

THE PRIEST



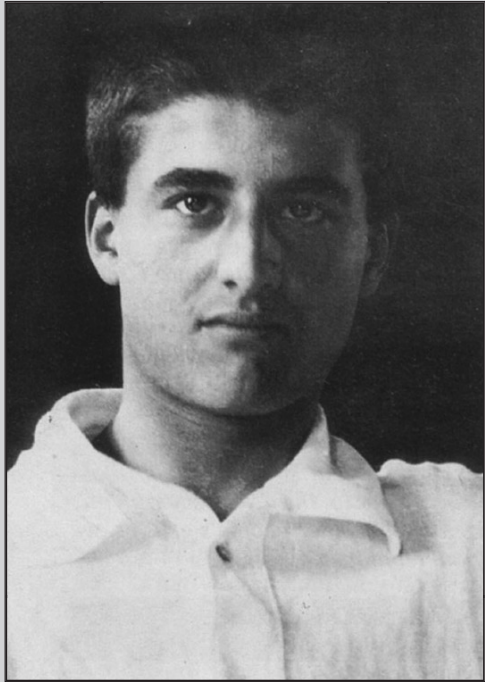
Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy

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Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

“Often it is the example of a priest’s fervent pastoral charity which the Lord uses to sow and to bring to fruition in a young man’s heart the seed of a priestly calling.”

(H. H. John Paul II, 2003, “Ecclesia de Eucharistia”, n. 31)

“Personal example by visibly owning his priestly identity ... [is] indispensable to any pastoral promotion of priestly vocations.”

(Congregation for the Clergy 2001, “The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community”, n. 22.)

Ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia.

“Where Peter is, there is the Church.”

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“We are accompanied on one side by the voices and gestures of our dissenting contemporaries but on the other side by a much more numerous and honourable company, the communion of those who have gone before us to heaven”

(Professor John Finnis, in this issue.)

THE PRIEST

the journal of the Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy

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Chairman's Remarks

Dear ACCC Members and Associates:

The Holy Father has developed the practice of writing a letter to priests on each Holy Thursday, the day when we mark the birth of the ministerial priesthood. This year Pope John Paul II has indicated that he will not write a letter but issue a new encyclical letter on "The Most Holy Eucharist". It is also mentioned that there will be accompanying documents from the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith and Divine Worship. By the time you are reading this note, these documents will probably be to hand. They offer us the opportunity to ponder and to ponder again the supreme importance of the Blessed Eucharist in the life of the Church, and most especially in the life of the priest. Each of us needs to be absolutely convinced of our need to offer "the daily Sacrifice" and to have a special place for adoration in our daily life. It is a sign that the understanding of the priesthood has grown clouded or deficient when the emphasis is shifted from the pre-eminence of the Eucharistic Sacrifice to other aspects of the priestly life. In some quarters it is even advocated that the daily celebration of the Mass by priests is to be discouraged, as though the absence of the Mass in daily life is a spiritual advantage! We know that every document or exhortation to priests from the Holy See in recent times has underlined the importance of the daily Mass for priests.

As well as celebrating the Mass, the manner of celebration of Mass cannot be neglected. Each of us needs to examine ourselves as to whether we celebrate Mass with due dignity and attention. We must be very faithful in the observance of the rubrics, so that we do not intrude our own likes or habits. The physical aspects surrounding the Mass need to speak of the beauty and wonder of the Mystery being celebrated. We should strive to use the best of sacred vessels and to see that they are constantly cleaned and polished. The linen for Mass should be carefully laundered and worthy. The cleanliness, nobility and style of our vestments should indicate that we are celebrating "the most beautiful thing this side of heaven!" All of these matters are not trivial but are all important components of ensuring that Holy Mass is not only intellectually but also in reality "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows."

I look forward to seeing many of you at our conference in Adelaide from August 25th –29th. We are honoured to have three of our bishops speaking with us. You might say we have an episcopal line-up with Archbishop Wilson, Bishop Jarrett and Bishop Coleridge amongst the main speakers. The main focus of our conference will be the life and holiness of priests. May all of us grow each day in a richer appreciation of the gift that has been shared with us in the Sacred Priesthood. May we all respond to this gift with "all that we are."

Rev. John Walshe PP, National Chairman

Editorial

Dear Readers:

Blessed Pier Giorgi Frassati, whose photo appears on the cover of this issue, was a student of engineering, and not for the priesthood, when he died at a young age. His face, with that deep look of mystery, however, well captures the look of young men whom Our Lord seeks to serve Him and His Church in the Sacred Ministry: the *many* such young men. It is with such faces before me that *The Priest* has taken on the character and direction that readers are noticing: for my chief editorial purpose is a revivification of priestly life so that young men can see and be drawn to the joy and wonder of the priestly vocation. The starting point for this is us priests. As Father Mankowski pointedly concludes the first of the two addresses from last year's ACCC Conference that are published in this issue: *By the shape of his life, the priest teaches what he believes*. Crucial to the shape of that life is its public visibility, and our readiness (indeed, our urge) to reach out with a "listening" and attentive life to the many young men whom God wants as His ministers in a Church and a world in such need. **Editor**

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Believe What You Read

Father Paul Mankowski, SJ *

Indispensability of truthfulness

The gist of what I have to say can be put quite simply. Christians believe Christ rose from the dead because they believe the witnesses who said Christ rose from the dead. They believe that the Church, and in a particular way the apostles, told the truth about Jesus. Moreover, the constant fidelity of the faithful, their acceptance of the authority of the Church in matters of doctrine, sacraments, and prayer, finds its taproot in the conviction of the radical reliability of the apostles. Truthfulness is thus an indispensable quality of a bishop, and of the priests and deacons that share his ministry.¹ When a churchman tells a lie, he weakens the faith of the faithful, weakens their conviction that the apostles were not lying when they confessed the Resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the assurance that the Church has the mind of Christ.

Sin against the Eighth Commandment

Now it is my conviction that in our own time the sins most characteristic of clergy are sins against, not the Sixth, but the Eighth Commandment. Any sin, obviously, is a serious matter for the sinner, but since the faith of Christians is connected in a particularly intimate way to the trustworthiness of the Church's ministers, offenses against truth committed by the clergy are especially troublesome. In fact, I believe that most of the woes that beset the clerical life today can be traced to this sin. Attempt at reform, accordingly, should aim to restore integrity, in the fullest sense, to the life of the priest.

Giving one's word. Let's start with the positive case, the connection between integrity and truth that can be discerned in our most solemn undertakings. When one man says to another, "I give you my word," he is saying more than "I give you my mind on the matter," or even "I give you my personal assurance." In saying, "I give you my word," he says, "I give you the truth about myself." Notice that the expression "I give you my word" belongs to the class of utterances philosophers call "performative locutions" — phrases which enact, which bring into being, the very thing they express. "I promise", "I pronounce you man and wife", "I hereby excommunicate you" — all these are examples of performative locutions. You will notice that there is a certain sacramental quality to them; like a sacrament they effect what they signify.

What is brought into being by the act of saying, "I give you my word" is a bond, a unilateral obligation on the part of the giver to give the truth about himself, and only the truth, to the receiver. Thus the characteristic expression of protest when the undertaking is violated is, "But you *broke* your word!" — that is, you broke the bond you established with me, what you offered as the truth about yourself turns out to be no truth at all.

But what is the purpose of such an undertaking in the first place? What is to be gained, for example, by saying "I give you my word that I never touched the petty cash box", as

opposed to saying simply, "I never touched the petty cash box"? Well, there is a sense in which the receiver (he who accepts someone's word) is indemnified against deceit. If I say to my boss, "I give you my word, I give you the truth about myself, that I never touched the petty cash box", and my boss accepts my word, and then it turns out after all that I did pilfer money from the box, then my boss is free to deny me any human good that hinges on my worthiness and — this is important — he has my permission to deny me this good always. To give a man your word is to attach a default clause, so to speak, to the contract: if I fail to deliver the truth I promise you, then you are free to despise me, now and as long as I shall live.

May God do to me ... We can find ghostly remnants of this "default clause" in the language of the Old Testament, looking at the oaths and solemn undertakings various persons make. In the moving passage where Ruth swears she will not abandon her mother-in-law Naomi ("Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your shall God be my God"), she concludes, "May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you" (Ruth 1:17). Or again, after the treacherous death of Abner, when his courtiers come to persuade David to cease his fast of mourning, David swears, "God do so to me and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!" (2 Samuel 3:35). Originally, along with the pronouncement of the oath formula — God do so to me and more also — a gesture was performed, a hand drawn across the throat, or fists clenched and pulled apart to mimic the rending of garments, which served as a kind of ritual shorthand: "May God cut my throat in this manner, and more also, if I fail to do what I now undertake, may the Lord rip me in two in this manner, and more also, if I fail to deliver on my promise!" That is to say, may God annihilate me, may God bring me to nought, if I speak not the truth.

On the purely natural level, if I give my word that I never touched the petty cash and it turns out that I lied, the value of my word becomes nil, non-existent. I indemnified my creditor, as it were, by means of my reputation for veracity. Once the indemnity — that reputation — is revealed as valueless, it is pointless to offer it as security in another transaction, and it is just as absurd to accept it. For this reason I find it baffling (and wryly amusing) when a man goes to the matrimonial altar for the second or third or sixth time in ten years and pledges fidelity to his bride. What is exchanged? What could be exchanged? What do the parties imagine is exchanged? Perhaps all this is obvious. I wonder if you will say the same about my next contention. In recent months it has become embarrassingly public knowledge that several prominent ecclesiastics have violated their solemn promises of chastity. Immediately following the revelations was a chorus of admonition inveighing against the sin of morose delectation, of taking pleasure in their disgrace. As far as it goes, that is quite proper. On the other hand, if a man freely and publicly makes a solemn commitment and then betrays it, in deriding him we do him no injustice.

We have his own permission to do so. He has invited us to despise him as clearly as the ancient Hebrew who takes a vow invites God to cut his throat if he backslides. Prudential concern for the common good may urge us to temper our derision or restrict it to discreet expression. But even where contempt for the defaulter is intemperate and public, it is not *his* person that has been thereby wronged.

Promises, oaths, vows

Now if I give another person my word, it is to him, another human being, that I extend the liberty of contempt if I default, if the word I give is false. In more solemn undertakings it is God who is invoked as avenger. The language of canon law, which in this matter marches closely with ordinary speech, distinguishes between promises, oaths, and vows. A promise (*iusiurandum promissorium*) is an undertaking exchanged between one person and another (cf, CIC 1201 §1). An oath is the invocation of God as witness to the truth, that is, the truth asserted to other persons (CIC 1199 §1).² A vow is a promise made to God (CIC 1191 §1).³ I wonder how often those who take oaths and vows realise just what it is they are offering, what they are putting on the line, and how gravely in fact they are pulling their hands across their throats, so to speak, in addressing their promises to God or invoking the Divine Name as witness to their undertakings.

Let me offer as typical, and for general consideration, the Jesuit vow formula:

Almighty and eternal God, *IN*, though altogether unworthy in Thy divine sight, yet relying on Thy infinite goodness and mercy and moved with a desire of serving Thee, in the presence of the most Holy Virgin Mary and Thy whole heavenly court, I vow to Thy Divine Majesty perpetual poverty, chastity, and obedience in the Society of Jesus; and I promise that I shall enter that same Society in order to lead my entire life in it, understanding all these things according to its Constitutions. Therefore I suppliantly beg Thy Immense Goodness and Clemency, through the blood of Jesus Christ, to deign to receive this holocaust in an order of sweetness; and that just as Thou gavest me the grace to desire and offer this, so Thou wilt also bestow abundant grace to fulfill it.

The phrasing will vary somewhat between the formula required by one religious institute and other, but the essential point will be the same. And the essential point is that the vow, though *received* by a religious superior, is *addressed* to almighty God, with all the angels and saints invoked as witnesses. God does not change. God does not die. God does not fade away. If God was ever part of the ritual, God will be always part of it, and the promises made will be eternally fresh. Now what, in the order of things, has changed by virtue of the vow? If we take the example of the Jesuit formula, before pronouncing the vow the man does no wrong by disobeying his superior's command; by making the vow he freely says, "Henceforward let it be a mortal sin for me to disobey." In making a vow a man offers his very self, his soul, as collateral, so to speak. (In the biblical Hebrew and Aramaic the words for self and soul are the same.) That means that the penalty for default is

damnation — the penalty, that is, that the vovant invokes against himself.

I never knew you! Taking a vow is a risky business. Vows always involve undertakings which are difficult — at least potentially difficult — to keep. No one makes a promise to eat when hungry or to sleep when tired. Everyone recognises there is something noble about making a vow or an oath, about freely putting oneself under an obligation. Everyone recognises that the stakes are large, nothing less than a man's very self: "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26). Everyone recognises that the creditor will not and can not weaken or forget, that he is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8). When a man takes a vow, he gives God his word, he gives God the truth about himself. That is why *this* word is infinitely more perilous to break. Who of us that are priests and have made solemn undertakings can listen without a shudder to Jesus' saying in the Gospel of Matthew (7:22f): "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers'" (Mt 7:22f).

"I never knew you." As I read these words, they are not a mere verbal gesture — a kind of cold shoulder — but state the stark facts of the matter. Think of a wife whose husband cheated on her by a liaison with another woman, then covered his sin with a lie, then propped up the first lie with half a dozen new lies, then supported each of secondary lies with a dozen others, on and on, year after year, erecting a scaffold of deceit underneath him. And when it collapsed, and his betrayal became patent, the wife might well say to her husband, "You're not the same person I married. The 'you', the self, you offered to me turns out to be no one at all. *I never knew you!*" How can the debt be paid? What shall a man give in exchange for his very self? Having given his word, and broken it, with what can he make good the loss? "You're not the same priest who vowed fidelity to me. You're not the same priest who prophesied in my name. I never knew you."

St Thomas More's case. Let me focus on a concrete and instructive example. In April of 1534 Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England, was summoned to Lambeth Palace and required to take an oath by which he would undertake to uphold the Act of Succession, which declared that the marriage of King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon was void and invalid. More refused to swear the oath, thus incurring the automatic penalty of life imprisonment and forfeiture of all his property. Why did More refuse to take the oath, knowing as he did that most clergy (then Catholic clergy, remember) and all but one bishop (then Catholic bishops, remember) tailored their convictions quite handily to the political reality and professed their loyalty to the new order? Here I quote Professor John Finnis:

To take the Oath would be to swear that he, More, maintained the marriage to be invalid, when in his own mind he maintained it to be valid. Thus, taking the Oath would be, for him, asserting publicly, and with God as his witness before men, a deliberate falsehood, intended to

deceive others about the state of his own belief—in short, it would be to lie. So: More went to the Tower on a point of morality, the absoluteness, the unconditional truth and force, of the quite ordinary and universal (though specific) moral norm which excludes lying, most clearly lying on oath.⁴

It goes without saying that Thomas More's refusal was a courageous act. Yet it was not an act of bravado, not an instance of political agitprop, but the result of careful deliberation about the moral and spiritual goods at stake, as More explained to the commissioners who were appointed to administer the Oath. He wrote to his daughter Margaret, "I showed unto them that my purpose was not to put any fault either in the Act or any man that made it, or in the oath or any man that swore it, nor to condemn the conscience of any other man. But as for myself, in good faith my conscience so moved me in the matter ... that I could not swear without the jeopardising of my soul to perpetual damnation."

Notice, More did not say that any and every honest man must refuse to swear the Oath, he did not say any and every man who swore would commit a mortal sin. Rather he realised that, in calling God to witness, by professing to believe what he did not believe, by offering as the truth about himself what he knew to be false, he would forfeit his immortal soul forever.

A man whom I know ... Let me give another concrete case, one of which I have more direct knowledge. I know a man who the week before he was ordained a deacon, was assembled by his superior in the parlour beneath his office and presented, for the first time, with the formula of the Act of Faith. You know the formula to which I refer: it consists of recitation of the Nicene Creed plus the undertaking to "firmly embrace and accept all and everything concerning the doctrine of faith and morals which has either been defined by the Church's solemn deliberation or affirmed and declared by its ordinary magisterium", and so forth. Having given the theologate time to read through the text, the superior then said. "I know this moment may be very difficult for you. I invite you, however, to allow the Holy Spirit, who has brought you this far in the journey, to carry you through to next Saturday." There was no doubt whatever what his words meant. My informant believes that each man in the room knew that he was being invited (and, given the timing and circumstances of the occasion, urged) to perjure himself. The invocation of the Holy Spirit was an added blasphemy which, though shocking, did not alter the facts in any material way whatever.

Every ordinand in the room made the Act of Faith. My informant has excellent reason to believe that several did so in good faith; he is just as convinced that several men did not embrace and accept the Church's doctrine on faith and morals, and accordingly, that they solemnly perjured themselves that evening.

Such a man would hope that he is wrong. He would hope that the heresy voiced by some was not really *ex animo* dissent but unreflective conformity to the atmosphere of

theological Whiggery then in fashion; he would hope that others followed the superior's suggestion simply because it came from him, blindly, mechanically, without attending to his words or to the issues at stake.

Moral eunuchs. But my informant's relations with some of these men were changed forever, for either they are incapable of swearing an oath, and thus moral eunuchs, or else capable of swearing, and thus perjurers. Neither alternative is gratifying, a third possibility is not evident. In some important way their manhood, as well as their priesthood, was permanently mutilated. After all, the occasions on which human beings solemnly profess who we are and what we believe are rare. We don't have that many opportunities. For the most part, our daily lives are spent in a welter of courtesies, compromises, acts of diplomatic evasion, not to mention tactical silences; all of these may be innocent and all are certainly necessary to civilised community, but they say little or nothing about the ultimate meaning and purpose of our lives. It is by our most important commitments, vows and oaths and promises, that we plant a flag in the sand, so to speak, that we tell the world the truth about ourselves, about the deepest allegiances of our souls.

Motions of civility. We might well pity men who are moral eunuchs, and, though it requires a greater effort, we might pity men who are perjurers. But I submit that it is impossible to *respect* them. This is not so much an observation about human psychology as an entailment of the logic of giving one's word; perjurers and moral eunuchs have denied us a view of the true self to respect. In a philosophically important way, there is "nothing there" to respect. As a consequence, all one's dealings with these men become necessarily superficial. Mutual wariness and suspicion become inevitable. Trust is non-existent, not because it is a good deliberately withheld, but because it is a good not in one's gift. We share dwellings and tables amicably enough, we go through the motions of civility, but only as actors feeding each other lines in a script written for a religious life that belongs to someone else.

If all this sounds like moral swaggering on my part, let me add that I make no claim to the courage of St Thomas More; except by occasional trifling vexations, I have never paid a price for my beliefs. I don't know if I could face what

Habakkuk 2:2-4:

"And the Lord answered me

'Write the vision;

make it plain upon tablets,

so that he may run who reads it.

For still the vision awaits its time;

it hastens to the end – it will not lie.

If it seems slow, wait for it;

it will surely come, it will not delay.

Behold, he whose soul is not upright

in him shall fail,

but the righteous shall live by his faith."

St Thomas More faced without folding at the knees. But there's a difference between the man who embarks on an undertaking and finds the difficulties greater than anticipated, and the man who never engages the difficulties in the first place. We can feel compassion for those men who, being weaker than Thomas More and trapped in a dilemma not of their own making, succumbed under force to the threat of imprisonment and destitution and swore an oath they didn't believe: an ugly failure, but an understandable one. But what do we make of men who – under no external compulsion whatsoever – forswear themselves and whose castration is a self-inflicted wound?

Isolation of faithful priests

The moral landscape in which faithful priests operate today makes inevitable some level of emotional isolation. True communion, union of minds and hearts, is only possible among men who are in agreement on first principles, who recognise the same goods as governing their lives. In the absence of such communion — indicated, as I have argued, by the alacrity with which one's peers and superiors forswear themselves on matters of prime importance — a priest frequently finds himself inclined to cynicism. By cynicism I mean not a habit of sardonic comment on the seeming triumph of hypocrisy, but rather the kind of despair that tempts one to measure triumph and failure in purely this-worldly terms, to make one's own, that is, the values of those who have prospered by cunning and deceit. Difficult though it is to resist, to succumb to this kind of cynicism is to start down a road from which few men return. The alternative is to take our vows, oaths and promises seriously, trusting that God will vindicate his word, the word he sent among us, the Word made flesh. In the interim, a certain amount of heartbreak is the inescapable price to be paid for integrity; nobody ever said it would be easy. The priest who tells the truth about himself, who lives the truth about himself, is bound to collide with, and be worsted by, the *realpolitik* of the world he inhabits. Whence, as G. K. Chesterton has written, his true victories will be those of his apparent defeats:

Look in what other face for understanding,
But hers that bore the child that brought the Sword,
Hang in what other house, trophy and tribute,
The broken heart and the unbroken word?

Notes:

¹ Henceforth, unless otherwise indicated, I use the word “priest” to mean any man in Holy Orders, inasmuch as he shares the episcopal function of witnessing to the truth: “The function of the bishops’ ministry was handed over in a subordinate degree to priests so that they might be appointed in the order of the priesthood and be co-workers of the episcopal order for the proper fulfilment of the apostolic mission that had been entrusted to it by Christ” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 2 §2).

² *Iusiurandum, idest invocatio Nominis divini in testem veritatis, praestari nequit, nisi in veritate, in iudicio et in iustitia.*

³ *Votum, idest promissio deliberata ac libera Deo facta de bono possibili et meliore, ex virtute religionis impleri debet.*

⁴ The author quoted the original address, now published in this issue.

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Where articles by the Editor are published, I apply the same tests that I apply to other authors in this journal. This “corner” is an experiment in treating some topics in a more piecemeal fashion. Like most content, it is more directed to priests than to lay associates.

It's God's Mass, not his!

When I hear young men (that is, laymen) speaking of the liturgy, I prick my ears. I thought of asking a number of my young friends to collaborate for a brief article on liturgical matters, but the logistics proved rather difficult, and capturing gesticulations, etc. in text is not easy. So I decided to write a few words that capture what I heard from several young men in different contexts and in respect of different priests. I have tried to capture these accurately, and my “comments” appear at the end.

1. The lead remark, “It's God's Mass, not his!” is the most telling that I have heard. It followed a mimicking of fast-action elevations of the sacred elements with a “bop!” to indicate an abrupt pinnacle, and an “Ah, now I can start talking again!” commentator's remark on the continuation of the eucharistic prayer – with the “punch” of the enactment being captured in the declaration, “It's God's Mass, not his!” (that is, the Holy Mass is God's, and the priest is the minister of God's action).

2. “Put away those old-fashioned, useless, irrelevant things!”, were the words of a not-young priest to a young man preparing the sanctuary. “Which, the [sanctuary] bells, or you, Father?” was the unexpressed reply, as – with no comment – a downcast young man prepared for Mass without bells. He then imitated a boring voice, saying, “Lift up your hearts” (the *sursum corda*).

3. “The thing that narks me most is the way he gawks and bobbles his head during processions. Actually, he's a nice guy, but he behaves as if he thinks that we go to church to see him!” The commentator's head was stuck out and bobbing, with much vacuous grinning.

4. With an acted looking-around-at-the-congregation, rather than at the elements, and thus the acted words “Take this all of you ...” being “read” as directed to the people, rather than consecrating the elements in sacrifice to the Father.

Comments: It is interesting how these incidents that occurred in conversation all have a common point: namely, that young men who are earnest worshippers of God are quick to see where a priest does not behave as a “ministerial priest” whose liturgical conduct points to God, the true Author of the sacred liturgy. Such remarks can border on the irreverent and disrespectful, but their passion well captures a true search for authentic liturgy. So hearing young men (and young women, though these examples all came from young men) is very salutary for me as a priest. I find that the young constantly remind us that it is *Christ* whom they seek – and they are quick to pick where the priest presents himself, rather than Christ.

Father Paul-Anthony McGavin

Teach What You Believe

Father Paul Mankowski, SJ *

Priests whom we can trust

In my last address I spoke about perjury by priests, and the annihilating effect it has on the person of the priest himself. In this essay I turn the focus to the faithful. I want to argue that mendacity on the part of a priest has effects much more profound than destruction of his personal honour, more wide-ranging than the damnation of his soul. The Church's faithful need to be able to trust their priests. They need to know that what their preachers tell them is Church teaching really is the teaching of the Church. They need to know that the seal of the confessional is really binding on their confessors. They need to know that, when a priest tells them, "Your sins are forgiven", he is speaking in the name of Christ and the Church, not out of some private moral theology of his own devising. Most of all, they need to believe that the Church herself is not lying when she says her doctrines were not invented by men but vouchsafed to her by God.

Who and what the priest represents

C. S. Lewis penned an extraordinary essay in the 1950s which was first delivered as an address to Anglican clergy at a theological college. In it he condemned to the expedient whereby certain modernist priests, while privately or semi-privately denying the divine origin of Church teachings, served up these teachings to their congregations as "picture-truths" — as stories or illustrations, which, though deemed unworthy of assent on the part of intellectuals such as themselves, nevertheless could be used to give the simple faithful guidance in matters beyond their comprehension. In words as scathing as any he ever wrote, Lewis mercilessly lays bare the moral shabbiness of the priest who has recourse to such a device:

I'm sure if I had to produce picture-truths to a parishioner in great anguish or under fierce temptation, and produce them with that seriousness and fervour which his condition demanded, while knowing all the time that I didn't exactly — only in some Pickwickian sense — believe them myself, I'd find my forehead getting red and damp and my collar getting tight. But that is your headache, not mine. You have, after all, a different sort of collar.¹

Bull's-eye! The predicament that Lewis pin-points hinges on the fact that — do what he will — a priest can never alienate himself from the moral force of the Church he represents by his priesthood. If persons tormented by confusion or temptation have resort to him as a priest — as opposed to some secondary qualification he may incidentally possess — then they are submitting their problem to the judgment of the Church: they want to know the mind of God. Picture a priest who disbelieves or only half-believes in the afterlife, confronted with a pious working-class couple whose ten-year-old son has drowned in tragic circumstances. In the desperate earnestness of their grief and confusion they ask Father, "But where *is* our son now, at this moment?" Only a morally depraved clergyman could respond to their distress by repeating echatological doctrine that, in his heart, he believed to be a myth. Or think of a mother of four children

caught in the dilemma of either commencing contraception or seeing her non-Catholic husband fulfill his threat to walk out on her. She asks the priest in the confessional what God's will is for her. The teaching of the Church is clear. What kind of man would enunciate that teaching, would summon her to a decision requiring moral heroism and entailing considerable sacrifice — if at the same time he did not earnestly and wholeheartedly believe it himself? When Lewis adds the sardonic acknowledgment, "You have, after all, a different sort of collar", he is pointing, not to an extenuating, but to an aggravating circumstance, one that multiplies the villainy of the offence. Bad enough in a layman, this duplicity is doubly contemptible in a cleric.

Scandal caused by untruthfulness

Of course, cowardice might suggest various escape routes for an unbelieving priest who finds himself in such a predicament. He might, for example, simply lie about the Church's teaching, suggesting that it is identical with his own private view, or that the point at issue is still a matter of theological dispute and therefore unresolved, or again he may invent some doctrine on the spur of the moment that puts less strain on his penitent. This mendacity may provide some short-term psychological relief, until the same person is disabused by a more upright priest or happens upon the authentic doctrine in some other way, whereupon the penitent's distress will return in full force, with the added pain of scandal and confusion caused by contradictory voices of authority. Even more, the priest in this instance is guilty of a bait-and-switch, proffering as the Church doctrine what he knows is not, and falsely engaging the conscience of his penitent. For example, even if Father X earnestly believes that it is God's will that a particular penitent continue in an adulterous relationship, he knows that it is not the Church's teaching on the matter, and by presenting such a choice as an option that can be (or must be) conscientiously chosen, he is dishonestly trading on his penitent's desire to follow the Church and reinforcing a desire for what he believes to be a false object.

Scandal caused by lack of valour

Alternatively, the priest might seek to distance himself from the messiness of the situation by refusing to endorse any particular teaching or course of action and simply urging his penitent to follow his conscience. At first sight it may seem that this manoeuvre relieves the priest of any responsibility for any hardship the penitent undergoes — since, after all, the penitent must choose to bring the hardship upon himself — but the reality is not so simple. In the first place, the priest (in the cases we are considering) has lied to his penitent by falsely suggesting that options excluded as conscientious choices by the Church are not so excluded. Moreover, he robs the penitent of the moral clarity provided by the Church, which is his just possession and consolation. For instance, a woman living with and engaging in sexual relations with her boyfriend consults Father X. Father X tells her

to follow her conscience. Her conscience, let us say, tells her to break off sexual relations with her boyfriend and attempt chastity seriously. However, she then feels guilty in her decision precisely because Father X, out of cowardice, falsely made it into *her* decision. If the opposite choice is also conscientious, she wonders, is she being selfishly dramatic or priggish in making a decision that will vex and alienate her boyfriend? Had she been correctly instructed that extra-marital chastity was the only right decision, it would not make the sexual restraint any easier, perhaps, but she would have had the strengthening consolation that she was doing what was right because it was right, confident that the opposite decision was not equally and indifferently God's will. Deprived of that confidence, she is much more likely to waver and fall, in part because Father's pretended "pastoral openness" was in reality a disguise for gutlessness.

Here I want to digress briefly to dispense with a mare's nest. A priest is guilty of neither duplicity nor hypocrisy in instructing others to pursue a course of action requiring moral courage of a magnitude that he doubts he has himself. It is inevitable that the kind of moral absolutes which the Church professes will not, in certain times and circumstances, bring it about that a man's clear duty carries with it an appalling price. The priest's job is to enunciate the duty, irrespective of the weakness and strength at his command (or better, what he imagines to be the weakness and strength at his command).

The pretence of "private opinions"

So far I have framed the discussion in terms of priest and penitent, but this was largely a device with which to focus the problem sharply. What has been said applies across the board to any priest's relation to the difficult teachings of the Church. It's true, of course, that in our time the contested doctrines that figure most prominently in the public imagination concern sexual morality. As a friend of mine has remarked, if someone comes up to you in the street and says "I have a problem with Church teaching", you know he's not telling you he's a monophysite. But in fact the crisis makes itself across the entire range of Catholic doctrine.

To return to the problem of the half-believing clergyman: some priests comfort themselves with the thought that, by openly proclaiming their dissent from Church teaching and refusing to counsel or instruct others in conformity with doctrines they reject, they are for that reason honest and immune from the charge of duplicity. One gambit is to proclaim, "the teaching Church is wrong", or "the Magisterium is wrong", as if there somehow existed a Church behind or above the teaching Church to which they might remain loyal. In a similar vein, we often hear "gay" priests express hesitations about their role as representatives of a Church that is inimical to the gay agenda, while insisting that, since they are working to change Church teaching themselves, they ought not be identified with the suffering occasioned by the orthodox line. Such a stance is performatively inconsistent. A priest cannot un-priest himself by pretending that, when he speaks of matters on which the Church has pronounced, his priesthood can be

"detached" from the act through which his assertion is offered to others for consideration. The Church claims divine authority in faith and morals, and to understand what a Catholic priest is includes the understanding that he is inalienably connected to a Church that claims divine authority in faith and morals. Consequently, any time a priest makes an assertion regarding faith and morals he necessarily appeals to his interlocutors to judge his statement to be true, *inter alia*, because of his connection with a Church that has divine authority in the matter. Of course a priest can perform a purely verbal gesture of distancing, for example, by prefacing his remarks with the notice, "I speak not as a priest but as a clinical psychologist", or "I write not as a priest but simply as an honest seeker of the truth", but such an act is discursively vacuous. In the real-world context of human discourse the priest participates as a person who holds a (putatively) divine commission in a body that claims divinely endowed authority and divinely guaranteed immunity from error. Whether the priest or his interlocutors deny the grounds for these claims is wholly irrelevant to their existence — or to his personal responsibility for their continued existence.²

Priests inseparable from the teaching Church

Let me propose an imperfect but suggestive analogy. Picture an officer in the Nazi SS — uniformed, regularly employed, in conventionally good military standing — who dissented from Nazi Party policy on the extermination of the Jews. Would anyone accept his claim that his dissent freed him from a share of the S.S.'s responsibility in the Holocaust? Of course not. His personal views, in and of themselves, do not diminish his complicity in the least. Would it make a difference if he had written letters or given speeches opposing the policy? Not if, in the end, he retained his S.S. commission and preserved his good standing. After all, diversity of opinion among S.S. members would be significant only as a sociological datum; in terms of "reasons for action" (in a morally significant sense), only one policy mattered. A stranger who saw our man walking in the street in uniform would see, simply, an officer of the S.S., and would experience the intimidation consistent with his relationship to the institution of the S.S. The officer, purely by continuing his connection with the institution, reinforces its purposes and shares responsibility for its program. Only if he severed his institutional allegiance and collaboration completely and unambiguously could he exempt himself from the blame of complicity.³

Perhaps it appears that I am making heavy weather out of a minor point. But I want to insist that all priests, faithful priests and dissenting priests alike, share responsibility for the effects that Church doctrine has in the world around them. Father X may profess great sympathy for the pain of women excluded — wrongly, in his view — from Holy Orders; Father Y may empathise with the severe trials homosexuals go through in attempting chastity — a burden he thinks wrongly imposed on them.³ Yet the pain and the burden will be there whether Fathers X and Y dissent or not; even if these priests don't take the teaching seriously, other people will, and some will make staggering personal sacrifices to conform their lives to Church teaching — only because of the Church's assurance that this teaching is

God's will. Like the S.S. officer who does private hand-wringing but keeps his commission, the dissenters' position is a contemptible one. At once sanctimonious and cowardly, dissident priests profess to find in the Church a source of falsehood and injustice; yet they persist in their complicity with the very injustices they deplore, lacking the elementary personal integrity that would require them to apostatise.

Priestly dissent weakens faith

Everyone, no matter how theologically unlettered, can catch the whiff of mendacity that hangs around the dissenting priest. Either he's lying to the Church, they think, or he's lying to us, or he's lying to himself. As with the case of a Marine lieutenant wearing a "U.S. Out of Nicaragua" lapel badge, ordinary people "just see" that there's a problem, and that the problem is connected with dishonesty. When such men permit themselves or are permitted to continue as priests, it engenders an eerie feeling of disorientation among the faithful. At some level, they realise, Father is living a lie. Is his salvation endangered by this lie, or not? If his salvation *is* endangered, then why doesn't the bishop move to correct him? If it is not endangered, then is there any connection between the truths we live by and our salvation and damnation? Doubt upon doubt suggests itself to their imagination. Does Father believe in the Church? Does the bishop believe in salvation? Does the bishop believe in God? Is the bishop lying about his beliefs? Are the bishops lying when they say they're handing on God's teaching and not their own opinions? Are they lying when they claim God chose Israel his people, or that God loves the poor, or that God forbids sex outside marriage? Do the bishops really know God's mind? Would they tell us they did if they didn't? Even more worrisome, did the Apostles lie when they claimed to have witnessed the risen Christ and to have received the Holy Spirit? Is the whole Christian Faith a pious fraud?

A priest who may be doubted brings doubt upon the Church

If this seems far-fetched, I have ample first-hand evidence that it is not. Many Catholics of my acquaintance, neither fools nor theologically naive, confessed that they were given a staggering shock to their faith by the clerical abuse scandal that erupted publicly in the United States during 2002. And this is important: the shock had (almost) nothing to do with sexual sin, the abuse of children itself, disturbing though this was. The blow to their faith came from the readiness of ecclesiastics, especially bishops, to lie in order to buy their way out of embarrassing or incriminating situations. "I can hardly take it in", several laymen admitted to me. "How can a man who believes in divine retribution swear what he knows to be false? And if Bishop Z doesn't believe in God, are there any bishops who do? And if so, then why are they silent about their brother bishops? Father, this is the first time in my life I've doubted whether the Catholic Church is the true Church."

A priest's witness is relational

As the etymology of the word itself teaches, integrity is an indivisible attribute. A man who is untrustworthy in one area of his life — especially when duplicity is to his

advantage — is unlikely to be trustworthy in another. That is why the duplicity of bishops and priests is so corrosive. It severs a connection that is essential to faith. This has been well explained by the philosopher William Marshner, whose account I here paraphrase. In ordinary language, the verb "believe" in a sentence of the type "x believes ϕ " indicates a simple, unilinear relationship between the person who believes, x, and the object of belief ϕ . To say, "John believes the stock market will stabilise soon" means no more than "John is of the opinion that the stock market will stabilise soon." Faith, on the other hand, presupposes a triangular relationship. To say "x has faith that ϕ " implies "x believes y (i.e., John believes another person) that ϕ ." When I say "John has faith that Christ rose from the dead", I mean "John believes the testimony of another witness (his parents, his catechist) that Christ rose from the dead." And of course these witnesses will owe their own faith to the testimony of still other witnesses, and so on and so on, until we reach the eye-witnesses, the apostles, themselves.

Priestly mendacity and spiritual homicide

The reliability of faith, then, depends on the integrity of the chain of witness, depends on the fact that each testimony is true. And since the believer has no independent means of verifying the truth of the testimony, the *trustworthiness* of the witnesses is all the more important. Of course, an untrustworthy man may sometimes utter a true statement. But if he is to be believed on a matter that contravenes common opinion, a witness must be worthy of trust, worthy of belief. When a witness to the faith (and, as I have argued, a priest is regarded as a witness whether he wishes to be so regarded or not), when a witness to the faith destroys his own credibility — by breaking his vows, or lying, or dissenting from defined doctrine — he commits an act of spiritual suicide. But he does more than that, he commits spiritual homicide as well.

"In former times", wrote Ronald Knox, in his most famous satire,

... when Israel's ancient Creed
Took Root so widely that it ran to Seed,
When Saints were more accounted of than Soap,
And men in happy blindness serv'd the Pope,
UXORIOUS JEROBOAM, waxen bold,
Tore the Ten Tribes from DAVID's falt'ring Hold
And, spurning Threats from Salem's Vatican,
Set gaiter'd Calves in Bethel and in Dan.
So Freedom reign'd, so Priests, dismay'd by naught,
Thought what they pleased, and mentioned what they thought.

A priest is not his "own man"

For those of us priests living in a post-Enlightenment age, it takes a great effort of imagination to realise and fully come to grips with the fact that we do not enjoy all the liberties modern man conventionally accords to himself. It is easy to forget our priesthood to the extent of viewing ourselves as free agents in a participatory democratic culture — as independent thinkers, scholars, citizen-voters, etc. — in a manner indistinguishable from that of our fellows. We almost reflexively reserve to ourselves the right to think what we please and mention what we think. I have tried to argue that it isn't so simple. A scholar or a soldier or a civil servant can write a letter to the editor of a newspaper and

include the caveat, “this is my personal opinion only and does not represent the view of Columbia University or the Department of Defence” as the case may be. On matters of faith and morals, a priest has no private views of that sort. Doctrine is not and can never be “private property” in this sense. A scholar might insist that his views are his business only, and that, since other persons are wholly free to accept or reject them, he bears no responsibility for the use such persons make of his assertions. We priests can make no such claim. “You are not your own”, says St. Paul, “You are not your own: you were bought with a price” (1Cor 6:19f).

Priestly living the mystery of the faith

In the eyes of the world, to relinquish the role of “free-agent” appears to be a senseless act of self-diminishment. This is only to be expected. Yet in an important way it is key to the priestly task of being a co-evangelist with his bishop. In his own retreat to priests, the former archbishop of Paris Cardinal Suhard said, “To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one’s life would not make sense if God did not exist.”⁵ I suggest that Cardinal Suhard’s notion of witness provides a good index of the integrity of one’s priesthood. If the freedoms and satisfactions of my life are of a sort as to earn the admiration of the world, if all men speak well of me, or speak of my life with envy, then something is out of order. If, on the other hand, a priest’s life seems absurd in secular eyes, if the austerities and diminishments required by fidelity to the priesthood appear meaningless, then his personal joy in his vocation becomes a mystery, it is a sign that points beyond itself, it is truly evangelical. By the shape of his life, he teaches what he believes.

Notes:

¹ “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” *Christian Reflections* (ed. W. Hooper, Eerdmans, 1958):153.

² Few dissenting Catholics, priests or laymen, deny the authoritativeness of the teaching Church across the board. Usually their arguments against this or that doctrine (clandestinely) depend on or appeal to the authoritativeness of many other Catholic doctrines — for example, a dissenter from teaching on contraception will often assume the directive force of teachings on promising, truth-telling, the canonicity and reliability of Scripture, etc. Sometimes their uncritical acceptance of the values of the ambient culture obscures the importance of the Church in sanctioning such doctrines; sometimes for polemical reasons they find it tactically expedient to be silent about the sanctions.

³ Were he to become a defector-in-place, that is, a subversive, his continued association would be feigned. The total split is a necessary condition of exemption from complicity.

⁴ Among theologically trained intellectuals of a certain stripe, a priest’s expressions of dissent may be proffered as a kind of “consolation through solidarity”, but this is in fact a ruse that serves another purpose: in essence, the dissident priest asks the victim-group’s permission to forego or postpone his duties to intellectual honour and personal integrity (duties that require his un-priesting), with the implicit understanding that he will make use of his dishonestly-held position to help subvert the institution.

⁵ Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, *Priests Among Men*, Paris, 1949.

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Liturgical Question Box

Rev Mgr Peter J. Elliott

Q. *Our Parish Priest looks around at us and moves the bread and the chalice around as he says: “Take this all of you and eat”, as though he is addressing the crowd. Along with some other parishioners I am not comfortable with this. I also find it distracting, but if I were to complain or even raise a question, I would get nowhere. I am only a layman. Is he supposed to be doing this?*

A. To answer your question we must first resolve a basic liturgical and sacramental question: **to whom are the words of consecration addressed?** These sacred words are at the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer, which is addressed to God the Father. Therefore, set within a prayer, the consecration narrative adapted from accounts of the Last Supper is addressed not to the people but to God the Father. This is clear when we look at the immediate context of the words of consecration. In each of the four Eucharistic Prayers, just before the consecration, the celebrant addresses God the Father: **1.** “to you, his almighty Father”; **2.** “and gave you thanks”; **3.** “and gave you thanks and praise”; **4.** “... glorified by you, his heavenly Father.” The Missal directs the celebrant to say these words bowing slightly, that is, inclined forward looking at the bread and the chalice, not standing erect looking at the people.

The words of consecration do not merely recall the Last Supper, rather they bring before the Father the one Sacrifice of Jesus Christ His Son, which is made present through the transubstantiation of the bread and wine. The Mass is the great Memorial of the Paschal Mystery, Christ’s saving death and Resurrection. While the Mass is a re-enactment of the Last Supper, it is not a memorial of the Supper. Nor is this re-enactment meant to be “telescoped” into the words of consecration. In fact it is spread out over four distinct moments in the eucharistic celebration: **1.** the Preparation of the Gifts (He took bread and wine); **2.** the Consecration (He blessed or gave thanks); **3.** the Fraction (He broke the bread) and **4.** Communion (He gave himself to his disciples). This also explains why the priest should not break the bread at the consecration, as some have done in recent times.

For all these reasons a priest should not speak or act as if he were addressing the assembly during the consecration. Nevertheless, his mistake would not invalidate the consecration. It is often made sincerely, to “involve the people” as if “we were at the Last Supper”. However, in practice the people are best involved by a prayerful consecration.

Your Parish Priest might think again were someone to point out to him that what he is doing reflects the deliberate strategy of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. They eliminated the consecration by reducing it to reading a scriptural narrative of the Last Supper over the bread and wine, that is, a word addressed to the congregation not a prayer of consecration.

A final comment: Never say, “I am only a layman.” As a member of the lay faithful, you have rights within the Church and one of these is the right to participate in celebrations of the liturgy according to the mind of the Church, following the directives of the Roman Rite [cf, CIC #392].

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Saint Thomas More and the Crisis in Faith and Morals

John Finnis *

This paper, not previously published in full, was first presented as an address to the Thomas More Society in Melbourne in 1989. Sub-headings have been added editorially.

Low Sunday 1534

In the afternoon of Low Sunday, a week after Easter 1534, Sir Thomas More was summoned to appear next morning, at Lambeth Palace, to take the public oath required of all adult subjects by the new Act of Succession – an oath to observe and maintain “the whole effect and contents” of the Act of Succession, which declared that the marriage of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon was against God’s law and utterly void notwithstanding the Papal dispensation in reliance on which it had been entered upon 25 years before. That Sunday evening, and again in the morning, More went to confession. After morning Mass he said goodbye to his family and went to Lambeth Palace, then as now the Archbishop of Canterbury’s residence. The Commissioners for the administration of the Oath had summoned that Monday morning a large number of London clergy and one layman, More. And it was More who was called in first. He silently read through the Act of Succession, and the Oath drawn up under the Great Seal, and refused to swear that oath. After failing to get him to state his reasons, the Commissioners sent him from the room to reflect.

Out of the windows of another room in the Palace, looking into the garden below, he could see – as “... doubtless he was meant to – the clergy of London passing through the garden; most were cheerful enough, slapping each other on the back and calling for beer at the Archbishop’s buttery” (Kenny 1983:72). All took the oath, save one who was hurried through the garden on his way to the Tower, where he would languish for three years until he accepted the Reformed and Protestant order.

Lying on oath: a point of morals

Why did More refuse to take the oath, incurring the automatic penalty of life imprisonment (which began, in effect, that morning), and confiscation of all his goods? His reason, I believe, was one which neither then nor later could More explain without incurring the immediate penalty of death for treason. And when, more than a year later, he was found guilty of treason and was thus in a position to speak freely, the focal issue had shifted by virtue of the later statute under which he was condemned to death, the Act of Supremacy. So More never did directly explain his original and really decisive decision, the decision to refuse the Oath. And historians and biographers have often been obscure about it. But the reason, I think, is clear and not in doubt. More believed, in 1534 as in 1529 when he became Lord Chancellor, that Henry’s marriage to Catherine was consistent with divine law and perfectly valid, whether

because of the Papal dispensation or because Catherine’s marriage to Henry’s brother Arthur had in fact never been consummated.

More did not think that the validity of Henry’s marriage to Catherine was an issue about which all honest and competent persons must agree; but he had made his own study of the theological issues and had himself reached the conclusion that the marriage was valid. (If he needed confirmation, he may have found it in the judgment of the Pope, delivered only a few weeks before Easter, after years of delay: the marriage was indeed valid.) To take the Oath would be to swear that he, More, maintained the marriage to be invalid, when in his own mind he maintained it to be valid. Thus, taking the Oath would be, for him, asserting publicly, and with God as his witness before men, a deliberate falsehood, intended to deceive others about the state of his own belief – in short, it would be to lie.

So: More went to the Tower on a point of morality, the absoluteness, the unconditional truth and force, of the quite ordinary and universal (though specific) moral norm which excludes lying, most clearly lying on oath.

Luther and the crisis of morals

The Reformation, whose incoming tide we see if we stand with More looking down into the garden, or if we go back with him to face the Commissioners again, was among other things a crisis of morality – symbolised in a mild but real enough and representative form by the Chief Commissioner, the Most Reverend Thomas Cranmer, the 500th anniversary of whose birth was celebrated (rather quietly) in England in the year that this address was delivered. There he sits (as More chooses to stand), the Archbishop of Canterbury who less than a year ago swore publicly an oath of obedience to the Pope, having just previously sworn secretly not to mean or intend that great public oath – in other words, who lied, publicly and on oath, in order to secure the opportunity to advance decisively the Protestant cause in England.

More’s own catalogue of what he calls “Luther’s conclusions and most shameful opinions”, a catalogue he drew up in his *Dialogue concerning Heresies* in 1529, gives pride of place to the crisis of morals inaugurated by Luther’s teachings:

Item, he teacheth that only faith sufficeth to our salvation with our baptism, without good works. He saith also that it is sacrilege to go about to please God with any works and not with faith only.

Item, that no man can do any good work.

Item, that the good and righteous man always sinneth in doing well.

Item, that no sin can damn any Christian man, but only lack of belief. For he saith that our faith supbeth up [consumes] all our sins how great soever they be.

Item, he teacheth that no man hath no [any] free will, nor can anything do therewith, not though the help of grace

be joined thereunto; but that everything that we do, good and bad, we do nothing at all there in ourself, but only suffer God to do all things in us, good and bad, as wax is wrought into an image or a candle by a man's hand, without anything doing thereto itself.

Item, he saith that God is as verily the author and cause of the evil will of Judas in betraying Christ, as of the good will of Christ in suffering of His passion (More, *Dialogue...* IV, 2, in Campbell, 1947:150f).

The Council of Trent, 20 years later, was to pick out that last statement of Luther's for explicit condemnation, along of course with many others.

More understood Luther better than modern ecumenists

Today, the ecumenical movement may encourage us to suppose that a list such as More's or Trent's of Luther's errors is a list of regrettable misunderstandings. But such a supposition would be rash. The possibility that a laudable desire for reconciliation between Christians today leads those who review the Reformation controversies to misunderstand the historical data is at least as likely a possibility as that the rage and shock of dissent and controversy led participants in those controversies to misunderstand the fundamentals of their opponents' positions. The possibility that someone of the intelligence, learning, self-discipline and balance of St Thomas More understood Luther better, and represented his views more accurately, than do most late 20th century theologians is greatly enhanced by this undeniable fact: that the principal positions of the early Reformers, such as Luther, Zwingli, Tyndale and Oecolampadius, are positions which during the succeeding centuries, and in some cases during the succeeding *decades*, were more or less thoroughly abandoned by the mainstream Protestant churches. Who today holds anything really like Luther's position on predestination; on the utter absence of free will; on total depravity; on salvation by faith alone; or even on the independent entire sufficiency of Scripture?

The Protestant Reformation was above all a movement for sincerity and simplicity in Christian faith and life. Why did it attract the opposition, pre-eminently, of a man whose Christian faith and life were of truly outstanding sincerity, inwardness, uncluttered simplicity, and freedom from empty forms? Let me hold that question in play while raising the question suggested by a repeated, almost mocking comment of More's latest biographer, Richard Marius, in his very interesting, in some respects perceptive and considerable, biography – the comment that More's thousands of pages of controversial writing against the Protestants (many hundreds of those pages written even while he was a Lord Chancellor who cleared up and kept cleared the great backlog of cases in Chancery) were a labour futile and pointless (Marius 1986:406, 426, 518). Why did More write so? Why did he regard the Reformers and their cause with the horror that kept him moving through his vast project of refuting each and every one of their teachings?

Not simply conservatism. It wasn't a conservative's love of or respect for what he had been taught like his parents before him, or for the social forms in which he had grown

up, a love and respect which shies away from questioning their foundations and from seeking an exact understanding of what is essential in them and what contingent, of their vulnerability to critique and reform. For example: the same English Catholic hierarchy who in the mid 1530s would abjectly defect, with most of their clerisy, had in the previous decade (as before) rejected the project of translating the Bible into the vernacular; but that was a project warmly favoured by More (and accomplished by Catholics throughout Europe many years before the Reformation). Or again: More's reflective testing of the moral, political, economic foundations of social organisation in his *Utopia* needs no retelling here.

Protestant questioning of faith and morals undermines revelation

So More's response to the Reformers is not conservative. It is the response of someone who, unlike the English bishops (less learned than him) and unlike Erasmus (more learned than him), understood that the Protestant demands for Reformation in faith and morals put in question, more or less unwittingly, the very foundations of Christianity – of belief in a God who both creates out of nothing and discloses himself in human history by the definitive public revelation constituted by the incarnation, life and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth, God made man. More's protest is against a subjectivising of faith, against finding the criterion of belief in one's own inward experience, rather than in the reception of God's revelation by the apostles and its transmission through history by the common corps (body) of Christendom, the Church gathered about and led by the successors of the apostles as provided for by Jesus Christ.

The Reformation succeeded in overthrowing Catholic faith, sacraments and worship just to the extent that it persuaded Christians to put that faith and sacramental order to the test of experience, of feeling what it does or does not *do for you*. As Tyndale put it in his *Answer to Sir Thomas More* (1531), the question whether the Pope and the bishops in communion with him are the Church, with authority to teach definitively, is to be put to the test of one's own experience:

Judge whether it is possible that any good should come out of their dumb ceremonies and sacraments unto thy soul. Judge their penances, pilgrimages, pardons, purgatory, praying to posts, dumb blessings, dumb absolutions, their dumb patterings and howling, their dumb strange holy gestures, with all their dumb disguising [vestments], their satisfactions and justifying. And because thou findest them false in so many things, trust them in nothing (Campbell 1947:8f).

The Catholic sacraments are dumb (Tyndale expects his readers to agree) because, in the precise sense of today's idiom, they don't *speak to me*, they do *nothing for me*. Catholicism offers me, says Tyndale, only an "historical faith", a faith which he defines as hanging on "the truth and honesty of the teller, or [on] the common fame [opinion] and consent of many." What I want and can have (he says) is a "feeling faith" – "a sure feeling, and therefore ever fruitful [faith]" (Campbell 1947:204).

More's stand for faith that is not feeling

More accepts that Catholic faith is indeed an historical faith, a faith which trusts those who witnessed Christ's words and deeds, his miracles, his prayer, his suffering, his resurrection, and witnessed to their reality by preaching them even to martyrdom, handing on their own supremely historical faith to us, through the transmission of the whole deposit of faith in the unwritten traditions and written Scriptures of the Church. The Reformers may believe that their feeling of faith is true, objective, common and communicable, because it is communicated by the Holy Spirit. But they can't know about the Holy Spirit, save from the teachings of Jesus; and these they admit they can't know, save from the Scriptures; and the Scriptures they can't rationally judge to be reliable and true, save by relying on the judgment made, many centuries ago, by the Church, whose books they were and are, the judgment that *these* books, in all their assertions, are reliable and true while countless other purported testimonies to Jesus were misleading and false. And the same Church which made that definitive judgment on the canon of Scripture offers equally its definitive judgments on the meaning of those Scriptures, and on matters (such as abortion) on which the Scriptures say nothing explicit, but about which the Church's tradition has spoken from times even before the New Testament writings were half completed.

Incoherence of Protestantism

Spurring More on, then, is a sense of the sheer folly, the muddle, the intellectual confusion, of a movement which will not recognise its own incoherence in relying on the Church's definitive judgment about what is and what is not Scripture while denying that the Church can ever judge the truth of anything definitively. Similarly stark muddles were manifest to More in the rejection of free-will and in other principal positions of Luther and his followers.

It was also clear to More that such muddles could be attractive and effective only because each intellectual component, each proposition, in the overall incoherent teaching was necessary in order to *rationalise* a position reached and held not *for reasons* but to answer to, to satisfy, to express *feelings*.

More wrote and wrote because to write for publication is to act in the public realm, to participate in the realm of common, ideally of *universal* discourse, about things which are in that realm as the faith of the Gospel supremely is. What is reasonable can integrate feelings if it is not dominated by feelings, by private experience, but expresses the insights and judgments which any reasonable being would make on the available evidence, including the evidence of witnesses.

From the time of the death of the last Apostle, our access to the divine revelation is by appropriating what the apostles had appropriated, no more and no less; and an interpretation of it is acceptable only if consistent with the whole of it

What the Catholic Church hands on in her faith and worship expresses the insights and judgments of a vast succession of reasonable human persons who received, tested and handed on the whole tradition (*including* the Scriptures) in which the divine act of publicly accessible revelation is to be made effective until the end of human history. For that act was ineffective unless what was taught by Jesus was heard and appropriated, and what was done by him was noticed and appropriated. The apostles' appropriation of what they had heard and seen took them time. But the act of divine revelation was itself completed when its appropriation by them was complete, in other words by the time of the death of the last apostle. From that time on, our access to the divine revelation is by appropriating what the apostles had appropriated, no more and no less; and an interpretation of it is acceptable only if consistent with the whole of it, and with the fact that it is borne through history by the community whose inauguration is one of the principal subjects of Jesus's discourse and action.

Coherence of the Church's testimony

The deposit of faith is available to every individual member of that community, and indeed to everyone who could become a member by his or her own free choice; but each individual's private understanding of it will be irrational if it is not coherent with the understanding of it which has been accepted and proposed definitively by those who have been charged with transmitting it in its entirety, and those saints, fathers and doctors of the Church who have appropriated it integrally. The Gospel always speaks to the individual heart – by the power of the Spirit, More insists, and not “fruitlessly” – but it belongs essentially to the vast public realm inhabited by the faithful of *every* era. The faithful of every era, then, participate in a vast common and public discourse with each other, and with the more or less unbelieving world to whom the Gospel must be proposed (as by St Paul to the Athenian intelligentsia), and with “the new men” (*novi homines*, “new people”, as More calls them), Christians who have fallen away into what we call dissent and More called heresy.

More's conscience

I go back to More, in Lambeth Palace that hot April Monday morning. What had he said to the Commissioners when asked to swear the Oath? As he wrote to his daughter a few days later [circa 17 April 1534]:

I showed unto them that my purpose was not to put any fault either in the Act or any man that made it, or in the oath or any man that swore it, nor to condemn the conscience of any other man. But as for myself, in good faith my conscience so moved me in the matter ... that I could not swear without the jeopardising of my soul to perpetual damnation (Rogers 1947:502).

In the late twentieth century, the term “conscience” is likely to be heard, as it is used by many, in a way profoundly affected not only by the Protestant appeal to inner experience, but also by the post-Enlightenment conception of a world in which the only source of meaning and value is the human mind, which settles meaning and value by its own, autonomous, self-constituting and self-constituted act,

an act expressive of its own inner experience, its sense of individuality and selfhood. That conception of conscience is attributed to More by Robert Bolt in the play and film *A Man for All Seasons*. But, as Anthony Kenny argues in the last chapter of his little book, *Thomas More*, this conception of conscience is utterly opposed to More's (Kenny 1983: 93-97). For More, as for St Paul and St Thomas Aquinas and the Venerable John Henry Newman and the Second Vatican Council, conscience is nothing other than (1) one's intelligent grasp, one's understanding of the fundamental forms of intrinsic good and evil and fundamental principles of practical reasonableness, of right and wrong, and then (2) one's judgment, in particular situations, about how those principles truly *apply* to the situation. When one's understanding of good and evil, right or wrong, has been stabilised and clarified and supplemented by the divine revelation which the Church preaches, one will understand those principles as precepts or norms of *divine law*. As Aquinas says, and Thomas More certainly agrees:

The binding force of conscience, even mistaken conscience, is the same thing as the binding force of the law of God. For one's conscience does not say that X is to be done, or Y avoided, unless one believes that Y is contrary to, or X in accordance with, the law of God (Commentary *In epistolam ad Romanos*, c. 14 lect. 2, ad v.5).

More's reliance on judgement of conscience

In refusing the Oath, More was relying, I believe, on two conscientious judgments: (1) that the marriage to Catherine was valid and in conformity with divine law, and (2) that to declare on oath that something is *not* the case when one actually judges that it *is* the case is to lie, which is always against divine law. In saying that he did not denounce the conscience of others, he was saying no more than that he considered it possible for someone to come to a mistaken conclusion about Catherine's marriage (namely the conclusion that Catherine's marriage was invalid) without dishonesty, bad faith, and corruption of conscience. Such a person, in taking the Oath, would neither be lying (as More would be if *he* took the Oath) nor manifesting wilfully corrupt conscience – though such a person would, in More's judgment, be mistaken. And, of course, More is not for a moment denying that many of those who took the Oath were, no doubt, lying, and many others, who were not lying, were in sinful bad faith, having preferred political convenience, or the like, to a careful and impartial inquiry into the truth about Catherine's marriage in particular, or about the Church's theology and discipline of marriage in general. One of More's most brilliant tales in his wonderful *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* (see Stevens (ed): 1951), written in his year of final imprisonment in the Tower, is to recall in homely terms conscience's susceptibility to corruption, whether by the cynicism and self-love of Father Renard (Father Fox) and Master Wolf or by conscience's blindness through the stupidity of poor scrupulous Master Ass. More's actual opinion about the leading Reformers of his day was that many of them, though he wished it were not so, were in bad faith, had sinfully "framed themselves a conscience" (*Dialogue* 187) to suit the dictates of pride, resentment or lust. But remember that that opinion of More's concerned not those who judged a disputable matter such as

One should recall the companion truth ... that for one who has heard the gospel preached in its integrity, a grievous moral error is scarcely possible without sinful failure of faith, hope and love, threatening salvation at its root.

the validity of Henry's marriage differently from himself, but those who set aside the whole common consensus of historic Christian faith save where it coincided with their feelings and their too easily supposed direct private inspirations by the Holy Spirit.

Contemporary misunderstanding of conscience

The crisis of faith and morals in our day is in some respects more profound and far reaching than the crisis in which More lived and died. One of its manifestations is the misunderstanding and abuse of the idea of conscience in relation to Christian moral teachings – particularly those teachings, about sex and about respect for innocent human life, which contradict the morals of the surrounding non-Christian and half-Christian culture. Of course it is true, as Aquinas says in the most explicit terms, that if someone after serious reflection judges that he *should* contracept or she should abort her baby (Aquinas's examples are: fornicate and deny Christ's divinity), then he or she sins gravely in not acting accordingly. But if one is going to recall that truth, one had better recall its companion: if one reaches such a judgment one has made a grievous moral error, is entangled in ethical incoherence and corruption, has wandered away from God's law and therefore from God's wisdom and from the terms of the divine offer of friendship and adoptive sonship; and, if one has heard the Gospel, preached in its integrity, such an error is scarcely possible without a sinful failure of faith, hope and love, threatening salvation at its root. For, to repeat, in forming one's conscience one is not so much seeking to form oneself, or to secure one's personal integrity and authenticity, as to discern the truth about the meaning and worth which human existence is meant by its divine author to have, and does in each human life have, for good or ill, for heaven-haven or shipwreck.

Contemporary errors resemble those addressed by More

But the follies of a legalistic moral and pastoral theology, which swings between presenting morality as if it were ecclesiastical law and proposing conscience as a licence to ferret out loopholes, are follies quite superficial, compared with other expressions and sources of today's crisis in moral theology and pastoral practice.

Some of those expressions and sources are interestingly close, even in content, to the moral teachings which More and soon the Council of Trent had to confront and reject. Thirsting for the feeling of certitude of salvation, Luther glorified and made central to Christian life a certain experiential surrender to Christ in faith, a feeling faith which was not itself chosen and which rendered particular free choices of moral good and ill, right and wrong, at best irrelevant. Quite reminiscent of

that is the teaching of those who today profess as Catholic a theology in which no sin can be mortal, can exclude one from the grace of God's friendship, however freely and knowingly it is committed, unless it amounts to a reversal of one's so-called "fundamental option", an orientation of one's whole self towards or, as the case may be, away from God, an orientation which (in one theologically widespread version of the theory) occurs, mysteriously, below the level of consciousness and reflective self-consciousness and is indeed not itself a free choice between alternatives. A Catholic theology of course knows of a fundamental option, and identifies it plainly enough: it is the option of faith, and it is a free choice to accept, consciously, the proposal to believe in God and to accept his offer of adoption into his family here on earth, his Church. This faith is not itself abandoned when one freely and consciously makes a seriously immoral choice, such as adultery or abortion or contraception: but it is rendered ineffectual – "dead" is Trent's term (after *James* 2:20) – because by an immoral choice of that sort one turns one's back on the divine friendship whose existence and availability one's faith acknowledges. Only the choice, by God's grace, to repent – again an unmysterious particular free choice – enables that friendship to be resumed. Thus Trent, John Paul II, the Church's millennial sacramental practice, the New Testament, the tradition of the Two Ways – of Life and of Death – which we find even earlier than most of the New Testament.

More on the teaching of "the new men"

But in the teaching of the new men, which you will find amply represented, and virtually unopposed, in the theology and catechetical shelves of (I dare say) your local Catholic booksellers, the neo-Lutherite conception of fundamental option is only one thread in a web of positions which offer to replace the Catholic conception of morals, which More would have acknowledged as his own in the second-century fathers and the Second Vatican Council and John Paul II. All these threads radiate out from, and circle about, a certain state of experience and a certain conception of the foundational role of experience in the reality of faith.

The widespread but unjustifiable theory of fundamental option as the only instantiation of mortal sin articulates a recoil from, a passionate unwillingness to accept, the tension of living in a relationship (with God) which can be broken off by a single, simple choice to do what one's friends are doing, and restored by a single choice to repent, to be reconciled, for example in a standard, mundane sacramental act. And what shall we say of the widespread theory that there are no specific moral absolutes, no exceptionless negative norms or precepts, but that all the precepts which every previous generation of Jews and Christians took to be (when exactly stated) unconditional, exceptionless, are really no more than

The "consensus theologorum" of many contemporary theologians who "reflect Contemporary Christian experience" and who articulate it directly to and for "contemporary Catholics", [is often a covert] correcting the magisterium [of the Church] ...

The widespread but unjustifiable theory of "fundamental option" [involves] a passionate unwillingness to accept [that] a living relationship with God can be broken off by a single, simple choice to do what one's friends are doing, and restored by a single choice to repent, to be reconciled ... in a standard, mundane sacramental act.

generalisations of the way in which, subject to exceptions to be identified by individual conscience, the one true moral principle applies – the principle that one should bring about the states of affairs which involve greater good, or less evil in the world? This theory, which has no support in the Church's tradition or Scripture, and which is exposed to devastating philosophical objections well-developed by secular as well as Christian philosophers, is supported really by an appeal to the "experience of the faithful today", of those contemporary Christians who feel that there are situations in which they can do more good, or avoid greater harm, by aborting babies, trying out sexual compatibility before marriage, winning wars or securing peace by carrying out or planning massacres of civilians, finding a new sexual partner after a failed marriage, contracepting to prevent the bad effects of having another baby now – and so forth.

Mislocating divine revelation in experience

These opinions of contemporary Christians are ascribed by the theological "new men" to a movement of the Spirit, who is guiding the faithful to mirror faithfully these moral opinions of the surrounding pagan culture of the wealthy West and the [until recently] Marxist East, and who is not guiding the Pope or the bishops faithful to his teaching on these matters. Divine revelation they locate really in religious experience and conscientious judgments, witnessed by a supposed contemporary "consensus" or "*sensus fidelium*", and is only *imperfectly symbolised* in Scripture and traditional dogmas and doctrines on matters of faith and morals. To the extent that the Church's magisterium clings to a different conception of revelation and therefore reasserts the old doctrine, including moral doctrines, in the very sense and with the same meaning that they had in the tradition – *eodem sensu, eadem sententia*¹ – to that extent the magisterium is a less truthful witness to revelation than is the "*consensus theologorum*", the consensus of those theologians who reflect "contemporary Christian experience" and articulate it directly to and for "contemporary Catholics", thereby correcting the magisterium (partly expressly and mainly by extensive omissions and tacit negations).

Falsification of Catholic teaching continues

If this view of revelation and faith finds no support in Vatican II or the tradition, no matter – it can be given the support of a version of Blessed John XXIII's opening address to that Council, in which (they say) the Pope said that what matters is the *substance* of the tradition. The Pope (they say) did not say what he is recorded in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* and in *Gaudium et Spes* 62 (the Council's final document) as saying – that the Church and Council and faithful must hold

to the *very meaning* of, and *position affirmed* in, traditional doctrines. The new men's favoured version of Pope John's address you will find in the Abbott and Gallagher *Documents of Vatican II*, p. 715 (fourth paragraph; but cf. the first paragraph on p. 715).² It is argued to be authentic in Peter Hebblethwaite's widely marketed biography of John XXIII, which claims (1985:432) that the Vatican bureaucracy subsequently falsified the Pope's opening address by inserting into the *Acta*, the Vatican's official Gazette, the words which you find attributed to Pope John there and in *Gaudium et Spes* and in the Council's own official record of the Pope's address. When one discovers that no changes were made in the version in the *Acta*; that the *L'Osservatore Romano* report of John XXIII's address the day after it was given (*L'Oss. Rom.* 12 October 1962, p. 2 col 3) says exactly what the *Acta* weeks later said,³ that Hebblethwaite's tale of subsequent curial falsification is itself, therefore, a reckless falsehood; and that the mythical version of John XXIII's address is far more widely quoted and known than the one which he actually delivered (reaffirming, at this precise point, the First Vatican Council's teaching on revelation and the immutability of the affirmed content of doctrine); one then experiences again the *exasperation* of Thomas More at the sheer scale of falsification of Catholic teaching to be found in the Reformers' writings, and at the success of bad money in driving out good in the small change of theological currency which finds its way into everyone's pocket or purse.

The true "sensus" and "consensus fidelium"

Against the conception of revelation, faith and doctrine proposed or, more often, presupposed by the new men much may be said. But in meeting it at the level to which and at which it appeals, Thomas More's constantly reiterated appeal is most helpful – his appeal to the true *sensus* and *consensus fidelium*. This is not the judgment of our generation of Christians more or less comfortable in a secular culture. It is the judgment of the many generations of Christians before us, very many of whom like More knew vast tracts of the Scriptures by heart, prayed not for minutes but for hours daily, and yet who lived in cultures which posed moral questions no less complex than today's.

This appeal neither denies nor ignores the development of Christian doctrine. Development of moral teaching can involve the identification of new options for morally upright choice, as when there emerges, alongside the old, immoral option of usury the new or newly clarified option of charging interest on loans at a rate, established by a capital market, which fairly reflects the lender's entitlement to compensation for his risk and for forgoing participation in the equity, the profit, of other economic enterprises. Or such development can occur whereby one undifferentiated and erroneous position or conception is replaced by two – as the one conception of "religious liberty" which the French revolutionaries said was incompatible with religious vows and indeed with any unconditional religious profession, and with any moral restrictions on religious speech or conduct, and which was therefore condemned by the Popes, comes to be replaced by two, differentiated positions, one position the still erroneous and still condemned "religious liberty"

... we are accompanied on one side by the voices and gestures of our dissenting contemporaries but on the other side by a much more numerous and honourable company, the communion of those who have gone before us to heaven

of indifferentism, or of rationalist rejection of religious commitment or vows, or of freedom from every moral restraint, but the other clearly distinguished from the first, and affirmed, as the religious liberty proclaimed by Vatican II. But such developments, though they may involve some amendment and even reversal of some verbal formulations, involve no contradiction or reversal of any *proposition*, any position (*sententia*, judgment) which was accepted in the tradition as a position which Christians must definitively hold to — positions such as exclude the intentional killing of any innocent person, whether as an end or as a means, or adultery or any other way of securing sexual satisfaction outside marriage, or preventing one's act of sexual intercourse from having the procreative consequence which it might otherwise have had. On matters of the last-mentioned sorts, our situation is in all essentials humanly the same as our Christian forebears; our options, however elaborated at the level of technique, are in terms of intentionality (and therefore of moral assessment) the same options; and the moral judgment to be made on them is in all essentials to be found in the public revelation completed in Christ and the reception of his words and deeds by his Apostles and thence by the apostolic community established by Christ to transmit those words and deeds through the remainder of human history.

Faith in Christ and His Church. In the Catholic conception of faith for which More died, one's personal faith, which one has by the grace of the Holy Spirit, is only a fully adequate and appropriate response to that grace when it is a sharing in the faith of the Church. And that faith is (1) a reception of a divine revelation completed by the historical words and deeds of Jesus, and (2) a transmission of what God thus entrusted to the community of those, the Apostles, who had thus received him in faith. So More, in his very last work, *De Tristitia Christi* ("On the Sorrow of Christ"), in the very midst of what is a devotional meditation on the Passion, and very much as part of the devotional purpose, goes about and about to establish (1) the factual truthfulness of the Gospel accounts, and to vindicate their historical credibility against sceptical doubts. And in all his defences of the faith, he strives (2) to put us in the presence of the great company of our fellow Christians of every earlier age: as we make our way through life, as "through the broad High Street of a great long city" (*Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, 237), we are accompanied on the one side by the voices and gestures of our dissenting contemporaries but on the other side by a much more numerous and honourable company, the communion of those who have gone before us to heaven, along that way, and whose voice we can hear in the writings of the saints and doctors of the Church, and in the acts of its Councils, Councils which in turn direct us to the successors of Peter.

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The Doctrine of the Sacraments in the Catechism

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger *

This article is drawn from a longer paper by Cardinal Ratzinger given at the Catechetical Congress in Rome on 9 October 2002. The article provides a reading of the intentions of the Second Vatican Council with the hindsight of more than a generation and with a 10-years-on reading through the text of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The terminus of his article is an argument against approaches to the liturgy of the Church that are either or both (a) weakly symbolic and unduly intellectual and instructional, and (b) unduly focused on the perceived needs of the local community. He sees the Catechism as offering a sound reading for authentic reception of Vatican II liturgical reforms. Since the text of the Cardinal's talk is somewhat compressed, editorial comment has been introduced that is clearly marked by the use of italicised text above each section. Editorial text should not be attributed to the author.

Scripture and Tradition in the Church

In this section the Cardinal argues for a "canonical" reading of the sacred Scriptures – that is, the component parts of Scripture are read within the whole of Scripture and the Scriptures are read within the Church and the continuity of Tradition. He thus provides a defense of the reading of Scripture found in the Catechism, and its relationship with the worship of the Church.

The dynamic vision of the Bible in the context of the lived and continuing history of the People of God leads also to an important insight about the essence of Christianity: as the Catechism (#108) concisely states: "the Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book'." This is an extremely important affirmation. The faith does not refer simply to a book, which as such would be the sole and final appeal for the believer. At the centre of the Christian faith there is not a book, but a person – Jesus Christ, who is Himself the living Word of God and who is handed on, so to speak, in the words of Scripture, which in turn can only be rightly understood in the life of Him, in the living relation with Him. And since Christ built and builds up the Church, the People of God, as His living organism, His "body", essential to the relation with Him is participation in the pilgrim people, who are the true and proper human author and owner of the Bible, as has been said.

If the living Christ is the true and proper standard of the interpretation of the Bible, this means that we rightly understand this book only in the communal, believing, synchronic and diachronic understanding of the whole Church. Outside of this vital context, the Bible is only a more or less heterogeneous literary collection, not the signpost of a journey for our lives. Scripture and Tradition cannot be separated. The great theologian of Tübingen, Johann Adam Mohler, illustrated this necessary connection in an unparalleled way in his classic work *Die Einheit in der Kirche* ("Unity in the Church"), whose study I cannot recommend highly enough. The *Catechism* emphasises this connection, which includes the interpretive authority of the Church, as the Second Letter of St Peter specifically states: "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation ..." (2Pet 1:20).

Let us rejoice that, with this vision of the interpretation of Scripture, the *Catechism* is in agreement with important tendencies of the most recent exegesis. The canonical method of exegesis emphasises the unity of the Bible as the principle of interpretation; synchronic and diachronic interpretations are being increasingly recognised in their equal dignity. The essential connection of Scripture and Tradition is emphasised by the famous exegetes of all confessions; it seems clear that an exegesis separated from the life of the Church and from her historical experiences is not binding and cannot go beyond the category of hypothesis, which must always take into account the transcendence of what is said at a given point in time. These are all reasons to rethink the hasty judgements on the simplistic character of the interpretation of Scripture of the *Catechism* and to rejoice that, without complexity, it connects us to Scripture as a present word and can thus be shaped by Scripture in all of its parts as by a living spring.

Doctrine of the Sacraments in the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Cardinal sees the treatment of the Sacraments in terms of "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery" as marking a departure from an abstract treatment of the sacraments that unduly concentrated on analytical components (he particularly refers to "matter" and "form") and that considered the sacraments in ways that were not sufficiently theological nor adequately located in the concrete celebration of these mysteries. His critique proceeds in terms of some simplified dichotomies: (a) a prevailing pre-conciliar view where distinctions drawn from scholastic approaches became attenuated by the distinctions being treated discretely (in separation from the whole) (he appears to refer to this approach as "neo-scholasticism"), and (b) distorted implementations of the Vatican II impetus to liturgical reform that have a "linear", intellectualistic (and, I think, essentially Protestant) view of the sacraments and that give an undue focus on the local community.

Sacramental signs in living and concrete liturgy. I wish now to say something on the ongoing doctrinal relevance of the second and third parts of the *Catechism*. Since it is completely determined by Vatican II, the newness of the second part which deals with the Sacraments is immediately visible in its title: "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery". This means that the sacraments are envisaged entirely in terms of salvation history, based upon the Paschal mystery – the Paschal centre of the life and work of Christ – as a re-presentation of the Paschal mystery, in which we are included. This also means that the sacraments are understood entirely as liturgy, in terms of the concrete liturgical celebration. In this the *Catechism* has accomplished an important step beyond the traditional neo-scholastic teaching on the sacraments. Already medieval theology to a large extent had separated the theological consideration of the sacraments from their liturgical realisation and, prescinding from this, treated the categories of institution, sign, efficacy, minister, and recipient, such that only what referred to the sign kept a connection with the liturgical celebration. Certainly, the sign

was not considered so much in the living and concrete liturgical form, as it was analysed according to the philosophical categories of matter and form. Increasingly, liturgy and theology were ever more separated from one another; dogmatics did not interpret the liturgy, rather its abstract theological content, so that the liturgy appeared almost to be a collection of ceremonies, which clothed the essential – the matter and the form – and for this reason could also be replaceable. In its turn, the “liturgical science” (to the extent to which one can call this a science) became a teaching of the liturgical norms in force and thus came closer to becoming a sort of juridical positivism. The liturgical movement of the 1920s tried to overcome this dangerous separation and sought to understand the nature of the sacraments based upon their liturgical form; to understand the liturgy not simply as a more or less casual collection of ceremonies, but as the development of what came from within the sacrament to have its consistent expression in the liturgical celebration.

Failures to realise the mandate of Vatican II. The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution of the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, highlighted this synthesis in an excellent, if very modest, way and so, based upon this connection, offered to theology and to catechesis the mandate of understanding in a new and deeper way the liturgy of the Church and her sacraments. Unfortunately, until now this mandate has not been fully realised. Liturgical science tends once again to separate itself from dogmatics and to set itself up as a form of technique of liturgical celebration. In its turn, dogmatic theology has not yet assumed the liturgical dimension in a convincing way. A great deal of reforming zeal is founded upon the fact that one continues to see the liturgical form only as a collection of ceremonies, which can be replaced at will with other “inventions”. In this regard, in the *Catechism* one finds these golden words, based on the profound nature of true liturgical understanding:

For this reason no sacramental rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of the minister or the community. Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy (#1125).

In its treatment of the liturgy, which introduces and shapes the sacramental part, the *Catechism* has taken a great step forward and therefore was received with great praise by authoritative liturgists, for example, by the great scholar of Trier, Mgr Balthasar Fischer.

Grounding the Sacraments in a Tradition that pre-dates the emergence of particular Rites. Without entering into particulars, I would like in a general way to mention certain aspects of the *Catechism*’s teaching on the sacraments, in which, by way of examples, its current doctrinal relevance can be discerned. The proposal to illustrate the individual sacraments based upon their liturgical celebrated form, initially faced the obvious fact that, since the liturgy of the Church consists of a plurality of rites, so a unifying liturgical form for the whole Church does not exist. This did not create a problem for a catechism written only for the Western (Latin) Church or for one particular Church. But a *Catechism* such as ours which wills to be “Catholic” in the strongest sense, and, therefore, is directed to the one Church with a plurality of rites, cannot favour *one* rite exclusively. How then to proceed? The *Catechism* cites first of all the oldest [non-biblical] text of a description of the Christian Eucharistic celebration, which Justin Martyr outlines in an *Apology* for

Christianity addressed to the pagan Emperor Antoninus Pius (136-161AD) around the year 155AD (#1345). From this basic text of tradition, which precedes the formation of specific rites, one can determine the essential structure of Eucharistic celebration, which has remained common to all the rites, the *Mass of the ages*.

The recourse to this text thus allows at the same time a better understanding of the individual rites and a discovery within these of the common structure of the central Christian sacrament, which ultimately dates back to the time of the apostles and thus to the institution by the Lord Himself. The solution found here is indicative for the overall concept of the *Catechism*, which could never be only Western and – as it is at the heart of the Oriental Churches – also never solely Byzantine, but has to take into account the wide breadth of tradition. The many texts of the Fathers and witnesses of the faith of all the centuries – men and women – that are included in it, form one of the most valuable aspects of this book. A glance at the list of names shows that ample space is given to the Eastern and Western Fathers, and the voices of holy women are also strongly present, from Joan of Arc, Juliana of Norwich, and Catherine of Siena, to Rose of Lima, Therese of Lisieux, and Teresa of Avila. This treasury of quotations alone gives the *Catechism* its value both for personal meditation and for the ministry of preaching.

Grounding the Sacraments in the action and work of the Holy Spirit. A further trait in the theology of the *Catechism* on worship, to which I would like to call attention, includes the emphasis on the pneumatological dimensions of the liturgy, and pneumatology itself – the doctrine of the Holy Spirit – is a theme on which the *Catechism* should be read in a way that cuts across sections, in order to understand its special physiognomy. The section on the Holy Spirit is basic within the framework of the interpretation of the Profession of Faith (##683-747). The book emphasises above all the profound joining together of Christology and pneumatology, which is already visible, for example, in the name Messiah – Christ – the anointed; in fact “anointing” in the patristic tradition means Christ’s being penetrated by the Holy Spirit, the living “ointment”. Especially important and helpful do I find the section on the symbols of the Holy Spirit (#694-701). It shows a typical aspect of the *Catechism*; its attention to image and symbols. It does not just reflect on abstract concepts, but it highlights symbols. They give us an interior vision, showing the transparency of the cosmos to the mystery of God and at the same time opening the relation with the world of religions. With the emphasis on image and symbol we are therefore already in the realm of liturgical theology, since the liturgical celebration essentially lives on symbols. The theme of the Holy Spirit returns again in the teaching on the Church (#797-810) – here as an aspect of an essentially Trinitarian vision of the Church. And again we find it amply present in the part on the sacraments (#1091-1112), here it belongs to a Trinitarian definition of liturgy. The pneumatological vision of the liturgy again helps one to have a correct understanding of Scripture – the work of the Holy Spirit. In the liturgical year, the Church traverses the entire history of salvation, and – reading Scripture in a spiritual way, that is, based upon the author Who has inspired and inspires it, the Holy Spirit – experiences the “today” of this history. From here also – from the origin of all Scripture from one single Spirit – even the interior unity of the Old and New

Testaments becomes comprehensible; for the *Catechism* this is also an important item, to demonstrate the profound connection between Jewish and Christian liturgy (#1096). In parentheses we can observe in this regard, the theme of the Church and Israel is in fact a theme that cuts across sections, that also permeates the entire work and cannot be judged by a single passage. The fact that the *Catechism's* strong emphasis upon pneumatology also connects with the Eastern Churches, obviously does not need to be pointed out.

Conclusion

The very term "modern" points to a prevailing ephemeral or transient character of much contemporary culture (to things that are passing fashions of at-the-moment technologies). The Cardinal argues for a sense of "culture" that is more inherent in the nature of man (in translation, he uses the term "pre-contained") and more related to Christian worship (than to passing and highly localised practices and behaviours). His sense of "culture" is thus more universal, and more strongly related to symbolism that is deep and enduring. He thus views critically liturgical development (or, liturgical degeneration) that is weakly related to deeply human expressions of culture and to the dispensation of the Christian Mysteries. Although he does not use the term, (it seems to me) he is making the recognition that much contemporary practice tends be a late-20th-century/early-21st-century replication of the cultural mutation (and mutilation) of liturgies that occurred in classical Protestantism and ecclesial bodies who draw on those roots, and lacks integral roots with Tradition in a truly Catholic sense. He thus presents a reading of the Catechism as providing a momentum for an authentic implementation of the reforming intentions of Vatican II in the celebration of the Christian Mysteries.

In conclusion, the *Catechism* has also given proper attention to the theme of worship and culture. It makes sense to speak of inculturation, in reality, only if the dimension of culture is essential to worship as such. And in turn, an intercultural encounter can be something more than an artificially superimposed external, only if in the developed ritual forms of Christian worship there is pre-contained an inner contact with other ways of worship and cultural forms. The *Catechism* therefore has clearly highlighted the cosmic dimension of the Christian liturgy, which is essential for the choice and the explanation of its symbols. In this regard it states:

The great religions of mankind witness, often impressively, to this cosmic and symbolic meaning of religious rites. The liturgy of the Church presupposes, integrates and sanctifies elements from creation and human culture, conferring on them the dignity of signs of grace, of the new creation in Jesus Christ (#1149).

Unfortunately, in certain sectors of the Church, liturgical reform was conceived in a unilaterally intellectualistic manner – as a form of religious instruction – and furthermore was often culturally impoverished in a worrying way, both in the realm of images, in music, and in the configuration of liturgical space and celebration. With an interpretation directed entirely to the community, and focused only upon

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Priestly Celibacy Today

by Thomas McGovern (Scepter: Princeton. Four Courts: Dublin. Midwest Theological Forum: Chicago, 1998) pp. 241.

Review by Father Paul-Anthony McGavin

This author's 2002 book *Priestly Identity*, along with a 2001 book by a different author under the almost identical main title, *Priestly Celibacy*, were reviewed by the Bishop of Armidale in the May 2002 issue of *The Priest*. Father McGovern's *Priestly Celibacy Today* shows the same thoroughness as his *Priestly Identity*, and strongly draws upon the teachings of the present Holy Father and documents of Vatican II and implementations of Vatican II. For readers who have not followed these literatures or who seek a compendium, this book is a most valuable resource. Those who have followed this stream of literature will find little new in Father McGovern's book.

Following an Introduction, there are eight chapters: **1.** Historical Perspective; **2.** Scriptural Foundations; **3.** Theology of Celibacy; **4.** Anthropological Considerations; **5.** Formation for Celibacy; **6.** Celibacy and Holiness; **7.** Objections to Celibacy; **8.** Witness and Testimonies.

The following lead sentence to chapter 4 captures the theological thrust of the book:

In his philosophical approach to the theology of the body, John Paul II blends the truths of Thomism with the insights of phenomenology, an approach which enables him to throw new light on permanent realities and arrive at conclusions fully consonant with the perennial philosophy (p. 136).

In speaking of the formation of conscience in a priest, McGovern uses the apt phrase "a conscience that is neither scrupulous nor relaxed" (p. 169). This seems not to fit with his later counsel about "maintaining appropriate distance" in the exercise of the pastorate* by "avoiding seeing people late at night [and] not calling to houses when people are alone ..." (p. 177) – which, while having some general prudence, suggests an inhibition of the priestly responsiveness of a minister of Christ. McGovern's essential understanding of celibacy is neither "theological explanation" nor "function", but "ontological participation in Christ's own priesthood and his spousal love for his Church" (p. 224).

One of the testimonies that McGovern gives+ that particularly appeals to this reviewer is a sequel to the martyrs of Nagasaki, Japan, of 1622. In 1865, with the return of Catholic missionaries, a group of secret Christians from the hills surrounding Nagasaki approached the missionaries. For more than two hundred years they had carried a tradition that Catholic missionaries would return and that they would be recognised by three tests: they would honour the Blessed Virgin, they would be sent by the Pope, and they would be celibate (p. 220). This, I believe, is an authentic testimony that should awaken what McGovern in his Epilogue refers to as "the spiritual blindness of a sensate culture" (p. 226).

* He, unfortunately, uses the phrase "pastoral role", with its functionalist implications.

+ Drawn from Francis J. Bowen, *Pioneers of the Faith*, London, 1938, pp.17-38.

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“Pastoral Abuse” of discrimination against kneeling

Congregation de Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum

In November 2002 there was published in *Notitiae*, the official journal of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, the following “response” to a USA bishop (along with one to a USA layman). This requires that the bishop “firmly instruct” any priest refusing communion to a member of the faithful because of kneeling to desist or face disciplinary action. This response is published as a resource for “importunate” readers (cf, Luke 18:5) to press the moderators of the liturgy to action! (CIC #392) (Ed.)

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has recently received reports of members of the faithful in your Diocese being refused Holy Communion unless while standing to receive, as opposed to kneeling. The reports state that such a policy has been announced to parishioners. There were possible indications that such a phenomenon might be somewhat more widespread in the Diocese, but the Congregation is unable to verify whether such is the case. This Dicastery is confident that Your Excellency will be in a position to make a more reliable determination of the matter, and these complaints in any event provide an occasion for the Congregation to communicate the manner in which it habitually addresses this matter, with a request that you make this position known to any priests who may be in need of being thus informed.

The Congregation in fact is concerned at the number of similar complaints that it has received in recent months from various places, and considers any refusal of Holy Communion to a member of the faithful on the basis of his or her kneeling posture to be a grave violation of one of the most basic rights of the Christian faithful, namely that of being assisted by their Pastors by means of the Sacraments (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, canon 213). In view of the law that “sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them” (canon 843 §1), there should be no such refusal to any Catholic who presents himself for Holy Communion at Mass, except in cases presenting a danger of grave scandal to other believers arising out of the person’s unrepented public sin or obstinate heresy or schism, publicly professed or declared. Even where the Congregation has approved of legislation denoting standing as the posture for Holy Communion, in accordance with the adaptations permitted to the Conferences of Bishops by the *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani* n. 160, paragraph 2, it has done so with the stipulation that communicants who choose to kneel are not to be denied Holy Communion on these grounds.

In fact, as His Eminence, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has recently emphasised, the practice of kneeling for Holy Communion has in its favour a centuries-old tradition, and it is a particularly expressive sign of adoration,

completely appropriate in light of the true, real and substantial presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the consecrated species.

Given the importance of this matter, the Congregation would request that Your Excellency inquire specifically whether this priest in fact has a regular practice of refusing Holy Communion to any member of the faithful in the circumstances described above and – if the complaint is verified – that you also firmly instruct him and any other priests who may have had such a practice to refrain from acting thus in the future. Priests should understand that the Congregation will regard future complaints of this nature with great seriousness, and if they are verified, it intends to seek disciplinary action consonant with the gravity of the pastoral abuse.

Thanking Your Excellency for your attention to this matter and relying on your kind collaboration in its regard

This text was drawn from the Adoremus site /<http://www.adoremus.org/>
The source document has the protocol number 1322/02/1, dated 1 July 2002 and signed by H. E. Jorge A. Cardinal Medina Estevez.

*The Priest as Confessor ...
Continued from page 28*

Summing-up

In conclusion, the priest in the confessional fulfils an irreplaceable role. He acts *in persona Christi*, making Christ present to the penitent. Upon the advice he gives will depend whether the penitent is enlightened about the law of God and encouraged to live it, to the point of seeking true holiness, or is rather left in his sins thinking he is acting correctly. In a word, the penitent’s earthly and eternal happiness is at stake. But we have the assistance of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God to help us. If we are diligent and generous in fulfilling this ministry, many souls will be eternally grateful to us.

I conclude with some words of the Holy Father in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*:

I wish to pay homage to the innumerable host of holy and almost always anonymous confessors to whom is owed the salvation of so many souls who have been helped by them in conversion, in the struggle against sin and temptation, in spiritual progress and, in a word, in achieving holiness. I do not hesitate to say that even the great canonised 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 civilisation 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! (#29).

* **Rev Dr John Flader** is a priest of Opus Dei and is Director of Adult Education for the Archdiocese of Sydney, Australia.



The “Ecclesia Dei” decree and the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter: fifteen years on.

Father Glenn Tattersall, FSSP *

Recovery of usage of the classical Roman rite

On 2nd July 1988 Pope John Paul II issued *motu proprio*¹ his Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia Dei adflicta*. It remains one of the lesser known acts of this Pontificate. Issued in response to the decision by retired French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre to formalise his schism by ordaining Bishops without the mandate of the Holy See, the Pope made a clear distinction between a preference for the classical latin liturgy (which the Lefebvrist movement retained), and the theological problems of the Lefebvrists, which had their *locus* in ecclesiology and the nature of Divine Revelation. In other words, contrary to what had been maintained in some quarters since the early 1970s, an aspiration for the historical or classical liturgies of the Latin Patriarchate, far from being regarded with suspicion as a mark of disloyalty, was accepted as “rightful” (*Eccl. Dei* #5c). As a consequence of this recognition, the Pope legislated that the classical forms of the western liturgy, as codified in the latin liturgical books of 1962, should be made widely and freely available in response to pastoral needs. In addition, Pope John Paul furnished a theological basis for this explicit endorsement of liturgical pluralism in the western Church: “It is necessary”, the Pope insisted, “that all the pastors and the other faithful have a new awareness, not only of the lawfulness but also of the richness for the Church of a diversity of charisms, traditions of spirituality and apostolate, which also constitutes the beauty of unity in variety: of that blended ‘harmony’ which the earthly Church raises up to Heaven under the impulse of the Holy Spirit” (*ibid*: #5a). In other words, recourse to the older liturgical forms was not to be regarded as a form of protest against other authorised forms or legitimate developments, but indeed was to be practised in the context of building up the entire Church of God.

The *Ecclesia Dei* decree then provided the theological and canonical basis for the subsequent approval or erection of clerical and religious institutes, whose charism included a commitment to the classical latin liturgical tradition as constitutive. It was in this context that the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter was founded on 18 July 1988 as a clerical society of Apostolic Life. A decree from the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* dated 10 September that year confirmed the Fraternity’s entitlement to the use of the Roman Missal, Ritual, Pontifical and Office in the editions in normative use in 1962. A further decree on 18 October 1988 raised the Fraternity’s status to that of Pontifical right.

Whereas most other so-called *Ecclesia Dei* institutes were pre-existing communities subsequently regularised and approved by Rome, the Fraternity was unique in having its foundation and approval coincide. In fact, the establishment of the Fraternity arose out of a failure: the failure to win back the majority of the Society of St Pius X priests and seminarians from the vortex of schism into which Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre had led them. Only a small minority of the group – some 12 priests and 20 seminarians – refused to back

Lefebvre’s decision. Members of this group, encouraged by the Holy Father and counselled by Cardinals Ratzinger and Mayer, would become the Fraternity’s founders. This initial number has now grown to some 135 priests and about 120 seminarians.

As a clerical society of Apostolic life, the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter lives out its charism of commitment to the classical liturgical tradition in the context of pastoral ministry to the lay faithful who themselves are attached to this tradition. Although maintaining their identity as secular clergy, members of the Fraternity are supported personally and in their priestly ministry by the common life, which also lends itself to celebrating the liturgy with a greater degree of solemnity.

Other institutes approved by the Holy See under the *Ecclesia Dei* dispensation include the Benedictine monks and nuns of Le Barroux, and the Dominican-inspired Fraternity of St Vincent Ferrer. Finally, some existing institutes, without changing their canonical status, reverted after 1988 to the celebration of the classical liturgy: these include the family of Benedictine communities linked with the Abbey of Notre Dame de Fontgombault, which now has an American foundation in the Archdiocese of Tulsa; and more recently, the Carmelite nuns of Lincoln, Nebraska.

The *Ecclesia Dei* movement, and the Fraternity of St Peter, are 15 years old this year. The Fraternity has had a presence in Australia for only three years (firstly in Melbourne, and now also in Parramatta, Sydney and Canberra). How might one assess the place of the latin liturgical tradition, and particularly the role of the Fraternity at this point, in an Ecclesial situation where the post-Vatican II liturgy has assumed clear dominance, and is likely to retain this? I would suggest that there are four specific areas of ongoing relevance.

1. A sign of good will and an instrument of reunion: healing the Lefebvre schism. In numerical terms, the Holy See’s attempts in 1988 at the time of the *Ecclesia Dei* decree to win back Lefebvre’s followers were not as successful as one might have hoped. There have been very concerted attempts in more recent years, notably by His Eminence Dario Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos (current President of the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission), to reach a settlement via negotiation with the Bishops ordained by Lefebvre. The Cardinal’s initiatives met with a significant success last year by the return to full Catholic communion of the Fraternity of St John Vianney and its followers, based in Campos, Brazil. A special Apostolic Administration was erected by the Holy See to accommodate this group and to guarantee its particular liturgical privileges. However, the Society of St Pius X itself has viewed this reconciliation with suspicion, and its own regularisation appears more unlikely than ever. In a sense, this is merely illustrative of what the Pope identified and distinguished in 1988: that the Society’s concerns are not

so much liturgical as dogmatic. In fact, since 1988 especially, one witnesses an increasingly critical stance by the Society of the contemporary magisterium, and at times a systematic misrepresentation of the teachings of Vatican II.

It is probable that, as a whole, the Society of St Pius X and its adherents will persist in schism for the foreseeable future. In the face of this likelihood however, the retention of the classical liturgy by groups firmly within Church's bond of unity, such as the Fraternity, remains important. Firstly, this is a witness to the truth that one is not compelled to "choose" between the Church and the liturgy (aside from the fact that such an opposition is false and absurd in itself). Secondly, individuals (both priests and laity) continue to seek reconciliation, and the permanence of these liturgical privileges encourages and facilitates this. In the case of clergy seeking to exercise their priesthood licitly, the Fraternity provides perhaps the clearest and most attractive option. Finally, in the longer term, we can expect the breakdown of internal order in the Society due to the repudiation of rightful authority inherent in its schismatic stance – and this will inevitably lead not only to disciplinary but also doctrinal confusion. At the same time, a generation born into the Society rather than voluntarily joining it by way of protest, will eventually assume dominance. Both of these factors will present new opportunities for reunion, and the continued vigour of the classical liturgy firmly within the Church will be a major factor in their success.

2. A service to those within the Church. Although the Fraternity of St Peter was founded by former associates of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, it soon found that most interest, and most new applicants, came from those who had not been previously associated with any schismatic movement. Similarly, Fraternity priests and other clergy taking advantage of the *Ecclesia Dei* provisions, found a "hidden constituency" among the lay faithful the existence of which had previously been denied, or at least gone unnoticed. In other words, a significant number of the laity, for one reason or another, either had been disturbed by various liturgical changes (be they lawful or unauthorised), or simply had a positive preference for the forms and spirit of the older liturgy. In neither case however were members of this group prepared to jeopardise their union with the Church to satisfy their aspirations. With the advent of the *Ecclesia Dei* dispensation, and the foundation of institutes such as the Fraternity, it was possible for these members of Christ's faithful – both priests and laity – to have their just aspirations recognised and met. The fruits of making the classical liturgy once again available to those who have remained faithful to the Church are manifest, and have been recognised at the highest levels:² they include priestly and religious vocations, the liturgy as a key inspiration to various lay apostolates and initiatives, and as a pillar of support for the renewal of family life.

3. Witness and impetus for reform. But what value, if any, does the continued celebration of the classical liturgy hold for the rest of the Roman Patriarchate, the majority of whose practising members are to be found at the modern Roman rite?

One does not have to oppose the old forms to the new to admit that the retention of the historical liturgy in a "living" context, rather than simply as a museum piece or an exercise in nostalgia, has a vital importance for the whole Church.

As in recent decades the general over-confidence, and blind faith in a monolithic progress, so characteristic of western culture in the 1960s and 1970s, has begun to be balanced by a recognition of the value of diversity and the importance of conservation, so there is a greater appreciation emerging of the heritage of worship which we have been bequeathed. The organic development of this liturgy through time has imparted a unique complexity and depth to its substance and form. The classical liturgy is an exceptionally important theological *locus*, since its historical growth mirrors in the *lex orandi* the development of doctrine that we find in the *lex credendi*. As well, in this liturgy especially, latin (still the official language of the Church and of worship of the Roman Rite) and the treasury of Gregorian chant are fully maintained. Of course, it is possible to employ latin and chant equally in the newer rites. Nevertheless, it is clear that the reformed rites are intended principally for vernacular celebration, and that the numerous options permitted regarding music and other ritual aspects have led to a pastoral reality that does not favour extensive use of latin or chant, at least in parochial settings. Because of this, it is clear that the classical liturgy will be perhaps the foremost means for the preservation of latin and Gregorian chant in the life of the Church. There is another important aspect of the witness value of the received liturgy: its ongoing vigour in the Church of our own time is an important proof – against dissidents at both extremes – that there are not two Churches: the pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II Churches. Illustrative of this is that there is only one point on which liberals and Lefebvrists agree: their disdain for the *Ecclesia Dei* dispensation.

Finally, it is important that all Catholics, whichever authorised form of worship they choose for themselves, have an awareness and respect for the way in which their predecessors in the communion of saints worshipped. In this regard, the presence of the historical forms of worship is an invitation to filial piety, and an opportunity to learn in humility.

As an extension of this "witness" value of the classical liturgy, there arises the question of the reform – or as some would suggest, the enrichment – of the modern Roman rite. It is not the purpose of this article to critique the reform that followed the Second Vatican Council. However, it should be noted that for some years now highly placed figures in the Church have questioned the wisdom of aspects of the reform, and particularly the extent to which the actual reforms corresponded with the wishes of the Council as expressed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Certainly, the promulgation of *Liturgiam Authenticam* and the subsequent setting up of new translation teams such as *Vox Clara*, must be seen as an admission by the Holy See that aspects of the first attempts to turn out a vernacular liturgy were seriously flawed. There is also an ongoing debate about the importance and value of the "orientation" of the Eucharistic celebration. Clearly, whatever the outcome of such debates, in the process of discernment that the Church's wisdom and authority will bring to bear, the living presence of the historical Roman liturgy has a unique contribution to make.

4. The "new" evangelisation. An important mark of John Paul II's pontificate has been the call to a "new"

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The Gospel of Mark “in a few sentences”

Father Paul-Anthony McGavin *

The Gospel of Mark is but “a few sentences” – well, sixteen short chapters. And its style is racy – with “and” and “immediately” punctuating the rapid shifts in the action. Even so, many readers fail to see its simple outline. These brief notes address only the key themes and condense the action and the message to “a few short sentences” – into four “sentences” that are amplified in bold at the end of each section. These sentences are as follows:

- 1. The Gospel is about the Son of God.**
- 2. The Gospel, εὐαγγέλιον, is proclamation of the Good News.**
- 3. The Gospel, εὐαγγέλιον, is announcement of a Messianic Age of the Kingdom of God: its proclamation calls all to the Messianic Banquet presided over by Jesus, the Sacrifice of God.**
- 4. Entry to this Messianic Feast is patterned on Jesus’ entry into glory: it is patterned on the Cross.**

1. The Gospel is about the Son of God.

- *Jesus Christ, the Son of God*, forms the title verse of chapter 1, verse 1.
- *My beloved Son*, appears in the verse opening the mission (1:11).
- *Son of God*, is the cry of demons who are then silenced (3:11).
- *Son of God* (perhaps originally proclaiming Jesus as a good man) is the cry of the gentile centurion that closes the Crucifixion scene (15:39).

The gospel proclamation is a showing forth of the authority of the Son of God, the death and rising of the Son of God, and the proclamation of the Person, Jesus, Son of God, and his Salvation.

2. The Gospel, εὐαγγέλιον, is proclamation of the Good News.

- The good news of God is that the kingdom of God is at hand in Jesus and in Jesus’ proclamation, and calls for fitting response – for repentance and believing faith. The proclamation starts in Galilee (1:14).
- The point for the spread of the mission, “home” (2:1, 3:19b), is Capernaum (1:21) and spreads throughout Galilee (1:28,39) and into the open country (1:45), with people drawn from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond Jordan, Tyre, and Sidon (3:7f).
- The mission moves to Eastern Galilee, the gentile Decapolis (5:20f), where “great crowds” gathered.
- The mission returns to Nazareth in Galilee (“his own country”) (6:1), where his hearers “took offence” (6:3).
- The mission shifts to “a lonely place” to which “many” came “from all the towns” (6:31-33), and, thence, to Gennesaret (6:53).
- Jesus took refuge in Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast (7:24), but “could not be hid” (6:24), and then back

to Galilee and to the Decapolis (7:31) where “in those days” a great crowd gathered (8:1) (see “sentence 3”, below).

- After this, Jesus went to the district of Dalmanutha [of Magdala] (8:10), thence returning “to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee]” (8:31), coming to Bethsaida (8:22).
- The mission then moved to Caesarea Philippi (8:27), where there occurs a key turning point in the drama: Peter’s confession: “Thou art the Christ” (8:29), and the immediate opening of Jesus’ explicit teaching about his coming suffering (the first prediction of his Passion) (8:31). This is straightaway followed by another “great crowds” scene (9:14). (But see “Transfiguration”, in “sentence 3”, below.)
- After this Jesus and the disciples again move to Galilee (9:30), while Jesus does not openly proclaim the gospel, but teaches his disciples – with the second teaching about his coming suffering (9:31) (the second prediction of his Passion), and another return to Capernaum (9:32).
- The mission again moves – to Judea and beyond the Jordan, and “great crowds gathered to him” (10:1).
- Jesus again set out (10:17), “And they were on the road going to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they [behind him] were ... afraid ... And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him ...” (10:32) (the third prediction of his Passion).
- And they came through Jericho, and were followed by “his disciples with a great multitude” (10:46).
- In the final movement to Jerusalem, Bartimaeus heard that “Jesus of Nazareth” was passing (10:47). The action has moved through a huge convoluted loop (like the circle of a letter Q) and has now shot-off like an arrow at the foot of the Q loop, and darts to Jerusalem: Nazareth through mission fields to Jerusalem. Once at Jerusalem, the action immediately shifts to the centre that, in his Person, Jesus will displace: the Temple, the centre of sacrifice for Judaism (11:11): And he drew near to Jerusalem past Bethphage and Bethany, and the Mount of Olives (11:1), and Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple (11:11).
- And the following day Jesus came from Bethany (11:12) and came to Jerusalem and entered the temple (11:15), and “all the multitude was astonished at his teaching” (11:18). “And when evening came they left the city” (11:19). “And they came again to Jerusalem” (11:27). “And Jesus taught in the temple ...” (12:35).
- “And as [Jesus] sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple ...” (13:3). “And while [Jesus] was at Bethany ...” (14:3). “... and [Jesus] sent two of his disciples, and said, ‘Go into the city [of Jerusalem] ...’” (14:13). “And when it was evening he came with the twelve” (14:7).
- “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (14:26). “And they went to a place

which was called Gethsemane ..." (14:32).

- "And they led Jesus to the high priest ..." (14:35). "... and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate" (15:1). "And they brought him to ... Golgotha ... And they crucified him ..." (15:23f). "And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last" (15:37). "And [Joseph of Arimathea] ... laid [Jesus] in a tomb ... and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb" (15:46).
- Sacrifice has shifted from a "place", the Temple, to a person, Jesus: "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (15:38).
- "And [the young man] said to [the women], 'Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen, he is not here ... But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you'" (16:6f).

The "good news" is proclaimed to Jew and Gentile and, relentlessly, the Christ sets his face to Jerusalem that "the scriptures be fulfilled" (14:49) – and the scene again finally moves back to the Mission fields, to Galilee, for the in-gathering of the Church of God: "... when [the smallest seed] ... grows up ... and puts forth large branches ... the birds of the air can make rest in its shade" (4:32).

3. The Gospel, *εὐαγγέλιον*, is announcement of a Messianic Age of the Kingdom of God: its proclamation calls all to the Messianic Banquet presided over by Jesus, the Sacrifice of God.

And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (14:22-25).

- "And ... they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said, '... But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee'" (14:26,28). "... He is going before [Peter and the disciples] to Galilee, there you will see him, as he told you" (16:7).
- "[And] his disciples came to him, and said to him, 'This is a lonely place [in Galilee] ... send them away ...' ... But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' ... And those who ate were five thousand men" (6:35,44, emphasis added).
- "In those days [in the gentile Decapolis], when a great crowd gathered ... and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about four thousand people" (8:1-9).
- "And ... [in Galilee] Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them ... And suddenly they saw no one but Jesus only. And ... he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead" (9:2-9).

The narrative returns to its beginning: to God in Galilee. The Mission proclaims Jesus, Risen from the Dead – and Jews and Gentiles share in Jesus' eschatological and messianic banquet

in Gentile territory, an abundance of the [seven baskets] (8:8), Seventh Day, the messianic and eschatological Sabbath (Genesis 2:2f). After the Cross, the theological narrative of Mark centrally locates Jesus' life in the banquet liturgy.

4. Entry to this Messianic Feast is patterned on Jesus' entry into glory: it is patterned on the Cross.

- "And [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things ... and rise again. And he said this plainly [openly]" (8:31f). "And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me'" (8:34).
- "But Jesus said [to his disciples] again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ... With men [salvation] is impossible, but not with God ...'" (10:23,27).
- "... And, at [Capernaum, Jesus] said to them, 'If anyone would be first, he must be last and servant of all'" (9:35).

The way of discipleship of the glorified Son of God is cruciform. The "authority" of Jesus (1:22, 1:27, 2:10, 3:15, 6:7, 11:28,33) is the authority of love even unto death. It is the construction of a narrative around a dying Messiah that is the proclamation, κήρυγμα (Mk 16:20).

On this reading, the Gospel of Mark in narrative form parallels in content the Pauline proclamation:

... Jesus Christ, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5b-11).

Postscript. "... And [the Lord] confirmed the message by signs that attended it. Amen." (16:20).

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The Doctrine of the Sacraments...
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the needs of the present, the great cosmic inspiration of the liturgy and thus its depth and dynamic were in various ways woefully reduced. Against such mistakes the Catechism offers the needed instruments which the new generation was awaiting.

* His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger is Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. His talk on the *Catechism* was published in English in *L'Osservatore Romano* n.47(1769), 20 November 2002, pp.6-8. The headings in this article differ from the original text, and the clearly-indicated editorial contribution should be attributed solely to the editor and not to the author.



The Priest as Confessor

Father John Flader *

This address was delivered to the 1999 ACCC Conference in Melbourne and was published in "The Priest" in the issue prior to my assuming editorship. It is re-published with layout changes that increase its readability, because – in the light of the 2002 Apostolic Letter "Misericordia Dei" – it deserves a re-reading: it being clear that recovery in the administration and practice of the sacrament of Penance has barely gained momentum. Indeed, the Apostolic Letter itself says, "The causes of the crisis [of neglect and maladministration of the sacrament] have not disappeared in the brief span of time since [the issuance of "Reconciliatio et paenitentia"] ("Misericordia Dei", p. 7). (Ed.).

Crisis and challenge

Nineteen years ago Pope John Paul II wrote in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* that "The sacrament of Penance is in crisis" (#28). As we examine that statement at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, we cannot help but realise that the words are still very true, certainly in Australia, and in some respects the situation may even have become worse. In general it is no secret that far fewer people go to confession now than was the case 30 years ago. Older priests can still remember several priests sitting in the confessional in a suburban parish church for hours every Saturday as a seemingly never ending stream of people of all ages came for their regular confession, not to mention what took place in Holy Week! Sadly, that is a very rare phenomenon, if it exists at all, as we enter a new era.

This is indeed a crisis. It is a crisis for individual souls, but also for their families, for the Church and for the whole of society.

The Holy Father mentioned as causes of this crisis: "the obscuring of the moral and religious conscience, the lessening of a sense of sin, the distortion of the concept of repentance, and the lack of effort to live an authentically Christian life (RP28)." It is not difficult to see the truth of all of those causes.

As priests we should be concerned about the crisis and do everything we can to address it. Very much is at stake, as we mentioned before. A parish where many go to confession will be a lively parish in the deepest sense of the word: that is, it will be supernaturally alive, and the rest will follow. From the holiness that results from the sacrament there will be more people in weekday Mass, more people praying, more people in the various parish organisations, there will be a greater evangelising zeal to bring more people into the Church and there will be more vocations.

It is this challenge that now address so that, far from becoming pessimistic, we may be filled with hope and we go away with specific ideas about how to increase the number of people going to confession in our own pastoral situation. We could not be in a more propitious moment to do this. We are in the early years of the new millennium,

having celebrated 2000 as a Jubilee Year. As you know, one of the great themes of every Jubilee is reconciliation. In this new millennium we are particularly invited to "a renewed appreciation and more intense celebration of the sacrament of Penance in its most profound meaning" (*Tertio millennio adveniente* #50).

Already in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* the Holy Father invited us to take up the challenge of helping our people to go more frequently to confession:

I therefore address an earnest invitation to all the priests of the world, especially to my brothers in the episcopacy and to pastors of souls, an invitation to make every effort to encourage the faithful to make use of this sacrament. I urge them to use all possible and suitable means to ensure that the greatest possible number of our brothers and sisters receive the "grace that has been given to us" through Penance for the reconciliation of every soul and of the whole world with God in Christ (#31).

The following outlines a number of ways in which we can do this.

The Value of Confession

If we are to succeed in helping our people to make more frequent use of the sacrament of Penance, we must first be convinced of the great value of the sacrament ourselves. In my opinion confession is one of the greatest treasures of the Catholic faith. It is, if you like, the first gift of Christ to the Church after his Resurrection, given on Easter Sunday evening as the fruit of his death on the Cross: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them" (John 20:23). He had died so that all might be saved and now he was giving the Church a sacrament to apply that grace to individual souls.

The sacrament responds to deeply felt human needs: the need to tell others what we have done, both good and bad; the need to tell someone we are sorry when we have offended them; and the need to hear that we are forgiven. We have probably all heard stories of non-Catholics wanting to go to confession simply because they felt this need. I can still recall vividly a woman coming to me in Sydney and explaining that she was not a Catholic but that she had done something some 20 years before that she knew to be very wrong and had never told anyone about it. After all that time she needed to tell someone and she went to a Catholic priest!

Not only does confession respond to deep human needs, it bestows great and numerous blessings on the soul:

- 1 Forgiveness of sins.
- 2 Sanctifying grace – if it were only for this, one ought to go frequently.
- 3 Sacramental grace – to strengthen the soul against future temptations, especially in the sins we have just confessed.

- 4 A new beginning in the spiritual struggle, inspired by the knowledge that the soul is now free from sin and strengthened by grace and the desire to keep it that way.
- 5 Greater self-knowledge, through the examination of conscience which precedes confession.
- 6 Growth in sincerity, both in examining one's conscience and in confessing one's sins.
- 7 Growth in humility, through confessing one's sins to another.
- 8 Counsel and encouragement from the priest – in a word, spiritual direction.
- 9 Remission of some of the temporal punishment, through the penance carried out.
- 10 Joy and peace, as experienced by the Prodigal son.
- 11 As a result of all of the foregoing, an increase in holiness – in the words of the Holy Father, “Frequent confession has always accompanied the ascent to holiness in the Church” (Address, 30 January 1981, in *L' Oss. Rom.* 23 February 1981:19).

Given the great fruitfulness of confession and the great fall off at the present time in the number of people making use of it, the following words seem particularly poignant, even though they were written a long time ago:

Most holy persons are firmly persuaded that whatever of piety, of holiness, of religion, has been preserved to our times in the Church, through God's goodness, must be ascribed in great measure to confession. It cannot, therefore, be a matter of surprise that the enemy of the human race, in his efforts to destroy utterly the Catholic Church, should, through the agency of the ministers of his wicked designs, have assailed with all his might this bulwark, as it were, of Christian virtue (*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Part n, Penance).

The Priest as Penitent

If we are convinced of the value of the sacrament of Penance and we want others to make more frequent use of it, we priests must be the first ones to go regularly to confession. Called as we are to lead our people to holiness, we must first seek holiness ourselves and frequent confession is one of the most effective means to this end.

The Holy Father, speaking of the effect of confession on the other aspects of a priest's life, writes in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*.

The priest's celebration of the Eucharist and administration of the other sacraments, his pastoral zeal, his relationship with the faithful, his communion with his brother priests, his collaboration with his Bishop, his life of prayer – in a word, the whole of his priestly existence – suffers an inexorable decline if by negligence or for some other reason he fails to receive the sacrament of Penance at regular intervals and in a spirit of genuine faith and devotion

In *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* the Holy Father says:

We shall also do well to recall that, for a balanced spiritual and pastoral orientation in this regard, great importance must continue to be given to teaching the faithful also to make use of the sacrament of Penance for venial sins alone, as is borne out by a centuries-old doctrinal tradition and practice (#32).

And in an address in 1981 he says:

The sphere of the use of the sacrament of Reconciliation cannot be reduced to the mere hypothesis of grave sins: apart from the considerations of a dogmatic character that could be made in this connection, we recall that confession periodically renewed, the so-called confession “of devotion”, has always accompanied the ascent to holiness in the Church (*L' Oss. Rom.*, 23 February 1981:19).

He elaborates on this idea in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*:

The frequent use of the sacrament ... strengthens the awareness that even minor sins offend God and harm the Church, the Body of Christ. Its celebration then becomes for the faithful “the occasion and the incentive to conform themselves more closely to Christ and to make themselves more docile to the voice of the Spirit” (*Onto Paenitentiae*, 7b). Above all it should be emphasised that the grace proper to the sacramental celebration has a great remedial power and helps to remove the very roots of sin (# 32).

Celebration of the Sacrament

In addition to preaching, we can take advantage of the celebration of the sacrament itself to recommend its more frequent use. If someone, for example, says it has been six months since their last confession we can encourage them to come every month, explaining the benefits of a more frequent reception of the sacrament. And if it has been one month, we can encourage them to come every two weeks, or even every week.

Likewise we can make the celebration of the sacrament more humanly attractive, so that it does not degenerate into a brief formalistic ritual. While in my experience few penitents read a passage of Scripture, it may be good for us, as confessors, to read a brief passage. While not required, it can make the celebration more meaningful. In this regard the Pope says in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*:

Attention to the actual celebration, with special reference to the importance of the word of God which is read, recalled and explained, when this is possible and suitable ... will help to give fresh life to the practice of the sacrament and prevent it from declining into a mere formality and routine (#32).

Particularly important, in my view, in making the sacrament attractive are the words of counsel and encouragement of the confessor. These words may be only brief, but if they are personally relevant to what the penitent has just confessed, they make the penitent know that he or she has been understood and they send him or her away with some practical advice and encouragement on how to improve. It is a matter not only of helping them to avoid sin, but also of helping them to grow in holiness, suggesting particular means to this end. In my opinion, these words of advice should never be omitted. Even though these words may be very brief, they can be very effective spiritual direction.

Confession, as we all know, is a particularly intimate experience for the penitent, especially when he or she is carrying the burden of problems. If the confessor shows himself to be ready to listen and to be sensitive, making an appropriate comment or asking an opportune question

when the penitent has finished, it can sometimes help the penitent to unburden himself or herself, and to release a load of baggage that did not come out in the confession of sins, leaving a great sense of relief and joy. As always in the celebration of the sacraments, a prayer to the Holy Spirit before beginning or in a sensitive moment of the confession can assist the priest to be especially helpful to the penitent.

When the person is coming to confession after a long time, it is especially important to seize the opportunity to help the person to give thanks for this encounter with Our Lord. We are then in the role of the father of the Prodigal Son, welcoming the person back with great affection and understanding. In all cases, these words can help to make the penitent very happy to have gone to confession and eager to return.

The Holy Father, drawing on St Alphonsus' *Theologia Moralis*, summed up the various roles of the confessor in an address in the Basilica of St Alphonsus, the patron saint of confessors, in Naples in 1990:

Like a **Father**, he will receive the penitents with sincere love, showing those who have sinned more greatly an even greater love and, with words full of mercy, he will send them away, encouraging them to set off again on the path of Christian life.

Like a **Physician**, he should prudently diagnose the roots of the evil and indicate a proper treatment to the patient, by which he or she can live a life more in conformity with his or her dignity and responsibility as person created in God's image.

Like a **Teacher**, he will seek to know thoroughly God's law, delving deeper into its various aspects with the study of moral theology, in such a way as not to give the penitent personal opinions, but rather what the Church's Magisterium authentically teaches.

Like a **Judge**, last of all, he will be fair. It is necessary for the priest always to judge according to the truth, and not according to appearances, being concerned, no matter what, to help the penitent realise that in God's paternal heart there is a place for him or her too (*L'Oss. Rom.*, 10 December 1990:10).

I am convinced that when the penitent has had a brief conversation with the priest, has felt welcomed and understood, and has gone away with some words of encouragement or advice, he or she will be eager to return and will often encourage others to do the same.

Making Confession More Available

When fewer people are coming to confession, the tendency can be to reduce the hours of confessions. After all, what is the point of sitting for long periods in the confessional when no one is coming? I would suggest the opposite approach. If we are truly convinced of the value of confession, we will want to extend the hours in order to increase the number of penitents.

The Code of Canon Law, of course, requires priests with the care of souls to make provision for hearing confessions:

All to whom by virtue of office the care of souls is committed, are bound to provide for the hearing of the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them, who

reasonably request confession, and they are to provide these faithful with an opportunity to make individual confession on days and at times arranged to suit them (Can. 986 §1).

What times would be good? One which I have seen the value of through numerous comments of penitents is the time before Mass each day. The people are going to be in the church anyway and some may be very eager to go to confession in order to make their Communion more worthy. After Mass may be another opportunity.

Another opportunity, for those with a school close to the church, will be the hour when school finishes in the afternoon. Mothers coming to collect their children will then be able to go to confession, possibly with their children, without having to make a separate trip.

Similarly, for those whose churches are near a shopping centre, the hours when greater numbers of people are doing their shopping can be a fruitful time to hear confessions.

Where Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is being celebrated, this time can also be fruitful for hearing confessions.

It is important, too, to make times available for the confession of children, so that they may become accustomed from an early age to go regularly to confession. Times can be arranged with the Principal of the Catholic school on a regular basis for the different classes. When a whole class goes at once, it is very important to stress the freedom of each child to go or not to go.

And of course, the Second Rite of Penance has been found very useful in bringing people to individual confession, especially in Advent and Lent. Since it highlights the communal aspect of sin and repentance, it is much to be encouraged.

Dedication to Souls

To encourage us in this ministry the Holy Father addresses to us the following words:

This is undoubtedly the most difficult and sensitive, the most exhausting and demanding ministry of the priest, but also one of the most beautiful and consoling. Precisely for this reason and with awareness also of the strong recommendation of the Synod, I will never grow weary of exhorting my brothers, the bishops and priests, to the faithful and diligent performance of this ministry (*Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, #29).

Our dedication to the confessional shows our people that Christ and his Church value each soul individually. Speaking on this theme to a group of Mexican bishops in 1984, the Holy Father said:

In the exercise of the ministry of the confessional, the priest who makes himself readily available for each of the faithful who needs his service, is the visible witness of the dignity of each one of the baptised. The very poorest – as are many of the members of your dioceses – for whom nobody takes time in our restless and hurried society, can give witness – if they are received by the priests with love and respect in the sacrament of Penance – to the fact that

the Church welcomes everyone, respects and listens to everyone with that personal love which expresses itself in the care and affection of Christ for each and every one whom he has redeemed by his blood (*L'Oss. Rom.* 20 February 1984).

In these times when we are very conscious of human rights, it is interesting to consider our dedication to individual confessions as facilitating the exercise of a right of the faithful to that sacrament. In *Redemptor Hominis*, the Holy Father wrote:

In faithfully observing the centuries-old practice of the sacrament of Penance – the practice of individual confession with personal act of sorrow and the intention to amend and make satisfaction – the Church is therefore defending the human soul's individual right: man's right to a more personal encounter with the crucified forgiving Christ, with Christ saying, through the minister of the sacrament of Reconciliation: "Your sins are forgiven"; "Go, and do not sin again". As is evident, this is also a right on Christ's part with regard to every human being redeemed by him: his right to meet each one of us in that key moment in the soul's life constituted by the moment of conversion and forgiveness (#20).

Speaking of rights, let me take advantage of the opportunity to mention a right of the priest, which has recently been clarified by the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts. In answer to the question "Whether, in view of what is prescribed in can. 964 §2, the minister of the sacrament, for a just reason and apart from a case of necessity, can lawfully decide, even if the penitent may request otherwise, that a sacramental confession be heard in a confessional equipped with a fixed grille", the Council answered in the affirmative. The response was approved and ordered to be published by the Pope himself (7 July 1998).

We can be encouraged in this ministry by the example of untiring dedication to the confessional by such priests as the Curé d' Ars and more recently Saint Pio of Pietrelcina. Let me give you another example, told to me by a Peruvian bishop, whose diocese of Huancavelica is high in the Andes. He tells of visiting one village, where he goes only once or twice a year, travelling seven hours by car followed by six more on horseback. On arriving he hears confessions for two hours before celebrating Mass and reserving the Blessed Sacrament, and then he hears confessions for four more hours or until all the confessions have been heard. Taking into account that this is the type of pastoral situation for which general absolution was envisaged, I asked him if he ever gives general absolution. His answer was immediate and categorical: "No, there is no need." This is true dedication to souls, treating each one of them as precious before God, and not considering one's own comfort or convenience as the paramount value. After all, is this not the way Christ himself acted, laying hands on the sick one by one and pouring himself out for the people so that he scarcely had leisure even to eat? (cf, Mark 6:31).

In my opinion, brief words of advice to the penitent should never be omitted

Confessor as Teacher

I would now like to return to what I said earlier about the confessor's role as teacher. I consider this to be a most important aspect of the priest's role in hearing confessions. It is here that we are truly the Good Shepherd, giving advice which will lead our people to do the will of God and thus find true happiness both here and hereafter.

From time to time we all encounter people, both inside and outside the confessional, in difficult pastoral situations. There are those, for example, who are using contraception to avoid pregnancy, those in irregular marriage situations who would like to receive the grace of the sacraments but cannot, those falling repeatedly into serious sin who begin to wonder whether the sin is really serious, etc. In these situations there can be a strong inclination to sympathise with the penitent, agreeing at least tacitly that perhaps there is no sin in their case, or to avoid giving advice, telling the person to make up their own mind about the matter in their own conscience.

One can then justify this way of acting with the reasoning that we need to be "pastoral" and to respect people's consciences. It is no secret that many priests do adopt this approach, and, in my opinion, it is a very serious pastoral problem. What should be our own response to such a situation?

God's Law and Our Good

In the first place we must remember that God's law, whether it be the natural law or the divine-positive law, is always for our good. God does not give us his law to make life difficult but rather to assist it, to lead us to our true good, which in turn leads us to human flourishing and happiness. Therefore, not to help someone to fulfil God's law is to leave them in a state which will ultimately hurt them. To use an analogy from the medical world, someone may be quite unaware of the fact that the water is contaminated and that there is a prohibition against drinking it, but if they drink it it will still harm them. Therefore, not to warn them of this fact is to hurt them. The same applies in the case of the moral law. The use of contraception, pre-marital sex or masturbation, for example, all harm the person, among other ways by lessening their understanding of and capacity for true love.

Of course, as the *Vademecum* for confessors concerning some aspects of the morality of conjugal life points out, there can be cases of subjectively inculpable ignorance, where it is preferable to leave the person in that state. This applies "whenever it is foreseen that the penitent, although oriented towards living within the bounds of a life of faith, would not be prepared to change his own conduct, but rather would begin formally to sin" (#38). But even here the confessor should endeavour little by little to form the person so that as soon as possible he can explain the malice of the conduct and help the person to live according to God's law.

Fulfilling God's Law is always possible

We should remember that although some of God's laws may be difficult to fulfil, they are all possible to fulfil. God does

not demand what is impossible. As the Holy Father wrote in *Veritatis splendor*:

Keeping God's law in particular situations can be difficult, extremely difficult, but it is never impossible. This is the constant teaching of the Church's traditions (#102).

And in his March 1984 address to participants in a course on responsible procreation he said:

It would be a very grave error to conclude that the norm taught by the Church is in itself only an "ideal" which must then be adapted, put in proportion, aligned, they say, with the concrete possibilities of man, according to a "weighing of the various goods in question". But what are the "concrete possibilities of man"? And of what man are we speaking? Of man dominated by concupiscence or of man redeemed by Christ? For this is the matter under consideration: the reality of the redemption of Christ. Christ has redeemed us! This means: He has given us the possibility of realising the entire truth of our being (quoted in, *Vademecum*, footnote 25).

Some of the Pope's most inspiring words on this matter, to my way of thinking, came in a 1984 address to the bishops of Kenya, in which he quoted from an earlier 1979 address:

We need never be afraid to preach the fulness of Christ's message in all its evangelical purity, for, as I stated on another occasion: "Let us never fear that the challenge is too great for our people: they were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; they are his people... It is he, Jesus Christ, who will continue to give the grace to his people to meet the requirements of his word, despite all difficulties, despite all weaknesses. And it is up to us to continue to proclaim the message of salvation in its entirety and purity, with patience, compassion and the conviction that what is impossible with man is possible with God"(AAS 71, 1979, pp. 1424f).

Therefore the fact that some or even many people find the law difficult should not deter the pastor from encouraging them to live it. I have always found that when even the most demanding laws of God are explained with clarity and conviction in a pastoral way, and the person is shown that with the grace of God he can live it, that person has responded well and has gone away at least willing to try. We cannot sell people short. Deep down they know what is right and they are much happier when they are told the truth and are encouraged to live up to it than when they are mollified and told that they can make up their own minds. In this latter case they can feel cheated and are less likely to respect either themselves or the priest, just as children do not respect their parents when they see them weak and unwilling to make demands on them.

Forming conscience

It follows from what we have just said, the priest must make every effort to help the person to form his conscience. Conscience, as we know, must be "conformed to the law of God in the light of the teaching authority of the Church" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* #50; cf, CCC 1783-1785) and it is the role of the priest to help the person in this formation.

We are all priests of the Catholic Church, and we should speak with her voice, not our own.

If we abdicate this responsibility, we do a great dis-service to souls. Think, for example, of the physician who sends his patient away to make up his own mind about what treatment to have without telling him of the various options, outlining the risks and likely outcomes of each. Only if we tell the penitent that one of the options involves serious sin and great harm both here and hereafter are we acting in a responsible manner and helping the person to make a truly free and informed choice.

But, it will be argued, we must be pastoral and charitable with the penitent. Who can disagree with that? But true charity cannot be divorced from the truth. In words of Pope Paul VI in *Humanae vitae*:

To diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls. But this must ever be accompanied by patience and goodness, such as the Lord himself gave example of in dealing with men. Having come not to condemn but to save, he was indeed intransigent with evil but merciful towards individuals (#29).

In a word, charity can never be separated from truth: *veritatem facientes in caritate* (Eph. 4:15). The same Jesus who had compassion on the woman caught in adultery also told her clearly, *Go thy way and sin no more* (John 8:11).

We do well, in summoning up the courage to teach the truth in difficult matters, to recall those words of the Australian Bishops in 1976 on how the authentic teaching of the Magisterium binds the consciences of all:

The Episcopal Conference informs the directors of Catholic Family Planning Centres and priests connected with this work that the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church contained in *Humanae vitae* – that "every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible", is "intrinsically evil" and to be absolutely excluded – binds the consciences of all without ambiguity and excludes the possibility of a probable opinion opposed to this teaching (1976 letter to people involved in Family Planning from the Episcopal Conference of Australia).

It is essential for priests to speak with one voice on all moral matters. And that voice is the voice of Christ as spoken by his Church. For, as the *Vademecum* reminds us, "Not infrequently, the faithful are scandalised by this lack of unity, both in the area of catechesis, as well as in the sacrament of Reconciliation" (#3.16).

When the faithful get one answer from one priest and a different one, not to say the opposite one, from another, they can only be confused. We are all priests of the Catholic Church and we should all speak with her voice, not our own. As we read earlier from the Holy Father in speaking about the confessor's role as a teacher: "He will seek to know thoroughly God's law ... in such a way as not to give the penitent personal opinions, but rather what the Church's Magisterium authentically teaches" (*L'Oss. Rom.* 10 December 1990:10).

Continued on page 19

Again, the crisis is a crisis of clergy faith

The present crisis of faith and morals, like the crisis in More's time, centres on the clergy, their formation, their *esprit de corps*, their preaching. When did I last hear a sermon which tried to explicate, vindicate or make real the factual truthfulness of what they commonly and misleadingly call the "stories" of the Gospel? Or which explicated the appointed scriptural readings by putting us in the presence of the meditations and explanations of one or more of the Fathers, or by showing us the interpretation of that text in the Councils? Or indeed which expounded for us a sentence, let alone a paragraph or a page or a chapter, of any of the constitutions of Vatican II, a Council which simply has never been preached and which remains substantially unread even by many quite learned clerics. Anyone who today would like to learn from Thomas More could do no better than to read and re-read (ideally with the texts cited in its precise footnotes) the 20 pages of Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, "on Divine Revelation", unprejudiced by the misleading claims of those, far or near, who invite you to be less impressed by the text than by its differences (which they hugely exaggerate) from earlier drafts.

If More strives to put us in the presence of Jesus of Nazareth and into the presence of the saints and doctors who have gone before us, he strives also to show us the true horizons of our earthly existence, the true range and depth of our morally significant choices. He wants to put us always in mind of heaven and hell, which have disappeared from the moral/theological treatises of the new men and which in most contemporary preaching appear only in the form of a fatuous, unexamined presumption that God, before whom no-one need stand in holy fear, will with the entirely limitless indulgence of an irresponsible late twentieth century father somehow extend the comforts of our prosperity forever.

Censoring the Scriptures by erroneous theology and catechesis. Few things are more foolish than the claim of the new men that the Bible has been newly opened to our generation of Catholics, when in fact it has never been so heavily censored as it is by a theology and catechesis which covers with silence the Bible's supreme themes of Genesis and Apocalypse, of creation which initiates time, and redemption which is completed only in eternity at the close of historical time. The faith and vision of Thomas More is closed to us if we do not live within the horizons thus pointed out to us.

July 1535

We now cross the river from Lambeth Palace to Westminster where More, on Thursday 1st July 1535, after nearly sixty weeks' imprisonment, stands before his eighteen judges (including the new Queen's father and brother). They have just condemned him for the capital treason of attempting (allegedly in a casual conversation with the Solicitor General in the Tower while the Privy Council's servants were taking away all More's books) "wholly to deprive our sovereign Lord the King of his dignity, title and name of Supreme Head in earth of the Church of England" (the title statutorily

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conferred by the Act of Supremacy 1534 along with the royal power to judge errors and heresies with finality). More has just been condemned – at that point, it seems, to be hanged, disembowelled alive, and quartered. He is allowed a final speech:

More have I not to say, my Lords, but like as the blessed Apostle St Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present and consented to the death of St Stephen, and kept their clothes that stoned him to death, and yet be they now both twain holy saints in heaven, and shall continue there friends forever, so I verily trust, and shall therefore right heartily pray, that though your Lordships have now here in earth been judges to my condemnation, we may yet hereafter in heaven merrily all meet together, to our everlasting salvation (Marius 1986:510).

More's "narrow way". Left unspoken, but hanging in the air between More and his judges, in the Christian consciousness they shared, is the precondition of Paul's salvation: his conversion and repentance. In his *de Tristitia Christi* More had prayed that the new men would repent and come home to God, as Judas could have repented even after his betrayal of Jesus. In the top and bottom margins of his own Latin prayer book in the Tower, More penned a prayer: "Give me thy grace, good Lord", it begins, and after various other petitions:

Give me thy grace, good Lord ...
To walk the narrow way that leadeth to life;
To bear the cross with Christ;
To have the last thing in remembrance;
To have ever afore mine eye my death that is ever at hand;
To make death no stranger to me;
To foresee and consider the everlasting fire of hell;
To pray for pardon before the judge come ...
(*Thomas More's Prayerbook*, Yale U.P. 1969, xxxvii).

The prayer's final reflection is that the thoughts expressed in the prayer's petition are "more to be desired of every man than all the treasures" of this world's rulers all gathered together in one heap.

Heaven and hell. The most urgent task for a truly Christian theology and catechesis of faith *and* morals is to recover, for us all, the treasure of the truth conveyed in so many words of Jesus, and presupposed in his willingness to remain faithful to his vocation at the cost of gruesome execution: the truth that this life is lived towards a destiny that, body and soul together, far outruns the existence of all other bodies known to us, the whole matter of our apparently expanding universe; and that this destiny of adoption into the family of the Creator is, for one who can freely choose, conditional on one's choices. And it is conditional, not according to a will and judicial judgment and order like the commands, judgments and orders (however just) of human legislators and judges, but by an appropriateness, a fittingness, an inevitability (given, on the one side, God's promises of salvation and, on the other side the inherent

power of free choice to terminate an inter-personal relationship) in the structure of personal relationships between Creator and created persons. That structure is a vast set of relationships to live within which completely and everlastingly is heaven, and to break off which will prove to have been the beginnings of a loss that, when things are seen and felt without distraction, is all that Jesus holds before us as the fire of hell. (The Lord's discourse here is not, as some theologians like, dismissively, to say, "threat-discourse"; it is warning-discourse, utterly serious but devoid of threat. God makes promises, but no threats.)

Failure to take the Gospel seriously

More's *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* shows that he knows that atheists are not rare (see p. 194), and that he knows how even the faithful recoil with revulsion from reflecting on the prospect of hell (see p. 249). The four-and-a-half centuries since More's death have not only brought atheism even closer-in to the Christian consciousness, but have also greatly deepened that revulsion, have made more intolerable anything savouring of arbitrariness, of a divine voluntarism, in the structure of human destiny, have therefore made more urgent and necessary the responsibility of taking this part of the Gospel seriously. The failure to take this responsibility seriously, a failure which has many more aspects and origins than I have been able even to touch upon, is the heart of the crisis of faith and morals. Only if it we do take it seriously can we experience a hope, which goes beyond words, to meet St Thomas More, merrily, in heaven.

Notes:

¹ 1 Cor 1:10 (Vulgate) [in the same mind [feeling] and the same judgement, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοῖ καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ γνώμῃ] (Ed.); More, *Dialogue concerning Heresies* II, 9; Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* 62.

² The origins of this version are an unofficial Italian translation published by *L' Osservatore Romano* alongside the Pope's own Latin words on the day after the address. On Hebblethwaite's fabrication, see now my letters to *The Tablet* (London), 14 December 1992, 4 and 18 January, and 1 and 8 February 1992, and Hebblethwaite's letters of 11 and 25 January 1992.

³ And exactly what the Vatican Radio's tape of the Pope delivering his address records: see my letter to *The Tablet* 18 January 1992.

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evangelisation: essentially, this is a commitment to engage the modern world, and ultimately to win it for Christ. Underlying this commitment is a recognition of the seriousness of the various forces of secularism that the Church confronts, and an awareness of the special difficulties of re-converting formerly Christian peoples. The classical liturgy has its own role to play in the new evangelisation: firstly, by assisting the return to practice of those Catholics alienated by liturgical change or abuses; and secondly, by its transcendent and numinous forms – so shocking to secular sensibilities – it has a power more relevant than ever to open hearts and minds to the *Deus absconditus*.

"Re-enchanting" the liturgy of the Roman Church

According to the English Dominican writer, Fr Aidan Nichols OP, "the 're-enchantment' of the Catholic Liturgy is the single most urgent ecclesial need of our time."³ This is so not only for the sake of the Church herself, but also for the world that she engages and seeks to win for Christ, for "the liturgy itself generates cultures and shapes them."⁴ Since the reclamation of the classical liturgy to a place *in medio Ecclesiae* in 1988, there is every indication that its continued celebration will be one important force, among many, for good.

Notes:

¹ The term indicates at the Holy Father's initiative and under his direct authority.

² Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, *Ten years of the Motu Proprio "Ecclesia Dei"*, Conference in Rome, 24 October 1998.

³ Aidan Nichols OP, *Christendom Awake: on re-energising the Church in culture* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), p.21.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1207.

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DAILY PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

*Almighty and Eternal God
look with mercy on Your priests,
sharing Your Fatherhood in Holy Church.
Your Son, the Lord Jesus, has made them
priests and victims with Himself:
day by day, may they offer the worship
of His Mystical Body
in the Eucharistic Sacrifice,
with their own homage
of heart, mind and body.
By the Holy Spirit, make them zealous
in their priestly ministry;
keep them devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary,
obedient to the Pope and their own Bishop,
and through them inspire young men
to serve you in the Priesthood.
To You, O Holy Trinity,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen*



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