throne, etc. (Apoc 2:7ff).

Cosmic dimension of Heaven: The union with Christ, the Risen Lord, has also a cosmic dimension. Those united with Christ participate in Jesus’ relation to (dominion of) the world, sharing in the joy of God’s creation. The blessed will see the mystery of the universe and know the connection of world events. They will also be able to exercise an influence on the world now: through their loving concern, helping people and events to open up to the working of divine love in human history. Nothing beautiful, noble, and good that we experienced here on earth will be lost in heaven. On the contrary, if we like things here, how much more we will like them when in heaven!

Degrees in Heaven: God gives Himself totally to all, but they differ in their capacity to receive them. There is a difference in intensity of the individual experience of God. This does not mean different social classes in heaven; the first in the world could be last in heaven and vice-versa (cf. Lk 6:20-25; Mk 10:31; Mt 20:16; 6:3-11; 19:28; 16:24-27). Heaven is a classless society of the future.

However, special marks (*aureolae*) are assigned to some people: virgins, martyrs, doctors (cf. Apoc 14:4; Mt 10:32; Mk 8:25; 10:35-39; 13:9-13; Mt 5:11f.).

The criterion of degrees is **the love of Christ, of God, and of neighbour** (Mt 25). The measure of joy and perfection corresponds to one’s ability to love. Everyone is filled to the measure of his heart, and rejoices in everyone else’s happiness.

B. HELL

Pastoral Question: *How does a priest explain how a loving God can allow hell?*

Jesus warned his listeners to be vigilant of the greatest tragedy: hell, with its loss of the infinite God Himself (“it is better for you to enter life...[than] to be thrown into the eternal fire,” Mt 18:8). In this light, we should recall the consoling background of God’s merciful action to prevent this: (i) God only created heaven, having predestined all to become children in the one Son; (ii) hell is our creation (rejecting Him, we create a space outside of God); (iii) God is sheer mercy, ardently desiring the salvation of all; (iv) our sins are but a drop of water against the ocean of His mercy; (v) love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8); and (vi) that, as He did to the Good Thief, Jesus will probably offer the wayward a final call (final option). Thus all sins repented will be forgiven, the only lasting sin is the closing of hearts to receive God’s infinite mercy. This hardness of heart can be understood as a *final fixation of the failure to love, enclosed in oneself in self-isolation in revolt against love.*

At the same time, we recall its seriousness, that hell is for all eternity. St. Catherine of Siena, through a very sober teaching revealed to her by God in private revelation, offers a clear vision of the four principal torments of hell: deprivation of the beatific vision; conscience; devil; and fire. She tells us also that God revealed to her that, if those in hell were given the two options of either having the beatific vision and suffering the other three torments or the reverse, they would all choose the former, so great is the loss of God.

So also, I tell you, in hell there are four principal torments and all the others are offspring of these.

The first is that these souls are deprived of seeing me. This is so painful for them that if they could they would choose the sight of me along with the fire and excruciating torments, rather than the freedom from their pains without seeing me.

The first suffering revives the worm of conscience, and this is their second torment. For when they see that their sinfulness has deprived them of me and of the company of the angels and made them worthy instead of seeing

the demons and sharing their fellowship, conscience gnaws away at them constantly.

The sight of the devil is their third suffering, and it doubles every other torment. At the sight of me the saints are in constant exaltation, joyfully refreshed in reward for the labors they bore for me with such overflowing love and to their own cost. But it is just the opposite for these wretched little souls. Their only refreshment is the torment of seeing the devil, for in seeing them they know themselves better: that is, they recognize that their sinfulness has made them worthy of him. And so the worm gnaws on and the fire of conscience never stops burning.

Their suffering is even worse because they see the devil as he really is—more horrible than the human heart can imagine. You will recall that when I once let you see him for a tiny while, hardly a moment, as he really is, you said (after coming to your senses again) that you would rather walk on a road of fire even till the final judgment day than see him again. But even with all you have seen you do not know how horrible he really is. For my divine justice makes him look more horrible still to those who have lost me, and this is in proportion to the depth of their sinfulness.

The fourth torment is fire. This fire burns without consuming, for the soul cannot be consumed, since it is not material (such as fire could consume) but spiritual. But in my divine justice I allow my fire to burn these souls mightily, tormenting them without consuming them. And the tremendous pain of this tortuous burning has as many forms as the forms of their sins and is more or less severe in proportion to their sins.¹⁶

Responding to Objections

To many, hell seems like a remnant of an outmoded medieval system which is best left behind or an affront to the modern consciousness. The doctrine of hell, which is not central but an essential element of our faith, can seem a scandal. By far the greatest difficulty is that hell is eternal: it lasts forever, and ever, and ever... From a theological perspective, while the concept might seem a scandal to some in view of God's omnipotence and love, it was precisely for man's salvation that Christ took death upon Himself— His death is the greatest injustice and scandal.

¹⁶ St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue, Classics of Western Spirituality*, 80-81.

Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger represent the majority of theologians, who, while accepting the Church's teaching that one cannot make a judgment that any particular individual is in hell, teach the theological affirmation of the possibility of hell. With Rahner, there is a *metaphysical understanding of freedom*: "Freedom is the will and the possibility of positing the definitive." At the moment of death, the human person either ratifies or reverses the fundamental choice that has been operative throughout his or her life. God never by-passes human freedom in order to release people from the results of their free decisions. Furthermore, it draws attention to the moral seriousness of all the free decisions of human life.

Ratzinger similarly argues that the real intention of the doctrine of hell is to underscore the seriousness of human existence and human action. We have the power to decide something of eternal significance. Ratzinger goes more deeply: hell is the symbol of a human zone of untouchable loneliness and rejected love. It is a *symbol of isolation and lack of communication* with the impoverishment of existence which that involves. Hell is the result of choosing to live for and by oneself— this is disordered self-love (love of self), which with divine love (love of God), constitute the two opposing cities of Augustine's *City of God*.

James O'Connor believes that it is in fact, beneficial in having some theologians raise the question about the possibility of the salvation of all men, e.g., von Balthasar. It forces us to ask whether we really have any nearly sufficient appreciation of how much the Lord loves and gives of Himself for our benefit: "Hell is a terrible thing, *but not as terrible as the death of the God-man*, Who endured death to save us from hell. We never appreciate sufficiently how great God's love is." It is a terrible subject, and this second death is the antithesis of all the good things God has prepared for His chosen.

Msgr. O'Connor notes too that Rahner believes that, because of freedom, it would be presumptuous to claim to know theologically that the outcome of history must be universal salvation; yet, he points out that *it would be appropriate to hope that such might be the outcome of history*.¹⁷

¹⁷ James O'Connor, *Land of the Living*, 73-82.

Theological Background

NEW TESTAMENT

The New Covenant speaks of Gehenna as a place of punishment, prepared for the devil and his angels, but also for those who refuse to believe and be converted (cf. Mt 25:41; 18:9; Lk 3:7.9; Mk 3:28) . The Synoptics describe it:

- as a place of fire (Mt 5:22); unquenchable fire (Mk 9:43);
- like a pit (Lk 12:5); a prison or torture-chamber (Mt 5:25-26);
- everlasting punishment (Mt 25:46); destruction of the wicked (Mt 10:28);
- a place of misery, wailing and grinding of teeth (Mt 8:12);
- full of never-dying worms (Mk 9:48);
- it is called Hades, a place of torment (Lk 16:23).

Jesus Himself threatens the obstinate with everlasting fire (Mt 3:10ff.; 5:22: 13:42-51; 18:9; Lk 3:7.9; Mk 3:28).

According to John, hell is the punishment for sin through judgment, through death (exclusion from life), in complete darkness: “You die in your sins” (Jn 8:24). In the Pauline writings, the wicked will have to face the Day of Wrath (Rom 2:5), when the judgment will bring calamity, eternal ruin, and utter destruction to the unrepentant (1 Thess 5:3; 2 Thess 1:9; 1 Tim 6:9; Rom 9:22; Phil 3:19). They will be under God’s wrath, live in sorrow and torment; they are excluded from the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21; 1 Cor 6:9; Eph 5:5), and removed from God’s presence and splendour.

Other writings mention it as a “dark pit of hell” (2 Pet 2:4) or of darkness and everlasting chains (Jude 6f.). The Apocalypse describes hell as a place of fire and brimstone (cf. Sodom and Gomorrah; Apoc 14:10; 19:20; 20:10-15; 21:8), a second death, a lake of fire with sulphurous flames.

THEOLOGY: THE NATURE OF HELL

Hell consists of two main elements: the deprivation of the vision of God (loss of God) and some kind of physical suffering. The pain of loss is eternal separation from God, which creates an inner conflict: one realizes the need for God while at the same time rejecting this God. The pain of sense is a pain of conflict with a hostile universe, which torments like an inescapable fire. This pain is not merely psychological, but in some sense it is also cosmological. It is a state of loneliness, found in one’s heart.

There is no official declaration about the *further specification of hell*. Scripture uses such words (fire, wailing, gnashing of teeth, and worms) as literary images. Fire is often referred to the psychological remorse of the damned, but it also indicates the presence of God in the sense that the damned live in the presence of God's inescapable judgment. Furthermore, the damned soul is immobilized within himself, unable to reach out, he is the captive of creation and remains walled up within his personal solitude. He is constricted on all sides, he is a prisoner confined in a dark room without doors and windows, without hope of escape.

Hell is the final fixation of that state that man himself chooses, cutting himself off from the love of God and men. It is the radical and total self-isolation from God and men, the ultimate development of self-idolatry. Man carries hell within himself, he creates it through his boundless hatred, cruelty, tyranny, oppression, etc. *Since man was created for God, saying no to God means saying no to himself, wounding his own essential nature, becoming divided against himself.* When the rejection is final, he remains so forever, without hope of conversion, in an existence without meaning. *Thus, revolt against God is a revolt against love itself. The person in hell is enclosed in himself. There is no communication among the damned, every lost soul exists in frigid isolation.* This is expressed with the images of darkness and silence. The life of the damned is defined with these divine words: "Depart from me!"

Reasons for the existence of hell: According to the Philosophers, hell is an efficacious deterrent and sanction in order to observe God's law. Augustine says that, as a result of original sin, mankind became a "damned mass" out of which some are permitted to consign themselves to perdition through personal sins. John Calvin proposes a double predestination (more properly a double predetermination, that the Church vehemently rejects): eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. His argument is that God, being absolute sovereign and free, is free to damn creatures for His own glory!

Recent Catholic theologians have perceived more clearly the truth: hell is much more man's creation than God's. Hell is the direct and logical prolongation of man's own will to sin. *God does not condemn a person to hell, but rather a person freely chooses to reject Christ totally and definitively. Hell is therefore an enduring attitude of rejection of Christ's love. Hell consists in man's being unwilling to receive anything in his desire to be self-sufficient.* Is it possible to reconcile hell with God's love and mercy? Apparently, yes, since Christ did (He taught the doctrine of hell).

The occupants of hell: While the Church never said officially that anyone is in hell, the biblical statements imply that hell is not just an abstract possibility, but a concrete reality with actual occupants. In the early Church the Fathers believed that the majority of mankind ends up in hell. They based their belief on such texts as “only few are chosen” (Mt 22:14); “enter through the narrow gate” (Lk 13:23); without faith there is no salvation (cf. Heb 11:6, Rom 1:16-17; 3:26-28). We have seen that the Church rejected the Universalist opinion, according to which all will be saved because God’s omnipotence and love will save everyone. Modern theological exegesis however takes into consideration also such things as *implicit faith, anonymous Christians, charitable life, etc.* Yves Congar sees wider possibilities of salvation, that God will render unto each according to his works, and obeying the voice of their conscience. *Therefore, many today believe that only a minority will go to hell, the majority will be saved;* otherwise redemption would hardly be accomplished, and “Satan would not be cast out” (Jn 12:31). Vatican II seems to favour this opinion.

CHAPTER 11

MINISTRY OF GOOD ANGELS AND WARFARE WITH FALLEN ANGELS

It might be noted further that the greatest among the saints and men of God, from St. Augustine to John Henry Newman, have always lived on familiar terms with them [angels]. And the tradition of the Church has always accorded them a very large place in her theology.¹ (Jean Daniélou)

The insertion of a chapter on angels stems from their vital role in creation and redemption. The priest seeking to bear much fruit in his labours in the new evangelization should hearken to Jean Daniélou's critical insight: the saints, "from St. Augustine to John Henry Newman," lived in intimate terms with angels. Where many Christians are oblivious to this spiritual reality, the saints were intimately aware that the angels formed an indispensable horizon and a part of the daily fabric of their lives. They often invoked the powerful assistance of the good angels and stood at the front lines to help defeat the assaults of the fallen angels. Padre Pio, to give one well-known example, often conversed with, and sought the help of, his guardian angel and asked his spiritual children to contact him through their own guardian angels.

Jean Daniélou deepens the importance of angels by examining Aquinas, the Church Fathers, and Scripture. He points to the lengthy articles devoted by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* to the angels. Daniélou observes that the Church Fathers' attention was largely directed towards the angels' missions to humanity at different moments in the history of salvation. The Fathers were simply exegeting Scripture, which is full of the presence of angels:

In this, moreover, they were simply exegetes of Sacred Scripture. The Bible shows us Almighty God using "ministering spirits" (Hebr. 1:14) throughout the whole of the Old Testament, making them messengers of

¹ Jean Daniélou, *The Angels and their Mission According to the Fathers of the Church*, trans. David Heimann (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1957), viii.

his revelation. On the threshold of the New Testament it is once again the angels who instruct Zachary, Joseph and Mary in the mysteries of the coming of the Son of God. The Apocalypse of St. John shows them presiding over the growth and development of the Church.²

This chapter is intended only as a brief overview of angelology (doctrine of angels). After a brief overview of angelology, this chapter has two goals: (I) to reveal the vast ministry of the good angels, so that the priest can become more aware of their comprehensive collaboration in creation and redemption; and (II) to help the priest understand the origin and work of the fallen angels so as to know how to combat them. The lecture notes (within Text Boxes) in this chapter are taken with permission from Bishop Attila Miklósházy's "Creation, Anthropology, Sin" course.³

Brief Overview of Angelology

A foundational text comes from the Fourth Lateran Council:

The Triune God is the one principle of the universe, the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal, who by His almighty power from the beginning of time made at once out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal, that is, the angelic and the earthly, and then the human creature, who as it were shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body (Fourth Lateran Council, DS 800).

The function of angels is two-fold: adoration of God; and ministering in the relationship between God and men. Their whole essence is total dedication to God's glory and to the implementation of His will. But they are particularly entrusted a special care and solicitude for people, both individuals and nations, whose prayers they present to God. More specifically, they have a role in Christ's messianic mission at His birth, at the temptation in the desert, in His kerygma, in His Paschal mystery, and at the Last Judgment. It is especially in the key moments of His mission that they surround Christ and accompany Him. They also give witness at the Last Judgment (Lk 12:8-9; Rev 3:5; Mt 24:31; Mt 25:31-41).

² Jean Daniélou, *The Angels and their Mission*, viii-ix.

³ Attila Miklósházy, "Angelology," SAT 2321F: Creation, Anthropology, Sin (lecture, Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont., Fall 1978). Permission was granted in May 2016 to incorporate Bishop Miklósházy's notes in this book.

Their number is countless: “Myriads upon myriads there were, thousands upon thousands” (Rev 5:11). Scripture ranks them in various groups: angels and archangels (1 Thess 4:16); cherubs and seraphs (Ezek 10:3; Isa 6:2.6); 4 living creatures at the throne of God (symbols of the 4 evangelists in Ezek 1:5-25; Rev 4:6-9); 24 elders, symbols of the Old Testament and New Testament Fathers (Rev 4:10); 5 groups: Thrones, Powers, Dominions, Principalities; Authorities (Col 1:16; Eph 1:21). Jerome and Cyril of Jerusalem, but especially Pseudo-Dionysius, groups them into 9 choirs of three triads in the heavenly hierarchy.

After choosing God in their test, they now have the beatific vision of the Trinity and are assured of God’s grace forever, being united to God by a consummate love. They see God face to face (Mt 18:10; 1 Pet 1:12), and they praise God unceasingly in a heavenly liturgy (Ps 103:20; 148:2; Dan 3:58), and join the earthly liturgy (cf. the introduction to the Trishagion; an angel bringing the gifts to the heavenly altar in the Roman Canon; and the part of angels in the Baptism, Confession, Anointing, Ordination, and Marriage liturgies).

In the cult (veneration) of the angels, we must first of all distinguish between *latría* and *douliá*. On the basis of Rev 19:10, Augustine made this important distinction: *Latría* (worship) is a total self-offering to God, from a creature to the Creator; *douliá* (veneration) is showing our esteem to a person because of his inner worth.

Denial of the Existence and the Work of Angels

We have to note a contemporary phenomenon of the denial of existence and work of the angels. Two popular rationalizations of this denial are: the existence of angels only “pertain to the worldview” of that era; and that God’s love, not existence of angels, is what matters (e.g., Piet Schoonenberg, *God’s World in the Making*, pp. 8-9, note 16). *Humani Generis* expressed concern over the fact that many people today deny the personal character of the celestial spirits. The SCDF’s document on Demonology, “*Christian Faith and Demonology*” (1975), provides a helpful corrective to today’s scepticism: warning that it is a fatal mistake to act as if redemption is already achieved so that it were no longer necessary to engage in struggle with evil powers, of which both the New Testament and the masters of the spiritual life speak; and correcting the claim of some contemporary scholars that Scripture does not affirm their existence, but reflects Jewish ideas or New Testament traditions, that demons are only mythical personifications.⁴

⁴ Attila Miklósházy, “Angelology,” SAT 2321F: Creation, Anthropology, Sin.

I. The Vast Ministry of the Good Angels According to the Church Fathers (Jean Daniélou)

For the new Christ to obtain a glimpse of the immense work of the angels in our world, the writings of the Church Fathers are an indispensable font. Thus, this section is simply a summary of a section of Jean Daniélou's *The Angels and their Mission According to the Fathers of the Church*.⁵ In the work of angels, we must remember that the principle of subsidiarity begins with God: God does not need collaboration of man in the work of redemption but chooses to do so; and while He can do so directly through His divine power, he explicitly makes the angels' assistance to mankind one of their two primary tasks. Here our eyes are opened to a vast vista of angels governing creation, leading all nations to Christ, preparing the Old Testament, assisting Christ and then the Church in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and now collaborating in so many ways (nations, the Church, liturgy, spiritual life, protection, death and after-life, etc.).⁶

A. The Angels and the Universe

Most Christians are likely to be ignorant of the Church Fathers' teaching that angels govern the universe. There is an ancient tradition that God employs the angels as instruments of divine providence, beginning with their action in the physical world. Athenagoras (*Suppl.*, 10) and Origen (*Hom. 10 in Jer.*, 6) both speak of the angels being set in charge of the four elements. Thomas Aquinas confirms this as traditional teaching: "All corporeal things are governed by the angels. And this is not only the teaching of the holy doctors, but of all the philosophers" (*ST I*, q. 110. a. 1).⁷

B. The Angels and the World Religions

But God had provided help to all nations, beginning with witness to Him through creation: "In the generations that are past He let all the nations follow their own ways, and yet He did not leave Himself without testimony,

⁵ Jean Daniélou, *The Angels and their Mission*. For the sake of brevity, two important chapters ("The Angels and the Sacraments" and "The Angels and the Spiritual Life") have been omitted.

⁶ *Ibid*, viii.

⁷ *Ibid*, 3-4.

bestowing blessings, giving rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with good and gladness” (Acts 14:16). For the very regularity of the laws of nature is a sort of revelation through which man can recognize the existence of a provident God (Rom 1:20). The celestial objects of the heavens drew the eyes of those who saw them upward as close as possible to the King of the universe, into His antechamber, so to speak, and by their grandeur and beauty led them to contemplate the Creator of the universe. But the nations themselves were also entrusted to the care of the angels:

In this divine assistance to nations, angels also have a role to play. It is, in fact, a common doctrine in the whole of ancient tradition that God has entrusted the nations to the angels. The doctrine, which goes back to Judaism, is echoed in the Greek Translation of Deuteronomy 32:8. “When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he appointed the bounds of people according to the number of the angels of God”... (Deut 32:8).⁸

Dan 10:13-21 speaks of the angels of Greece and Persia and the New Testament seems to presuppose the entrustment of the nations in Acts 17:26. This truth is also found in the earlier Church Fathers, like Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Origen, and the Church Fathers of the Fourth century, like Basil, John Chrysostom, and Pseudo-Dionysius.⁹ The angels were given a mission which partially failed: “Thus, the angels were charged with leading the nations toward the one true God. But, as a matter of fact, the study of religions does not show that they succeeded especially well.”¹⁰ The nations fell primarily because of their idolatry (shows their egoism and presumption) and secondarily because of the work of demons.¹¹ While concerned first of all with the protection and temporal assistance of mankind, the angels’ mission is primarily spiritual. According to certain authors, they also play a role in the natural revelation of God. The revelation includes the wisdom of the Roman law and the philosophical truths attained by Plato and Aristotle, which greatly served the Church in its inception. This applies to other peoples, e.g., Egyptians and Hindus.¹²

⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ Ibid., 20-23.

¹² Ibid., 16-18.

C. The Angels and the Law

Christians may also be unaware that God entrusted the Old Testament economy to angels. From the Old Testament and from Jewish tradition comes the idea that Israel was the object of particular assistance from the angels. Daniel shows that Michael is the protector of the Jewish people (Dan 10:13-21; 12:1). This belief is found in Jewish literature, developed by Christians, and echoed by Pseudo-Dionysius. They are first of all ministers of revelations of God (Abraham in Gen 22:15-18; wife of Manoah in Judges 13:3). They also come to strengthen the servants of God in their tasks (e.g., in 3 Kings 19:5). Above all, the entire economy, including the Torah, was communicated through the angels: “But the Jewish tradition and later, Christian authors... maintain that the whole economy of the Old Testament was communicated to the Jews through the medium of the angels.... The outstanding instance of this role of the angels in the transmission of the old Covenant is the communication of the Law to Israel.”¹³

The idea of the angels’ transmitting the Law is also found in Christian Tradition. St. Paul wrote in Gal 3:19: “Why then was the Law? It was enacted on account of transgressions, being delivered by angels through a mediator.” Stephen declared that “You have received the Law as an ordinance of angels and have not kept it” (Acts 7:53; see also Heb 2:2-3). The idea was also found in the Church Fathers, like Hilary of Poitiers and Pseudo-Dionysius.¹⁴

Angels also served the People of God in many other important ways. Origen notes that “the angels served the people of Israel in the Law and in the other mysteries.” Hilary of Poitiers notes that the manna was given by the angels and that Israel, in fact, was served by the angels during the entire time of the Exodus. The assistance of the angels extended also to the safeguarding of divine gifts (Hilary speaks of *custodia*, the spiritual oversight that was entrusted to them). Thus there was an angel who watched over the Law, and, until the time of Christ, assured its authentic interpretation. Origen tells us that this is also true of the custody of the Ark of the

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

Covenant and the entire Temple itself.¹⁵ However, “This angelic presence is accorded to the Temple as long as the presence of God abides there and was withdrawn when, at the death of Christ, the Temple became a thing of the past and the veil was lifted.”¹⁶

The early Christian view saw the angels’ role as bound up with the Old Testament’s preparatory mission but ceasing with the coming of Christ, who then takes the history of salvation directly into His own hands: “This parallelism between the Old Testament and the angels on one hand and the New Testament and Christ on the other is developed by Origen in commenting on the Canticle of Canticles 1:10” (silver signified the Old Law and gold the spiritual reality of the Gospel).¹⁷ The role of the angels is concerned with the beginnings, the preparations (Old Testament).

D. The Guardian Angel

There are also guardian angels of the faithful. This doctrine appears in the earliest Christian texts (e.g., Pseudo-Barnabas, Hermas) and in the Church Fathers, developed to a great extent by Origen. The most important texts focused upon: Raphael appearing to the young Tobias (Tobias 3:25), Christ’s teaching concerning the “little ones” that their “angels in heaven always behold the face of the Father” (Mt 18:10), and the mention in the Acts of the Apostles of the angel of Peter, “It is his angel” (12:15). St. Basil teaches that “an angel is put in charge of every believer, provided we do not drive him out. He guards the soul like an ‘army’” (*Hom. in Ps.* 33:6). The titles help us understand the role of these angels: “guardian,” “protector,” “superintendent,” and “shepherd.”¹⁸

There are two opinions as to whether all men or only Christians receive guardian angels, i.e., given at birth or at Baptism. The conclusion that Thomas Aquinas reaches is that toward which Tradition leans: that everyone receives a guardian angel at birth, but this angel plays an entirely new role after Baptism (*ST* 1.113.5). The child from the first day of his life before Baptism becomes a prey to the devil (Tertullian, *De angelis*, 39.1), as a

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

result of which the guardian angel is almost powerless to help him, just as he is over the nations.

The coming of Christ reverses the situation for the angel who waits for the help that comes from God: “You too were the lot of some prince. Then Jesus came and snatched you from the perverse power” (Origen, *Hom in Luc.*, 35). The activity of the guardian angels accompanies the entire life of man. They begin this mission even when they are still pagans, continue among catechumens, and throughout the spiritual ascent up to the threshold of union with God. Those who have higher offices in the Church are the object of a very special protection.¹⁹ Angels have three key functions as distinguished by the Church Fathers: peace (Chrysostom), penance (Hermas) and prayer (Tertullian). (i) The angel of peace is charged with the *protection* of the one entrusted to him (e.g., Tobias), especially of protecting the soul against the devil. His role is also *positive aid*, e.g., comforting Christ in His agony, bringing interior peace to the soul. This idea is found throughout the spiritual tradition, e.g., in St. Ignatius’ “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits.”

(ii) The angel of penance: Phanuel is listed as the fourth archangel in 1 Enoch 40:7-9: “and the fourth, who is set over the repentance unto hope of those who inherit eternal life, is named Phanuel.” He induces the sinner to *repent*, in order that he may not blush when he sees the Lord of hosts coming. We are subject to various forms of remonstrance, and it is the angels who chastise us before the Father of the family Himself. Penance also includes the remission of sins and the restoration of the soul to health.

(iii) The angel of prayer is present not only in liturgical prayer but also in *private prayer* (e.g., Tobias 12:15). The angel of the Lord, who always sees the Face of the Father, prays with us and cooperates with us (Origen), circulating between the soul and heaven.²⁰ The early Tradition also teaches that man has both an angel and a devil within him, analogous to the situation of the nations. Thus man finds himself in the middle of a spiritual combat between the powers of light and the powers of darkness (see Ignatius, Athanasius, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa), and an incentive to do

¹⁹ Ibid., 70-72.

²⁰ Ibid., 73-79.

good is that we recall we live in the middle of a supernatural world, a spectacle, as St. Paul says, to both men and angels.²¹

E. Angels and the Sacraments

Angels Assigned to Each Church (Diocese): The Fathers have recognized angels being assigned to each diocese (and possibly parishes). Origen wrote: “One might say, following Scripture, that there are two bishops in each Church [diocese], one visible, the other invisible, and that both are busied with the same task.” Gregory Nazianzen shared his belief that “The care of this Church has been *entrusted* to an angel. And other angels are in charge of other Churches, as St. John teaches in his Apocalypse.” And “[Shepherd of] Hermas designates Michael as ‘the one who power over this people [universal Church] and governs them.’”

Angels involved with Baptism: Origen speaks of the angels present at the liturgy. Drawn in the first half [liturgy] by the reading of the Scripture which the angels delight in hearing, the one who delivers the homily should not forget that the angels are listening and judging it. The Fathers speak of the angels assisting at Baptism. Ambrose writes in his *On the Sacraments* of the radiance of the newly baptized that awes the angels. Cyril of Jerusalem describes the glowing night of Easter Vigil when the catechumens are baptized and Paradise reopened:

Now lift up the eyes of your spirit and **re-present** before yourself the angelic choirs, Almighty God upon His throne, His only-begotten Son to His right, and the ever-present Spirit at their side, the Thrones and the Dominions all performing their ministry, and each one of you achieving his salvation. Hear it already with your ears. Long for this blessed word which the angels will speak at the moment when, like the stars of the Church, you will enter, your bodies splendid in their whiteness and your souls sparkling with a blinding light.

Angels and the Eucharist: The angels are *especially present at the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is a sacramental participation in the liturgy of heaven*, the cult officially rendered to the Trinity by the angels. The presence of the angels introduces the Eucharist into heaven itself. St. John Chrysostom writes, “The whole sanctuary and the space before the altar is filled with the heavenly Power

²¹ Ibid., 79-82.

come to honour him who is present upon the altar.” *There is only one sacrifice that renders worship, and thanks to God, Christ’s sacrifice become the eternal sacrifice and liturgy. Heb 12 describes the Eucharistic sacrifice’s context found in the book of Revelation, namely, before the presence of the Trinity and the angels and saints:*

There is only one priestly activity, and that is Jesus Christ’s. By it the whole of creation glorifies the Trinity. This is this same activity that is offered by the angels in heaven and the saints on earth. This participation appears in the New Testament, where liturgy of the Church is presented as a participation in that of the angels. Thus, in the Epistle of the Hebrews 12:22-24, we read: “but you have to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels...”

The angels are also associated with different parts of the Mass. (i) Regarding the Offertory, Theodore of Mopsuestia show them symbolized by the ministers who arrange the offerings upon the altar: “By means of the deacons who minister in what is being accomplished we can see in spirit the invisible Powers ministering as they assist in this ineffable liturgy.”

(ii) Regarding the Trisagion (Eucharistic Prayer), Theodore writes: “The priest here mentions all the Seraphim who raise this song of praise toward God... A religious fear fills our conscience, either before or after we have cried out, ‘Holy.’” Jean Danielou comments on this awesome holiness: “This chant of the Seraphim expresses holy fear. It describes the awe felt by even the highest creatures in the presence of the infinite divine excellence. And this enables us to understand better the holiness of the Eucharist which leads us, with the Seraphim, into the presence of the All-Holy God, hidden only by the fragile species of bread and wine.”

(iii) Third, the angels also appear in the very act of offering the sacrifice, as the Roman liturgy describes: “The offerings be borne by the hands of Thy Holy Angel unto Thy high Altar.” The Book of the Apocalypse already shows the angels offering the prayers of the saints to God. Chrysostom writes: “It is not only men who raise this cry filled with holy awe, but the angels prostrate themselves before the Lord, the archangels pray to Him.”

Angels and Whole Liturgical Life: Danielou affirms that “the participation of

the angels extends to the whole liturgical life and especially to the celebration of the Christian feasts. The mysteries of Christ are celebrated by the heavenly powers at the same time as they are by the Church on earth.”²²

F. The Angels and Death

The angels, accompanying us since birth, lead us from death to our final destination: “After having assisted men throughout the course of their earthly life, the angels play an outstanding role at the moment of death. Biblical and Greek tradition join in this teaching. The New Testament shows Lazarus ‘carried by the angels to the bosom of Abraham’(Lk 16:22).”²³ The Christian liturgy makes reference to angels in the Mass for the dead, in which the final commendation of the funeral liturgy declares: “Angels lead thee into paradise...” The Fathers of the Church picture the angels assisting the soul at the moment of death and leading it to paradise.

This is why the prayers for the dead invoke the assistance of the angels. These prayers represent a two-fold aspect: (i) his guardian angel is asked to accompany the soul on its voyage to heaven (strengthening and scattering demons who try to bar advance); (ii) second, the guardians of heaven are asked to permit the soul to enter there (there are two groups of angels at work: one on earth, the other in heaven). Thus the angels help the soul escape the sufferings of death, accompany it and assure it a peaceful journey, and the angels at the gate welcome it.²⁴ But if the soul is not entirely pure, it has to be purified before appearing before the face of the all-holy God. It has to receive a baptism of fire (Purgatory), and the guardian angels retain the soul until it has been purified.²⁵

The martyrs, who have bathed in their own blood and have no need of Purgatory and whose struggles are assisted by thousands of angels with open admiration, are welcomed as conquerors at the threshold of paradise. They look in wonder at the martyr’s “ascension,” just as they did at that of Christ. They also look in wonder upon the newly baptized arising from the baptismal font. The Ascension of Christ, Baptism, and martyrdom are three

²² *Ibid.*, 55-67,

²³ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 95-97.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 97-99.

manifestations of one single mystery— that of the introduction of humanity into the house of the Father.²⁶

G. The Angels Leading Humanity to Heaven

The Fathers of the Church inherited the tradition that the sin of the angels is explained by their refusal to recognize the dignity of Adam created in the image of God. Satan was jealous of the numerous favours that man had received from God and brought about his ruin and made him a sinner by inducing him to violate the commandment of God. For Irenaeus, Methodius of Philippi, and Gregory of Nyssa, it was one of the “Powers” (angelic choir) who had been entrusted with maintaining and governing the earth who did this. This angel, Lucifer, found it intolerable that a nature set under his authority should have an image and likeness of Beauty (Christ).

It is above all the Ascension which appears as the counterpart of the Fall, the reunification with the spiritual creation after the Fall. The good angels rejoice at the creation of a new universe, in which man is formed into the image of Christ.²⁷ The angels, who suffered with us when we were separated from God and from them, exult with joy upon our return, but did not dream that it would be so glorious by our sharing in Christ’s glory²⁸: “The joy of the angelic creation in seeing Christ lead humanity into heaven at the Ascension is expressed by the Fathers by biblical images. One of the most important is the image of the lost sheep.”²⁹ Here, the ninety-nine sheep represent the angels whom the Shepherd has left behind to seek the one lost sheep— humanity; and the rejoicing in heaven is therefore that of these angels. This joy at the return is inaugurated at the Ascension, but will not reach its fullness until the Second Coming. Other images used include the Prodigal Son and the lost drachma.³⁰

One of the best images that describe the joy of the angels is that of the friends of the Bridegroom in the Canticle of Canticles. Their role is to conduct the Bridegroom to His Bride (Church) and to withdraw from them

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 101-105.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49-51.

at once, and their joy is complete when the wedding (spiritual marriage) is accomplished. Their role in the Old Testament was the preparation for the wedding; but for now it is to accompany with their rejoicing the Bridegroom's return to the Father's house at the Ascension.³¹ Other important aspects have not been treated for the sake of brevity, especially the angels' ministry in the Church and the sacraments. Given their vast ministry for us, we owe them an eternal debt and a tender devotion.

II. The Fallen Angels

In the world you will have trouble. But courage The victory is mine; I have conquered the world
(Jn 16:33)

For what more fitly or more fully befits our care and solicitude than to prepare the people divinely committed to us and the army established in the heavenly camp with constant exhortations against the weapons and darts of the devil? For he cannot be a good soldier fit for war who has not first been trained in the field... unless he first gives thought to the practice and skill of his powers. He is an old adversary and an ancient enemy with whom we wage battle.

Almost six thousand years are now being fulfilled since the devil first attacked man. All kinds of tempting and arts and plots for his overthrow has he learned by the very practice of a long time. *If he finds a soldier of Christ unprepared, if untrained, if he does not find him vigilant with a solicitous and whole heart, he besets him in ignorance, he deceives him incautious, he entraps him inexperienced.* But if anyone guards the precepts of the Lord, and bravely adhering to Christ stands against the devil, he [devil] must be conquered, since Christ whom we confess is invincible.³² (St. Cyprian, emphasis added)

A. Spiritual Warfare

This clarion call to battle goes back to the early Church, as we find in St. Cyprian's teaching us how to be a prepared soldier (see quotation above). The primary context of human history, evident in Scripture, is a massive

³¹ Ibid., 52-54.

³² Cyprian, *Exhortation to Martyrdom, to Fortunatus, The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 36, 314, quoted in M. Scanlan & R. Cirner, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Weapon for Spiritual Warfare* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 1980), 29.

spiritual battle. We have just seen the positive contribution of the good angels, now we must unveil the enmity and attacks of the fallen angels. It is no coincidence that Christ's ministry begins with a confrontation with Satan in the desert and that the end of His life entailed a final battle, described in John's Gospel as Satan's "hour."

St. Paul himself reveals to us that the greatest battle we face is that against the fallen angels: "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). St. Peter too warns us: "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

Pope Paul VI's noted Wednesday Catechesis of Nov. 15, 1972 is particularly helpful, portraying a cosmic landscape of a great spiritual warfare: that it involves an active force that is perverted and perverts; that biblical and Church teaching affirms its presence; that an awareness of this mystery of evil is necessary for a correct Christian concept of the world (their history of rebellion, damnation, and their presence in Christ's life); that they influence many aspects of our lives that we do not know, beginning with the temptation in Eden, that resulted in a certain dominion over man; that the devil is our number one enemy; and that he is capable of corrupting entire societies and events. It is the conviction of James O'Connor, author of *Land of the Living*, that that we shall fathom more profoundly the immensity of the combat at the particular judgment:

We are like troops in a battle, so engrossed in our own struggle that it is easy to forget the extent of the war, the fact that others fight beside us, and that it must be won on the "grand scale." The particular judgment will immeasurably broaden our horizon.³³

Our own human experience confirms the reality of evil existing in our world, beginning with concupiscence within us, as Paul affirmed: "but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (Rom 7:23). But we are inclined to be more cognizant of the physical level of evil in creation: in

³³ James O'Connor, *Land of the Living*, 107.

the realm of nature (disorders); within human persons (weakness, frailty, suffering, death); tension between two laws of love (loving God in others); and sin, perversion of human freedom and within society (injustice, hatred, conflicts, wars). Christians perceive clearly that evil is not merely an absence of something (physical or moral good), but underlying it is an *active force*, a living spiritual, personal being: a dark, hostile agent (devil) who is perverted and perverts others— a mysterious, terrible, and frightening reality— the mystery of iniquity. The Church is realistic in defending itself against such evil, called the devil.³⁴ Scripture and Tradition is clear that the proclamation of the kingdom of God always includes the victory over the devil (Lk 10:18), but also reveals that the kingdom is continuously exposed to the attacks of the evil spirit. Hence we must be prepared for this struggle that characterizes the life of the Church here on earth (Rev 12:7).

B. Origin & Goal of the Fallen Angels

Scripture and the Church's teaching reveal that God created two orders of personal beings: angels, who are pure spirits, and man, who is a composite of body and soul (the substantial form of the body). Both orders were created at the same time ("*simul*") at the beginning and both are tested (Fourth Lateran Council). Being pure spirits, angels intuit in an instant the entire reality that God reveals to them. Thus, they are able to see the whole and made an irrevocable decision for all eternity. In what is a great mystery, some angels chose to reject God, and in their pride, followed the powerful Lucifer, and were condemned to hell for all eternity. Scripture also seems to indicate that, being condemned, they are also envious of the great mercy and benevolence that God has for mankind. The result is that, being envious of man and desiring to thwart God's plan of mercy, they attack man in order to bring him to damnation.

This attack began right from the beginning of human history with our first parents, Adam and Eve, whose sin caused the evil spirits to gain certain "rights" or dominion over them.³⁵ To use an analogy from military strategy,

³⁴ Pope Paul VI, "Confronting the Devil's Power," Wednesday Catechesis, Nov. 15, 1972, Papal Encyclicals Online, accessed August 18, 2018, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/paul06/p6devil.htm>.

³⁵ The Catechism of the Catholic Church can verify the Church's understanding of the reality of fallen angels and their rebellion (CCC 391-395); and more specifically, the "Temptation of man"

when large traditional forces fight out in the open against enemies with superior guerrilla tactics, they often suffer heavy losses (e.g., decimation of General Custer's forces at the Battle of the Little Bighorn). But if the general comes to understand the enemy's tactics and adapts to them, then the odds shift greatly in his favour. Thus, if we do not perceive the influence of the fallen angels, they can cause much harm in our lives and in the Church, relatively unimpeded. In spite of this, there tends to be little formation of priests in seminaries and also little awareness among priests of the reality of the existence and the pernicious work of these fallen spirits in our daily lives and in the world. Applying the military saying, "know your enemy," we look at what Scripture and Tradition illuminates about fallen angels.

Scripture and Tradition on the Work of the Fallen Angels³⁶

The sin of the angels provides us with background on their origin:

The sin of the angels consisted in their pride (*hybris*). In Gen 3:5 the serpent promised to the first men that "You will be like God!" This may indicate that the pride of angels consisted in "wanting to be God, equal to God" (Hugh of St. Victor), and by their own power (Thomas Aquinas). The chief opponent of Satan is Michael, whose name means "Who is like God?" (Rev 12:7). Their fall consisted in the radical and irrevocable rejection of God and His kingdom, with the consequent state of damnation. Satan wanted to usurp God's sovereign rights, and attempted to subvert the economy of salvation and the very order of creation. This same motivation of his fallen existence he has tried to transplant into man: an attitude of rivalry, opposition to God, and antagonism. Once he was "Lucifer" ("light-bearer," cf. Lk 10:18), but he was blinded by his self-glory, overvaluing the perfection of his own being. Disobedience followed from the attitude, "*Non serviam!*," "I will not serve [God]!" which clearly manifests the radical and irrevocable refusal to take part in the building up of the kingdom of God. Satan wished to have his own kingdom (Lk 11:17-20); he wanted to dominate the whole world, the whole cosmos (cf. Mt 4:9).

(CCC 397-398), "Through sin a certain control over man" (CCC 407, 394), "Temptation of Jesus by the devil" (CCC 538-540), "Jesus' exorcisms" (CCC 538, 550).

³⁶ Attila Miklósházy, "Angelology," SAT 2321F: Creation, Anthropology, Sin.

Wis 2:24 hints that it was jealousy that made them sin (Irenaeus, Cyprian), i.e., jealousy of man. Augustine notes that jealousy is also the effect of pride. It may be that they were jealous of men, because they were told that Christ will become man and not an angel. In their pride then they rejected the Incarnation, refusing to adore Christ in His humanity (cf. Suarez, *De Angelis VII*, c.13, 13).

The work of devil can be gleaned from some of the biblical titles given him:

- “Sinner from the beginning” (1 Jn 3:8): he remains always as such, and induces people to sin. Thereby he acquires a certain dominion over man (original sin), holding them in his power, and subjecting them to his captivity;
- “Liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44): there is no truth in him. He denied the truth about God, who is subsistent Love and Holiness, when he suggested to our proto-parents that God is jealous of His prerogatives and wants to impose limitations and burdens on them (cf. Gen 3:5);
- “Murderer from the beginning” (Jn 8:44): he destroyed the supernatural life of grace and love in himself, and now wants us to do the same to us by tempting us to free ourselves from God: “Through the devil’s envy death has entered the world” (Wis 2:24). We have to be vigilant towards him “who is able to destroy both body and soul” (Mt 10:28);
- “Prince of this world” (Jn 12:31): his dominion embraces all the world, and no one and nothing is immune to his influence: “The whole godless world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 Jn 5:19);
- “Devil” (*diabolo*s): means “Disturber” who causes division, disturbance, and disunity by lying, calumny, and deception;
- “Tempter” (Lk 4:3-13): his primary action is to tempt people to evil. Satan tempted even Jesus, trying to thwart His messianic mission as well as the work of the Church. He is a clever seducer who knows how to make his way into us through the senses, imagination, libido, utopian logic, and disordered social contacts;
- “Deceiver”: “he masquerades himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14). In the history of humanity he presents himself under the disguise of good. He cleverly conceals his true self; *it is in his interest to make himself unknown*. He wants people to deny his existence in the name of rationalism or something else. He is cunning (2 Cor 11:3), blinds our intellect (2 Cor 4:4), sets snares on our way (1 Tim 3:7; 6:9), and uses any footholds/openings (Eph 4:27). We should become familiar with his wiles (2 Cor 2:11).

The influence of Satan can be seen in his different relationships:

Satan and God: Satan is not a rival to God. He can work only if and when God permits it (cf. Job 1:12; 2:6, etc.). God-fearing people, therefore, have nothing to fear. **Christ defeated the devil decisively at the cross:** “The Son of God appeared for the very purpose of undoing the devil’s work” (1 Jn 3:8); “but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33; 1 Jn 5:4). Even the fallen angels can be servants and realizers of the divine will and providence (cf. consigning someone to Satan: 1 Tim 1:20; 1 Cor 5:3ff.).

Satan and Christ: The evil spirits fight constantly against the kingdom. They want to disturb and frustrate the messianic, redemptive work of Christ. Satan confronts Christ, trying to mislead Him in the fulfillment of His mission (Mt 4:1ff.; Lk 4:1 ff.). His attempts continued throughout the life of Christ (Mt 12:38-40; Jn 6:15; 6:66; Lk 9:55; Mt 16:22; 20:20-22; Acts 1:6). Satan sows darnel among the wheat (Mt 13:39), and extirpates the good seed (Lk 8:12). Christ defends Himself against the accusations of being possessed by Beelzebul (Mk 3:22-27; Mt 12:22-30; Lk 11:14-23). He drives out the devils as a sign of the kingdom and victory above the devil (Mk 1:21-27; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29). He gives power also to His disciples to do the same (Mk 6:7; Lk 9:1; Mt 10:1.8; Lk 10:17f.). Jesus is the Light of the world who defeats the kingdom of darkness (Jn 1:5; 8:12; 12:46; 1 Thess 5:4f.; Eph 5:8; 1 Pet 2:9). Jesus will ultimately judge the Prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 16:11).

Satan and Man: Satan’s activity is directed especially against man and his salvation. Therefore we must be vigilant, “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). He works through deception and lies (2 Thess 2:9-12). But Satan cannot do anything to man that God does not permit. *He cannot do anything if man does not open doors to the devil* (Eph 4:27). He has no true power over us; he is just a tempter (*peirazón*; 1 Thess 3:5; Gen 3:13; Mk 1:22). He is like a chained dog that can bite only those who carelessly get close to him (Augustine).

Satan and the World (cosmos): Satan is called the “prince” or even god of this world, and evil men are called the “sons of Satan” (1 Jn 3:8.10). Man came under the slavery and dominion of the devil through his sin (Trent). In Rev 12:9.12, we read that Satan was cast down to earth. Paul talks about “elemental spirits of the world” (*stoicheia tou kosmou*; see Col 2:8.20; Gal

4:3). These texts seem to say that Satan has some grip on the cosmos, claiming some dominion over it (cf. Mt 4:9), which, however, is a lie. The texts do not prove that these evil spirits are settled in the cosmic realm. *Satan's entry to the world is man himself* (as spirit), and not vice versa. But the corporeal nature of man (*kata sarka*, according to the flesh) could be an opening for the evil powers.

The idea of a “mystical body” or “kingdom” of Satan, as a counter-Church, could be inferred from Rev 13:17-18; but the analogy to the Mystical body of Christ is false. Communion of Satan with his angels and with men is based on hatred against God and jealousy towards man. It is true, however, that such negative attitude could also build a certain solidarity or communion in evil: by producing public opinion, sinful social, economic, and political structures, which enslave the individuals, who then attempt to hide behind these in anonymity and be carried away by them easily. Such a sham-kingdom of evil can be created through unsound use of technique, science, psychology, and leads to cruelties, injustices, slavery, etc. *A counter-cultural defence against it demands spiritual power*: “Put on the armour which God provides, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens. Therefore, take up God's armour...” (Eph 6:11-18).

However, we ought to note that God's dealing with the fallen angels and with sinful man is vastly different. The angels, with their superior intellects, acted out of *malice*— they are condemned instantly and forever. They now seek primarily to deprive us of this unheard-of-gift of grace and destiny, to cause our eternal damnation. It is easy to see, given this vision, **that the principal work of the evil spirits is not possession, nor obsession, nor infestation, but temptation, which requires our free consent**. Given *God's loving forbearance with men*, because their weakness is like that of children, God will always forgive, heal wounds, and do everything to bring us back to Him. We can be damned and lose our eternal gift, but it will be from our own free choice. The main thing in protecting ourselves is **to maintain a strong relationship with Christ through His Church, and be in a state of grace**— this is the *best armour and protection* against the evil spirits.

Understanding Modern Challenges, Doubts, and Errors Arms the Priest

In regard to the devil the Church always warned against two opposite dangers: (i) exaggerating the importance of the devil, regarding him as a self-sustaining principle who does not owe his origin to God, which includes superstitious practices (more likely in Third-World countries); and (ii) denying or minimizing his malevolent power, either refusing to acknowledge the existence of the devil or explaining it as a pseudo-reality, a conceptual, fanciful personification of the unknown causes of our misfortunes (common in the positivist West). Here are 5 deviations.

(i) *Occult*: First, throughout the centuries the Church consistently condemned the *obsessive preoccupation* with the devil and the worship of demons, as well as all superstitious practices: sorcery, witchcraft, soothsaying, astrology, necromancy, divination, fortune-telling, spell-casting, conjuring spirits, consulting ghosts, oracles from the dead, magic, etc. (cf. Synod of Toledo, Synod of Braga, Leo the Great, Council of Trent, Pius IX, Benedict XIV, etc.).

(ii) *Denying Existence*: On the opposite end of the spectrum, modern science tries to *explain away* the evil phenomena through psycho-analytical and psychiatric studies, or by spiritualistic experiences. Afraid of Manichaean theories, the positivist view appears to be strong and unprejudiced, yet lends faith to unfounded magical superstition, exposing themselves to licentious sexual experiences, harmful drugs, and ideological seductions of fashionable errors.

(iii) *Biblical Demythologization*: A third area is modern biblical criticism that in certain sectors follow Rudolf Bultmann's *demythologization*, which attributes such things as heaven, hell, angels, and demons to the realm of pure mythology. Some biblical scholars attempted to re-examine the biblical doctrine of Satan in order to revise it. They either simply deny the existence of Satan or say that no certain doctrinal position is possible about him, because Scripture does not enable us either to affirm or deny the existence of Satan. According to them, even the words of Jesus simply reflect contemporary Jewish ideas about the devil. Thus, they argue that the existence of Satan is not part of the central Gospel message, and so we are free to abandon it.

(iv) *Theologians' Denial*: A fourth group are theologians (e.g., Christian Duquoc) who would say that belief in Satan is an anachronism, tied to an outmoded world-view and not to revelation. They argue that idea of Satan is no longer important, it is not useful or necessary to explain evil in the world; that insisting on it only hurts the Church's credibility. They hold that Satan is merely a mythical personification of function, emphasizing the influence of evil and sin on mankind (Herbert Haag, *Abschied von Teufel*).

But Christian realism obliges us to face the reality of evil and the reality of Satan. But we must keep in mind that the devil has been definitively defeated by Christ at the cross, though Christ has not yet destroyed his work (1 Cor 15:25-26). During our earthly history we are continuously exposed to his attacks, we must therefore be prepared for this struggle. We must be sober and vigilant in defending ourselves against the devil.

(v) *Contemporary Intoxication*: At the same time we must also be *careful not to fall into a new intoxication with Satan* in our days. The Church always condemned superstitious practices, capitulation to fatalism, and the abdication of one's liberty. *The Church never allowed men to shrug off their own responsibility by blaming their sins on the devil*, but energetically defends man's freedom and dignity. In the end, our faith is our source of confidence, for it assures us that the devil's power must stop at boundaries set for him by God, and that while the devil is able to tempt, he cannot extort our consent. Prayer wins us the victory over evil— therefore we insistently pray: "Deliver us from the Evil One"(Mt 6:13).

C. Contemporary Landscape: Escalation of Activity in our Time

We might be tempted to think that the fallen angels, because we not perceive their action, are not very active in our times. Scripture itself attests amply to their presence and work in the time of Jesus (about fifty cases in the Gospels).

The German Jesuit, Adolf Rodewyk, challenges and responds to those who claim that Jesus' references to evil spirits was only using metaphors for realities that had physical or psychological origins, and makes this warning:

“Satan had been able to achieve a great deal just because he had managed to hide and disguise himself.... He was behind many events in which men did not suspect him, or even when they did recognize or suspect him, they were helpless and did not know how to deal with him.”³⁷ In our contemporary period, Pope Paul VI, in the Catechesis mentioned earlier, “Confronting the Devil’s Power,” indicated clear signs of the presence of the action of the devil today, signs of which are abundant in our times:

We have to be cautious about answering the first question [signs of devil’s action], even though the signs of the Evil One seem to be very obvious at times. We can presume that his sinister action is at work where the denial of God becomes radical, subtle and absurd; where lies become powerful and hypocritical in the face of evident truth; where love is smothered by cold, cruel selfishness; where Christ’s name is attacked with conscious, rebellious hatred, where the spirit of the Gospel is watered down and rejected where despair is affirmed as the last word; and so forth.³⁸

There was a recent TV interview in which a Catholic priest biblical scholar attributed spiritual manifestations only to troubled consciences and psychological issues and denied the present active action of the devil with exactly the reasoning Pope Paul VI cautions us against here:

This matter of the Devil and of the influence he can exert on individuals as well as on communities, entire societies or events, is a very important chapter of Catholic doctrine which should be studied again, although it is given little attention today. Some think a sufficient compensation can be found in psychoanalytic and psychiatric studies or in spiritualistic experiences, which are unfortunately *so widespread* in some countries today.³⁹

Contemporary Worldwide Scale of Attacks

It is helpful to identify specific attacks on the world scale today. Alice von Hildebrand offers some insights in an article on “Lucifer’s Unceasing

³⁷ Adolf Rodewyk, *Possessed by Satan* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 25-27, quoted in Michael Scanlan & Randall Cirner, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, 22.

³⁸ Paul VI, “Confronting the Devil’s Power.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Attacks on the Church.”⁴⁰ She notes that the twentieth-century was the bloodiest in the human history, as he makes use of our very inventions against us, including the media, entertainment, and even education:

Thanks to the mind-boggling development of technology, many of us have closed our eyes to the fact that the Evil One saw these very inventions as a superb tool in his hand and managed to control the new media, entertainment, and “education,” thereby winning millions and millions of souls without much effort.⁴¹

She sees him having even greater “success” in killing than even with the atomic bomb— abortion:

Alas, Satan, working underground, started promoting a new means of destruction which he presented as a “glorious victory of freedom” — the efficiency of which would put atomic bombs to shame, and carrying the noble titles of progress, choice, and liberation from the shackles of the past. I am referring to Roe vs. Wade — a decision legalizing abortion in the USA — a day of such darkness that it sealed the radical moral decadence of a once-great country.”⁴²

She also notes that Satan’s frontal attack has less success, but he operates with more success by infiltration, citing especially the confession of Bella Dodd, who once served Russian communism.⁴³ Thus, on the larger scale, there is the massive work of the devil in media, abortion, ideologies (e.g., same-sex, Marxist), war, etc.

Some Concrete Everyday Attacks the Christian Might Encounter

What might some attacks look like in our everyday lives? Let us turn to some concrete experiences described by Father Michael Scanlan (former president and chancellor of Steubenville University) and Randall Cirner in their work, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*. They highlight Satan’s ultimate goal to sever our relationship with God and thereby cause our damnation.

⁴⁰ Alice von Hildebrand, “Treason, or Infiltration from the Very Beginning? Lucifer’s Unceasing Attacks on the Church,” *Inside the Vatican* (June-July 2016): 40-41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 41.

To accomplish this, the evil spirits can affect mankind in three basic ways: temptations; opposition; and bondage. They point out that we can be unaware that the evil spirits can act upon our *emotions, relations with others, health, focus in prayer, temptations with regard to the seven capital sins*, and so on:

Other qualities of the mind can also be brought into demonic bondage. Strange or bizarre daydreaming, thoughts, or desires; impulsive or undisciplined thinking, loss of contact with reality are not always the product of just human factors. The ravings of the psychotic might actually be the ravings of the possessed. A neurotic's compulsive dwelling on death may in reality be the web of demonic bondage. An undisciplined mind is not always a sign of true "genius." An inability to concentrate for any length of time cannot always be blamed on tension and stress.⁴⁴

They can also affect some aspect of the physical life: "The young woman with menstrual problems was an example of such bondage. We have also seen demonic bondage working in allergies, disease, epilepsy, terminal illnesses, arthritis, and skin problems."⁴⁵ Father Michael Scanlan and Randall Cirner offer some helpful real-life illustrations to which we can relate: Mary, a joyful wife and mother, in an out-of-character state of gloominess, depression, and irritability; Tom, a happily married man, periodically having out-of-character intense temptation to have an extra-marital affair; a young man, with a reasonably mature pattern of Christian life, having an insurmountable problem with self-abuse; and Cirner himself having marriage relationship problems with his wife, even though they both desire harmony and good relations.

In each of the four cases (desolation, adultery temptations, self-abuse, marital relationship), when the realization of the presence of demonic activity led to prayers for deliverance, they all experienced liberation.⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that the word for deliverance in Italian is "prayer of liberation" (*la preghiera di liberazione*).

⁴⁴ Michael Scanlan & Randall Cirner, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, 51. The late Fr. Michael Scanlan is employed here as a reference because of his sound reputation, long experience in the area of deliverance, and position as former Chancellor of Steubenville University.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ M. Scanlan & R. Cirner, "The Activity of Evil Spirits in Daily Life" in *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, 37-52.

These are everyday situations involving evil spirits whose activity we may not suspect. This is not to say that many problems we experience daily may not normally derive from natural causes, like poor health or bad choices.

Conclusion

The Ordinary Daily Attacks Within are the Primary Ones

Three key insights are helpful.

First, a Catholic should be reassured that he is protected securely like a fortress: by Baptism, fidelity to Sunday Mass and frequent Confession, and a prayer life and vigilance.

Second, he ought to be aware that, while many are inclined to think first of the extraordinary activity of the devil (infestation, oppression, obsession, possession), the principal and common attacks are the “ordinary” everyday actions. At the individual level, the main goal of the devil is to cause our damnation, through influencing us in temptations. This is where St. Ignatius’ discernment of spirits is such a valuable life tool.

Third, it is the experience of one North America exorcist that *most of the cases he encountered did not involve evil spirits but human issues*: e.g., mediumship, psychological problems, delusions from heavy medication, not addressing human problems (e.g., isolation) but seeking quick “spiritual” fixes, pointing to a tendency to bypass the human for the spiritual.

The Primary Power against Satan in this Battle is Evangelization

The three points above are for the personal level, but Christians also have the task to fight against the tide of evil in the world. Our Lord teaches, “this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting” (Mt 17:21).

As the Lord saved us not by his ministry but on the cross, so the primary work of new Christ is not ministry but intercession and a participation of the cross. The saints are the most efficacious “other Christs,” for they mount the cross with the Lord— they become victim souls.

To illustrate the necessity of the cross for evangelization, we look to St. Ignatius of Loyola’s wisdom. When Diego Lainez, one of his first disciples,

said he would gladly take the offer of an immediate Heaven, St. Ignatius declared, “I would elect rather to stay and work on for the glory of God; I am sure He is a generous Master, and would not suffer harm to a soul that had delayed its own fruition of Heaven to increase His glory here.” He continued thus: “If God sends you great sufferings, it is a sign He will make you a great saint; if you wish Him to make you a great saint ask Him to send you great sufferings.” Where his disciples prospered without check, he diagnosed relaxation [lukewarmness, tepidity].⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Thomas H. Sennott, “St. Ignatius of Loyola,” Catholicism.org, accessed August 4, 2018, <http://catholicism.org/saint-ignatius-loyola.html>.

CONCLUSION

Though the following is also directed to each baptized (called to become new christs), let us speak a word to encourage the ministerial priest. The priest has a special role in Christ's plan of the new evangelization. He is Christ's other self in the world, an *alter Christus*. Only in heaven will we see what a gift the priesthood is. When Sr. Briege McKenna, during the height of the priest exodus after Vatican II, complained to Jesus, "What is wrong with your priesthood?", Jesus firmly corrected her misconception, replying that the priesthood He created was perfect and an ineffable gift for which we should thank God. Then, in a vision that unfolded against the background of the high altar of the chapel, our Lord revealed the greatness of the priesthood, and in one scene, how Jesus descended onto each priest at Ordination. This was her new insight:

I found myself weeping as I watched the unfolding of this powerful revelation of the priesthood and what it means to a man to be ordained to the priesthood. I had a sense that everyone in heaven— Mary, the angels and all of the saints— were praising God's faithfulness to humanity in his call to men in every age to give them the power to make him present among his people.¹

The priest has been "transubstantiated" into Christ; he wields the divine powers of Christ as His instrument, such that he is acting "in the person of Christ." But these objective powers from Ordination bring *fruitfulness* to the Church to the degree he dies to self and allows Christ to live in him (Gal 2:20), to the degree he becomes Christ (subjective assimilation).

In addition to priests, all souls consecrated to Christ are His predelict friends. To you are addressed the same intimate and heart-felt words of Jesus to the apostles at the Last Supper as He knew He was about to leave them to go to His Father. For you too have shared His burden and His mission, and He now confers an ineffable kingdom: "You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk 22:28-30). You are now "friends" of Jesus: "No longer do I call you servants, for

¹ Sr. Briege McKenna, *Miracles Do Happen*, 71.

the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). You also hear the consoling words of having been chosen from all eternity, the fruitfulness you now have, as well as the power of intercession: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (Jn 15:16). Because Jesus has gone to the Father, you do greater works than He did: “whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (Jn 14:12).

In addition, at the Father’s right hand, He sends the Advocate, the Counsellor, and exhorts you to not be afraid and remain at peace: “But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (Jn 14:26-27).

But, as Cardinal Sarah reminds us, the priest and each baptized (new Christ) must remember that his place is on the cross and that he must embrace it, for he will find his joy within the self-gift of the cross:

Dear brother priests, dear religious brothers and sisters, the experience of the Cross is the experience of the truth of our life! The man or cleric who proclaims the truth of God inevitably climbs upon the Cross. He will experience the passion, crucifixion, and death of the Cross. All Christians, and priests in particular, are constantly on the Cross so that through their witness the truth may shine forth and lies be destroyed.²

God’s Gratitude: “Now it’s my turn”

It is fitting to end this book with a text from Dom Arminjon’s book, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Life to Come*, that greatly influenced St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a consecrated soul. In a sense, it is a fuller response to Peter’s question to Jesus about being rewarded (“Look, we have left everything and followed you,” Mk 10:28), and to every priest

² Robert Cardinal Sarah, Conference, May 25, 2019, *The Catholic World Report*, accessed June 24, 2019, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/06/21/cardinal-sarah-we-must-rebuild-the-cathedral-we-do-not-need-to-invent-a-new-church/>.

and consecrated soul. This text reveals how much God is overwhelmed by the fidelity and love of his faithful servants, and depicts the wondrous things He will do for them, synthesized by the awesome phrase that captivated St. Thérèse, “*Now! It is My turn!*”:

As no mother has ever loved her dearest son, as God loves His predestinate. He is jealous of His dignity, and could not permit himself to be outdone by His creature on the score of fidelity and generosity.

Oh! The Lord cannot forget that the saints, when they once lived on earth, paid homage to Him by the total donation of their repose, their happiness and their whole being; that they would have liked to have had an inexhaustible flow of blood in their veins, in order to shed it as a living and imperishable pledge of their faith; that they would have desired a thousand hearts in their breasts, so as to consume them in the unquenchable fires of their love; and to possess a thousand bodies, in order that they might deliver them to martyrdom, like victims unceasingly renewed. And the grateful God cries out: Now, my turn! The saints have given me the gift of themselves: can I respond other than by giving myself, without restriction and without measure? If I place in their hands the scepter of creation, if I surround them with the torrents of my light, that is a great deal; it is going beyond their highest hopes and aspirations, but it is not the utmost endeavor of my Heart. I owe them more than Paradise, more than the treasures of my knowledge; I owe them my life, my nature, my eternal and infinite substance. If I bring my servants and friends into my house, if I console them and make them thrill with joy by enfolding them in the embrace of my charity, this satisfies their thirst and their desires super-abundantly, and is more than the perfect repose of their hearts require; but it is not enough for the gratification of my divine Heart, for the repletion and perfect satisfaction of my Love. I must be the soul of their souls, I must penetrate and imbue them with my divinity, as fire penetrates iron; by showing myself to their spirits, undisguised, unveiled, without the intervention of the senses, I must unite myself to them *in an eternal face-to-face*, so that my glory illuminates them, exudes and radiates through all the pores of their being, so that, “knowing me as I know them, they may become Gods themselves.”³

³ Charles Arminjon, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Life to Come*, 215-216 (quotation at end taken from St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*).

