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Editorial commentary in the bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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Vatican II: Are We There Yet?
Part 3 – Sacraments and Sacramentals
Dedication

This issue of the National Bulletin on Liturgy is dedicated to those who have served the liturgical renewal as directors of the National Liturgy Office

Rev. Bernard Mahoney 1966-1969
Rev. David Walsh, OMI 1978-1980
Rev. Regis Halloran 1980-1986
Rev. Murray Kroetsch 1986-1990
Sr. Donna Kelly, CND 1995-2003

and to those who have served as editors of the National Bulletin on Liturgy

Rev. Bernard Mahoney 1965 to 1971
Rev. Pat Byrne 1972 to 1987
Mr. Frank Henderson 1988 to 1998
Sr. Zita Maier 1998 to 2000

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Illustration page 155 by Nora Brown

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About This Issue

Third in a Series: Vatican II Are We There Yet?

This is the third in a series of four issues that will arrive on your doorstep between the 40th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, approaching the Constitution on a section-by-section basis to guide reflection on the pastoral reality in which readers find themselves in the light of the call of the Council Fathers.

The first issue in the series (Bulletin #172) focused on the foundational principles out of which the reform arose as expressed in articles 1-19 of the Constitution. The second issue (#173) dealt with the various norms that have guided and will continue to guide the shaping of the liturgy for the 21st century, as expressed in articles 21-46. Now, Bulletin #174 deals with the specific reforms called for in the celebration of the eucharist and the other sacraments as well as our all-too-often forgotten—or at least misunderstood—sacramentals (articles 47-82). (Watch for Bulletin #175, which will focus on the concerns of the final chapters of the Constitution: the divine office, the liturgical year, and sacred music, art and furnishings.)

Part III – Sacraments and Sacramentals

It can be said that the first section of the first chapter of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, dealt with in Bulletin #172, established the “why” of the liturgical renewal and the second part established the “how.” Chapters II–VII deal with the “what”—What must change in the celebration of the Church’s official public worship?

This issue of the Bulletin addresses Chapters II and III—the celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals. Select paragraphs from these chapters, whose contents have not been touched on in the two previous issues, are examined generally from the perspective of certain questions:

• What change(s) was (were) called for?
• How well has the Church responded? What has changed on paper and in practice?
• Is the new rite “working”? Did the Constitution go far enough, not far enough, or perhaps too far in its demands?
• What have been the failures? weaknesses?
• What further work is needed?

The editor regrets that there was not more room to more fully address articles 64–70 on the restoration of the catechumenate and the revision of rite for infant baptism. However, it was decided that in the limited space available, confirmation, the “hot-button” topic within the larger arena of initiation, would serve as a thought-provoking jumping off point for reflection.

A second consequence of our limited space is that Richard Rutherford’s discussion of the revision of the rite of funerals and James Hayes’ on the ordination rite have been held back until the next issue.

We encourage our readers to continue to reflect on the Constitution, the Council that produced it, and the current milieu. We challenge ourselves to complete this statement: If it hadn’t been for the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy … [I]
As soon as full, conscious, and active participation became the focus of liturgical reform, it was clear that the "Order of Mass" would have to be revised. Article 50 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy mandated that revision and laid down norms for its implementation.

The liturgical experts who undertook the work of revising the Order of Mass were conversant with the long history of the Roman mass, and they were well aware of the factors that had led to the loss of popular participation in its celebration. They also knew that participation flourished in the fifth- and sixth-century celebrations in the city of Rome, and that an examination of their shape and structure would provide valuable data for their work.

It will be useful, then, to keep in mind these early celebrations as we examine the current reform and attempt to assess its strengths and its weaknesses, its successes and its failures. The revised Order of Mass provides the following principal divisions: introductory rites, liturgy of the word, liturgy of the eucharist, and concluding rite. We shall look at each of these in turn.

**Introductory Rites**

We should begin by stating the obvious: introductory rites should be brief. Such is the nature of an introduction. It is also obvious, this time from the history of liturgy, that the introduction is where the greatest expansion gradually has taken place.

In the classical shape of the early liturgy in the city of Rome, the introductory rites were indeed brief. They consisted of an entrance psalm, the greeting, and a call to prayer ("Let us pray") with a concluding collect that summed up the prayers of the people.

A thoroughgoing reform might have restored this early pattern, for it has much to commend it. But perhaps this would have been too drastic a step to take, at least all at one time.
The Order of Mass Is to be Revised

The Revision

The revised (1973) Sacramentary gives us the following headings for the introductory rites: entrance song, sign of the cross/greeting, penitential rite, "Glory to God," and the call to prayer with a concluding collect, also called the opening prayer.

Within this pattern we can readily spot the elements that comprise the basic floor plan of the early rite. And among these the entrance song has been restored to its original vigour, thanks to the decision to allow appropriate contemporary songs to accompany the procession. (The requirement to recite the antiphon if there is no singing is not really useful.) The 1973 revision also strengthens the opening prayer by removing the additional collects that used to commemorate an impeded celebration or continue the octave of a previous feast. It remains, then, to consider the sign of the cross, the penitential rite, and the "Glory to God.

Sign of the Cross

The liturgical experts were not in favour of this addition. Among the reasons given, it was argued that the mass had already begun with the entrance song. It was included, however, at the urging of Pope Paul VI.

Penitential Rite

The "I confess" was lifted from the prayers at the foot of the altar, which were a late addition of Frankish origin. The "I confess" itself entered the liturgy in the eleventh century. Today it is recited once only and all together.

The "Kyrie" litany was a popular prayer outside the liturgy and probably made its way into the rite near the end of the fifth century, during the pontificate of Gelasius I (492–496). The litany enjoyed great popularity outside the liturgy, and it seems that the pope introduced it into the mass using invocations similar to those that belong to the general intercession that conclude the liturgy of the word. The latter prayer disappeared from the mass about the same time. (Since the general intercessions have been restored in the new Order of Mass, the invocations assigned to the "Kyrie" litany have been given a new form, praising Christ for his merciful deeds among us.)

If the penitential rite appears to provide something that was lacking in the early Roman celebrations, we should keep in mind that the period of prayer before the collect was genuinely used for personal and probably even vocal prayer.

"Glory to God"

The "Glory to God," an early Christian hymn, was likewise very popular outside the liturgy. It made its way into the mass sometime during the sixth century, but for a long time its use was restricted (aside from the pope) to bishops at their mass on Sunday; priests used it only on Easter Day. In its popular form it was sung as a series of acclamations, using simple but effective tones. Today the hymn does not enjoy the popularity that it once had, and composers are still striving to produce effective musical settings for its text. From its history we know that it is the people's song. Today the question is: Can we make it simple, accessible, and beloved once again?

Overall Assessment

There is common agreement that today's introductory rites are simply too long. In parish celebrations the usual way to restrict their length has been to recite the "Lord, have mercy" and/or the "Glory to God." But each of these was composed to be sung, and the integrity of the rite is thereby put into question.

A moderate revision of the introductory rites might allow the selection of either the penitential rite or the "Glory to God," depending on the season, or even the singing of the "Glory to God" as an

---

1 In the pre-Vatican II liturgy, the "Confiteor" took the form of a dialogue in which the priest-presider and the servers, speaking for the people, recited the text to one another, hence it appeared twice.
entrance song. Proposals of this kind have been made by several English-speaking conferences of bishops, but Rome has not responded positively to date.

Liturgy of the Word

From a technical point of view we can say that this section of the liturgy has undergone a very successful reform. The pattern of three readings is in keeping with the early practice of the Roman rite. So, likewise, is that provided for the psalm: the verses sung by a cantor, the rest of the assembly taking the refrain. The “Alleluia” has been given back its prominent place, with at least one verse or versicle attached, and the traditional ministries of reader and cantor have been restored.

The ancient homily has replaced the later sermon, which was always viewed as a kind of “interruption” in the celebration. And the general intercessions (prayer of the faithful), which stood as the culminating point of the liturgy of the word in the early Roman mass, stand there once again. The result is a fully developed liturgy of the word that is faithful to its origins and that presents itself as an equal partner to the liturgy of the eucharist that follows.

Aspects of the Revision

Despite the overall technical success of this revision, a few issues may draw our attention. They pertain to the sequence, the homily, and the profession of faith.

Sequence

One question mark regarding the renewal of the liturgy of the word has to do with the decision to retain the sequence on a few occasions. The sequence was a latecomer to the liturgy, but in its heyday there were several thousands of them in circulation. The Council of Trent cut their number back to five. The latest reform removed one of these (“Dies irae,” at funerals), made two optional (“Lauda Sion,” on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ and “Stabat Mater” on Our Lady of Sorrows), and retained two as obligatory (“Victimae paschali,” on Easter Day, and “Veni, sancte Spiritus,” at Pentecost).

One can argue persuasively that these sequences pose no real problem, since they occur only twice a year. On the other hand, they are prescribed at Easter and Pentecost (high celebrations of the liturgical year). Music leaders scramble to find assembly-friendly settings for singing them; they upset the established order of celebration; and generally speaking the faithful seem to draw little spiritual nourishment from them during the celebration. Readers may find themselves on either side of the fence on this issue, but a future thoroughgoing reform may indeed remove them.

Profession of Faith

The profession of faith is not an original part of the liturgy of the word, as its rather awkward location in the rite might suggest. Both the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds have a more fundamental connection with baptism. Their entry into the mass was connected with heresies here and there in the course of history. The recitation of the creed by a Catholic assembly set it apart from parallel assemblies that had fallen into error.

The creed was not added to the Roman mass until the eleventh century. It occurred when Henry II came to Rome and registered surprise that the creed was not proclaimed. He was advised that this was because the Church in Rome had never experienced a heresy. The outcome of this discussion was that the pope did add the creed to the mass. In earlier times, however, it was the eucharistic prayer that was regarded as the faithful’s profession of faith.

The current revision retains the profession of faith. What is new is permission to use the Apostles’ Creed as an alternative to the lengthier Nicene Creed. This option has been well received.

Homily

The homily was one item where the 1975 General Instruction of the Roman Missal
(GIRM) used the word "must": "There must be a homily on Sunday and holy days of obligation ... (42). However, the text had to be emended in order to conform with the 1983 Code of Canon Law; GIRM 2000 (66) now has, in fact, moved from a clear "must" to the notion that the homily is not omitted "without a serious reason." This slippage in the text can only serve to damage the reform.

Another part of article forty-two of the General Instruction (GIRM 2000, 66) should also attract our attention: "The homily should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant." It is clear from the practice of the early Church that the homily is a presidential act. Thus the practice of another priest entering the assembly to deliver the homily is not recognized by the rite.

The proper place for the homily is the presidential chair, although the General Instruction allows both the chair and the lectern (see GIRM, 97; GIRM 2000, 136²).

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The revision of this part of the mass must be judged primarily on its ability to clarify the nature of the liturgy of the eucharist as the Lord's Supper. It is this fundamental reality that had become so greatly obscured by the time of the Second Vatican Council.

The revised Order of Mass divides the liturgy of the eucharist into three main sections: preparation of the altar and the gifts, eucharistic prayer, and communion rite. We shall examine each of these in turn.

Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts

Something the same can be said for the preparation rites as we have said earlier about the introductory rites of the mass: they should be brief, and they become overloaded with the passage of time.

From this perspective, the revision has done a pretty good job. The new Order of Mass has restored the presentation of the gifts following the pattern of the early Roman mass: While the presentation song (a psalm or hymn) is being sung by the people, the gifts are brought forward and placed on the altar, and this action is brought to a conclusion by the prayer over the gifts.

It is known, however, that the experts struggled mightily in this part of the revision, and they were not able to remove a number of private prayers designed to be said quietly by the priest. (And yes, we have all of us heard them prayed aloud.)

In the early days—in fact well into the eleventh century—everyone in the assembly took part in the procession, bringing not only bread and wine but also gifts for those in need. Today the monetary contributions of the assembly can be brought forward by one representative of the people. Nevertheless, the full procession always remains an option, as is recommended in the Holy Thursday liturgy.

Eucharistic Prayer

In the early Roman liturgy the eucharistic prayer was prayed aloud from beginning to end. But through the vicissitudes of history, the part from the end of the "Holy, holy" through to the conclusion of the prayer was later prayed in silence by the presiding priest. This is the practice that came down to us to the time of the Council. The revision has restored the eminently logical practice of proclaiming the entire prayer out loud.

Several problems, however, converge to disrupt the flow and unity of the prayer and damage the proclamation.
• The revised rite continues to presume that the priest will sing the preface and recite the rest of the prayer. But the unity of the prayer is best preserved

² GIRM 2000, 136 also permits "another suitable place" as appropriate—which is new.
when the entire prayer is sung, after the manner of the early Church. Future revisions of the Sacramentary should provide integrated music for the entire eucharist prayer, including the acclamations.

- The revised rite continues to prescribe the gesture of showing the elements to the people as well as genuflections in connection with the narration of institution. These are very late additions that likewise disrupt the flow of the prayer.

- The revised rite also directs the assembly to kneel during the words of institution, thereby adding a further disruption. Kneeling would have been unthinkable in the early Church, but later it seemed to make some sense for the part of the prayer that was prayed in silence.

**Communion Rite**

The Sacramentary divides the communion rite into the following parts: Lord's Prayer/doxology, sign of peace, breaking of the bread, communion/communion song, period of silence or song of praise, and prayer after communion.

**Lord's Prayer**

The Lord's Prayer was originally prayed by everyone in common. Later, during the time of Pope Gregory the Great (540–604), we find the prescription that it should be recited by the presiding bishop or priest alone. Our current revision has restored the practice of communal recitation and this has strengthened this part of the rite.

**Sign of Peace**

In the early Church, the sign of peace was so important that no one could share in communion without having taken part in the rite. But by the time of the pre-Conciliar mass, the rite had all but disappeared. (It survived in the solemn mass, where it was exchanged in rather formal fashion among the clergy.) Its restoration today is another very positive part of the reform.

**Breaking of the Bread**

The significance of this rite is clear: The eucharist is the sacrament of unity, and as we share in the one bread, which is Christ, we become one in him; we become the body of Christ. The action of breaking was an integral and highly significant part of the Last Supper, and we are reminded of this each time we pray the eucharistic prayer: “On the night he was betrayed he took bread and gave you thanks and praise. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you.”

The early Church took this rite very seriously. The eucharistic bread (leavened until the eleventh century) was broken onto a very large plate, sometimes supported by two subdeacons.

Unfortunately, as communions declined we were left with a single host, broken in two by the priest and then consumed by him. This practice continued up to the time of the Council.

Here, as elsewhere, the revision has moved in the direction of restoring the ancient practice, but in this case it has been far from successful. Today, in many communities, one or more of the larger “concelebration” hosts are broken, and the portions are distributed among the ministers near the altar and a few others. But this tiny gesture pales when compared with the strong symbolism of the early rite.

Nevertheless, some progress is being made. A number of communities now have a group of bread-bakers, who bake bread for the eucharist (in compliance with the regulations) that appears as real bread and is broken for the entire assembly.

**Communion/Communion Song**

It is difficult to say just how much the new rite is responsible for this, but for the first time in many, many centuries the faithful are sharing in communion at every Sunday mass. The revision also restores the practice of communion standing and in the hand—and finally, above all,
communion from the cup. But there are a few wrinkles here that deserve our attention.

- The whole liturgy of the eucharist, as the Lord’s Supper, moves forward to the act of eating and drinking as to its goal. Communion, as that eating and drinking, will take a lot of time. Yet there is often the perception that this part of the rite should be carried out with as much dispatch as possible, which is something like inviting people to a meal and then rushing them when the food is on the table! In the early Roman mass, there was one great plate of eucharistic bread and one great cup (often with double handles): one bread, one cup, shared by all.

- Communion under both kinds is an issue of great importance. No matter how tentative the original revision was, an unassailable point is clear, and that is the mandate of the Lord. We hear it at every eucharistic celebration: “Take this, all of you, and drink from it.” Pope Gelasius, noted above, used this very argument, instructing the people to follow the dominical decree. In view of this he ordered that no one was to share in communion except first under the form of bread and then directly from the cup, except in the case of very small children (who had no teeth) and the very old (who perhaps were in the process of losing them). The rite of communion will be fully restored only when communion under both kinds has been re-established as the norm.

- In the revised rite the people sing the communion song during the communion procession. In this regard, greater attention needs to be given to the prescription of the General Instruction to stand throughout communion. Standing and singing while others share in communion embodies and reflects the communal nature of the rite.

Period of Silence or Song of Praise

This is something of a novelty. In the early Church, the communion procession was concluded immediately with the prayer after communion, and the dismissal followed. The thinking was that once communion was completed, there was nothing left to do. There was, of course, a period of prayer after the “Let us pray.” This original form can be followed today, since the period of silence or song of praise is an option.

In any event, the song of praise, which the General Instruction tells us is to be sung by all the people, will usually have no practical application, since the people will have been singing throughout the communion procession.

Prayer after Communion

This prayer concludes the communion procession and is not a “closing” prayer. For this reason the revision states that any announcements are to follow the prayer, not precede it.

Concluding Rite

Not much needs to be said about the concluding rite. It is properly brief, and it follows the early pattern of blessing and dismissal. The additions found in the pre-Conciliar mass have been removed. These include the last gospel (the prologue of St. John), which was not in common use even late in the Middle Ages, and the prayers at the foot of the altar prescribed by Leo XIII.

Once the dismissal is given the celebration is complete and, for the integrity of the rite, it is time to leave. Of course, nothing stands in the way of instrumental music or even a communal song (not prolonged) as the priest and ministers make their way through the church, although this remains simply one option.

3 Possibly due to the extremely large size of most parish communities, whereby the parking lot must empty and refill several times on every Lord’s Day.
Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Is there anything in this article that surprises you?
2. If you have any memory of parish Sunday liturgy before the Council, which of the changes described in this article has had the most profound effect on your experience of parish liturgy since the Council?
3. If you have no memory of parish Sunday liturgy before the Council, which of the changes described in this article seems the most indispensable?
4. Of the practices described in this article, which are best implemented in your parish?
5. Of the practices described in this article, which need more work?
6. Of the practices described in this article, are there any that cause you concern or tension?

Networking

The following have been offered in response to our call for the sharing of resources produced by dioceses.

Canada

Available from: the National Liturgy Office

- Weddings and Funerals – a guide to finding the readings for weddings and funerals in the Canadian (NRSV) edition of the Sunday and weekday lectionaries.

Contact:
Tel.: (613) 241-9461 ext. 221

International

Available from: the Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, USA

- Initiation, Receptions, and the Eastern Churches – a thoroughly researched, well-documented resource, guiding initiation teams through the complexities of welcoming Christians baptized in the Eastern Churches.

Contact:
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Diocese of Lansing, Office of Worship
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Lansing, MI 48933
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"That More Complete Form of Participation"

Liturgical Musicians Association, Toronto

Paragraph 55 and Noble Simplicity

Ritual is not intended to be complicated or obscure. It just gets that way in the course of time, over a couple of thousand years. The Second Vatican Council recognized this when it undertook its reform of the liturgy: "The rites should be marked by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions; they should be within the people's power of comprehension and as a rule not require much explanation" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 34).

Today's cleaned-up rites are indeed more accessible and transparent. Witness the general shape of the Sunday eucharist, with its neat and clear-cut design: introductory rites, liturgy of the word, liturgy of the eucharist, and concluding rite—an introduction, two main parts, and a conclusion.

The Council's commitment to clarity and simplicity carries over to the shape and design of each part of the celebration. For example, we can now see more clearly that the liturgy of the eucharist is a meal—a sacred, sacrificial meal, to be sure, but a meal. Everyone knows what we do at a meal: we set the table (preparation of the altar); we bring on the food and drink (presentation of the gifts); we pray the table blessing (eucharistic prayer); and we eat and drink together (holy communion).

If the eucharistic prayer is the high point of the entire celebration, communion is the goal and fulfilment of the eucharist. This should be self-evident. Since the liturgy of the eucharist is the Lord's Supper, it is a sacred, sacrificial meal. And eating and drinking together is what a meal is all about. It was evident early on in the process of reform that if communion is the goal and fulfillment of the eucharist, it must be given full play. Paragraph 34 highlights the importance of making the basic structure of the communion rite stand out loud and clear. Paragraph 55 shows the way.

Focus on the Communion Rite

Any Sunday, 1958

I was just a kid, but I remember. Women had to wear a hat; men had to take theirs off. The windowsills were lined with fedoras. I followed the parallel Latin-English texts, attempting to get to the "Amen" at the same time as the priest. If my eyes strayed from the book, they'd better be on the priest.

A couple of dozen very pious people went to communion. They knelt at the rail with their hands under the cloth (while everyone else remained kneeling at their seats); they received on the tongue; they prayed that the host wouldn't stick too stubbornly to the roof of their mouth. These hosts—and an amount sufficient for the daily masses of the coming week—were consecrated at the first mass of the morning. Since the tabernacle rested on the altar, the priest had easy access to these pre-consecrated hosts during each Sunday mass.

This article is a synthesis and re-working of material that appeared in Laudemus, the newsletter of the Liturgical Musicians Association, a grassroots networking organization of musicians in Catholic parishes in Toronto and beyond.
In my pew I would ponder to myself: should I go to communion this morning? I went to confession with the rest of the school on the first Thursday of the month. By the end of the month my chances of still being worthy to receive communion were pretty slim. If I had caused my parents or teacher to raise their voice, if I had been a less-than-perfect big sister, if I had committed countless other sins that I wasn’t even aware of, I dreaded that halfway down the aisle someone just might haul me back into my seat!

*Last Sunday (2003)*

Easier to remember. Hats are no longer high fashion for women. Though little boys are still trained to take their baseball caps off in church, fedoras are few and far between. Everyone knows the responses of the mass in English and they make an effort to sing the refrains, acclamations, and hymns. A family carries bread and wine to the altar-table to be consecrated for the sacred feast, just enough of both for all present to share. All but a handful join the procession to receive the Lord’s body (in the hand) and blood (from the cup).

**Historical Background**

To understand what had happened to the communion rite up to the time of the Council, it is necessary to begin with the presentation of the gifts of bread and wine that will be the sacred food of the feast.

Processions developed during the fifth century and are evident in fully developed form in the liturgical documents of the sixth century. The procession with the gifts included the entire assembly, since everyone brought bread or wine and various gifts for the poor to the celebration. These gifts were presented to the deacons, who placed them on side tables. The deacons then selected the bread and wine that would be used for the sacred meal.

This procession remained a constant part of the Roman Sunday liturgy until the eleventh century, when the introduction of unleavened bread and other factors led to its gradual decline and eventual demise. The introduction of unleavened bread was part of a movement designed to remove the eucharist from the arena of the common and the profane—a movement that therefore soon restricted the production of the bread and wine for the eucharist to the clergy and to monasteries. The changes were resisted for some time in Rome, but they eventually became law.

Given the nature of the Lord’s Supper as a sacred, sacrificial meal, it should come as no surprise that from the beginning the faithful shared in communion under both kinds at every celebration. This was the established norm. Yet, for a variety of reasons and very early in our history, the communion of the faithful suffered a dramatic decline. This decline is evident even in the fourth and fifth centuries, although Rome retained the original practice for many centuries thereafter. The impact that this failure to share in communion had on the liturgy of the eucharist becomes starkly clear when we see it in terms of a people attending a sacred meal but not eating and drinking at it.

What is perhaps even more startling is that the practice of infrequent communion continued for such a long period of time. In *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (Allen, Texas, 1986), Joseph Jungmann makes the following observation: “From the eighth century onward, the actuality seems generally not to have gone beyond what the Lateran Council of 1215 established as a new minimum: Communion at Easter” (vol. II, pp. 361-362). In fact, it is only within the past hundred years (beginning with the pontificate of Pius X) that frequent communion has gradually been restored.

In addition, among the other changes that took place in the rite of communion, the most important is related to the chalice or cup. The faithful’s communion from the cup had been taken for granted from the beginning, since the Lord’s command is clearly to take and eat and to take and drink. It took a long time for the practice
to change, but, from the twelfth century onward, communion from the cup became more and more restricted. Over the course of the next few centuries the practice of offering the cup to the faithful disappeared altogether.

As mentioned above, the modern move toward more frequent communion began in the early twentieth century with Pope Pius X. But it was the Second Vatican Council's call for full, conscious and active participation that moved us from the idea of "frequent communion" to an understanding that sharing in communion is a basic aspect of our participation in every eucharistic celebration. Specifically, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy makes the following comments:

The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In the reform and promotion of the liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else (14).

That more complete form of participation in the Mass by which the faithful, after the priest's communion, receive the Lord's body from the sacrifice, is strongly endorsed. 1

In instances to be specified by the Apostolic See, ... communion under both kinds may be granted both to clerics and religious and to the laity at the discretion of the bishops, for example ... (55).

Since the Council, participation in communion has increased dramatically, making its way steadily toward the early norm that recognized the faithful's communion as an integral part of the Church's sacred meal.

With regard to communion from the cup, the Council took the first step toward its restoration since the acrimonious debates of Reformation times. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal provides the following explanation:

Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller light shines on the sign of the eucharistic banquet. Moreover there is a clearer expression of that will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father's kingdom (240; GIRM 2000, 281).

Since the Council, permissions for the faithful's participation in communion from the cup have increased significantly. As time goes by, communion under both kinds may once again become the norm, with communion under one kind the exception to the rule.

Theological Notes

As one might expect, communion is an action that is rich in meaning. It is helpful to keep before us the reality that the liturgy of the eucharist is the Lord's Supper; the risen and exalted Lord is the host, and he is hosting a supper.

In the background we find the usual, but very significant, characteristics of every meal of this kind: the host's generosity and invitation to friendship; the host's desire to share something of his own life with

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1 This is the ICEL translation. The translation edited by Austin Flannery (Costello Publishing, 1975) uses the phrase, "receive the Lord's body from the same sacrifice" [emphasis mine]; the Walter Abbott/Joseph Gallagher edition (Follett Publishing, 1966) reads: "receive the Lord's body under elements consecrated at the very sacrifice."
those gathered at the table; the feeling and experience of togetherness, peace, joy and shared life that only a table gathering can bring. None of this can be neglected when we turn our attention to the Lord’s Supper. Rather, it opens the way to understanding what this supper is all about.

What is unique about the Lord’s Supper is that it is the risen and exalted Lord who is the host. Everything else flows from this truth. Astounding as it is, the Lord himself—here in this world and in this present time—sets a table in our midst and invites us to eat and drink with him.

The supper is the Lord’s expression of his great love for us. He gathers us at table to share his paschal life with us so that we might live in him and he in us; so that we might be the living body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit; so that we might share the peace, unity and joy of the kingdom of God. He draws us into a covenant of love with him so that we might love one another even as he has loved us; so that we might be his sacramental presence in the world; so that we might call the world to the table of the feast.

Take and Eat

Sacramental signs have not always fared well with the passage of time. The bread of the feast and the act of breaking of the bread are classic examples. The gesture of the breaking of the bread was so expressive that the eucharist itself was first known as “the breaking of the bread.” The disciples, coming back from Emmaus, “told what had happened on the road, and how he [Jesus] had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Matthew 24.35). But this ancient gesture was eventually reduced to a mere breaking of “the priest’s host,” hardly noticed and certainly no longer understood by the people.

A similar fate befell the bread itself. Experienced primary school teachers to this day tell how children have no problem believing that the eucharistic bread becomes the body of Christ. Their problem is recognizing the host wafers as bread.

The current Order of Mass gives the breaking of the bread its own prominent place in the rite of communion. Of course, this breaking is highly symbolic:

The action of the breaking of the bread, the simple term for the eucharist in apostolic times, will more clearly bring out the force and meaning of the sign of the unity of all in the one bread and of their charity, since the one bread is being distributed among the members of one family” (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 283 [GIRM 2000, 321]; see also 56c [GIRM 2000, 83]).

As we might expect, the General Instruction also has something to say about the bread itself:

The nature of the sign demands that the material for the eucharistic celebration truly have the appearance of food. Accordingly, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, the eucharistic bread should be made in such a way that in a Mass with a congregation the priest is able actually to break the host into parts and distribute them to at least some of the faithful” (283 [GIRM 2000, 321]).

Thus, while not ruling out small hosts when the number of communicants is large, the General Instruction clearly opens the way for an effective breaking of the bread at the Church’s eucharist. The large so-called “concelebration bread” is a first step in this direction. Using several of them at a Sunday celebration is a good way
for a parish to ease its way into a more expressive breaking of the bread. However, some parishes have taken a step beyond this, baking their own eucharistic bread. The General Instruction provides the basic norms: “According to the tradition of the entire Church, the bread must be made from wheat; according to the tradition of the Latin Church, it must be unleavened” (282 [GIRM 2000, 320]). Bread-bakers will need to experiment in order to produce a bread that breaks readily, doesn’t crumble, and is easy to consume—bread that is worthy of the Church’s great feast. But the outcome will be bread that truly has the appearance of food.

**Take and Drink**

The ancient (and to certain extent modern) way of sealing a covenant—of bonding people together in a common life or a common cause—was by sitting down at table together. The focus of this meal was the blessing and sharing of a cup of wine. The blessing rehearsed the terms of the covenant and the joy and life that would come from it. The covenant-cup was then passed around the table, and each person sealed the covenant by drinking from it.

Bread and water are the staples of human life. Wine adds a new dimension. Wine gladdens the heart (Psalm 104.15); it speaks of freedom and joy and the fulfillment of life. In the Lord’s Supper, it speaks of the blessings of the covenant, the riches of life in God. Thus the cup of the covenant is the cup of the blessings that overflow unto eternal life.

The Lord’s Supper or eucharist is, of course, the covenant meal par excellence. Saint Paul, for example, records Jesus as saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11.25). When we drink from the cup of the covenant, we collectively become the community of the new covenant, the New Testament Church. The words of distribution—The blood of Christ. Amen—speak of a people prepared to give their lives in Christ for the sake of the kingdom of God.

In principle it would seem that communion from the cup should be taken for granted. After all, Jesus himself provides the mandate: “Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matthew 26.27-28).

In the early Church, communion from the cup was taken for granted. The eucharistic cup and the book of the gospels were the prized possessions of every community. The cup became larger as the community grew—large enough to require two handles to lift it up. Yet communion from the cup, like the breaking of the bread, suffered the vicissitudes of history and eventually disappeared in the West, except for the presiding bishop or priest. Its gradual restoration was signalled by the Second Vatican Council.

Although it is true that nothing essential to salvation is lost by communion under one kind, it is clear that sharing the cup was central to the Last Supper long ago and is central to the Lord’s Supper today. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy describes the relationship between the eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father’s kingdom in the following eloquent way:

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle (8).

The cup of the blessings expresses and embodies that joy. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal gives us the basic teaching:

Holy communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller light shines on the sign of the eucharistic banquet. Moreover there
is a clearer expression of that will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father’s kingdom (240 [GIRM 2000, 281]).

The Work that Remains

Tabernacle Communion

The Sacramentary emphasizes the connection between the presentation of the gifts and communion when it states the following:

Sufficient hosts (and wine) for the communion of the faithful are to be prepared. It is most important that the faithful should receive the body of the Lord in hosts consecrated at the same Mass and should share the cup when it is permitted. Communion is thus a clearer sign of sharing in the sacrifice which is actually taking place (p. 424).

Yet communion from pre-consecrated hosts reserved in the tabernacle is still an all-to-common practise. The logistics take a brief period of time to work out, but once this is done the practice called for by the Constitution is not in any way burdensome.

The fallout of continued “tabernacle communion” is strongly evident. People have lost sight of the totality of the eucharist, the great thanksgiving. The link between the Church’s great eucharistic prayer, which indeed makes the mass the mass, and the sacred food of the feast is obscured when the food comes from the tabernacle rather than from the table of the feast, from the altar of the sacrifice. When this happens, a communion service is equated with the celebration of eucharist.

Come to the Table

Naturally, the participants should be brought to or toward the table for communion. Leading people away from the table (to the back of the church) for the sake of speed and convenience is exactly what we do not do at a meal, and it compromises the celebration. Pastors, liturgy committees and music leaders can use this kind of structural analysis to shape and sharpen every detail of the Sunday celebration—much to the profit of us all.

Communion from the Cup

Communion under one kind remains, of course, an option—no one can be forced to receive from the cup—and in every community there are those who have health concerns related either to bread or to wine. Matters of hygiene come to the fore in our modern age. Many of the concerns, however, are overblown. The Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the National Liturgy Office have published a report titled “Communion from the Cup” that can form the best basis for discussion and instruction. It is available from the CCCB. The National Office has also published a leaflet (available in both French and English) designed for parish distribution. Both the leaflet and the full document are available at <www.cccb.ca>. Click on “Commissions,” then “Episcopal Commission for Liturgy – English Sector,” then “Documents,” and finally “Communion from the Cup.”

Communion by intinction is not a good alternative and has never been encouraged in Canada. But the dominical norm is clear; as the third eucharistic prayer says, “Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood.” In any event, it should be noted that the rite does not allow the communicant to take the consecrated bread and dip it in the cup (see General Instruction, 246, 247 [GIRM 2000, 284, 285]). Only a positive and “encouraging” catechesis—one that promotes communion from the cup by highlighting its value and importance—will lead a community back to the cup after such a long and contrary practice.
**“Real” Bread**

A Sample Recipe for Eucharistic Bread

**Ingredients:**
1 cup of unbleached flour  
2/3 cup of whole wheat flour  
3/4 cup of chilled, unflavoured sparkling water

**Method:**
Preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.  
Spray bottom of a spring-form pan with cooking spray and wipe off excess  
(A stoneware dish also works very well.)

Mix ingredients in a cold bowl, scraping sides. You may wish to use your hands to kneed into a ball. If needed, sprinkle with another 1/4 cup of unbleached flour, a little at a time. Flatten dough into pan using a rolling pin, making sure you lightly dust the pin before you start rolling. Using a fork, score in 100 pieces (draw a diagram first).

Bake for 10 minutes. Take out, turn over and score again (using the same pattern).  
Bake for another 10 minutes. The bread should be golden brown.

Cool over a wire rack. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and store in a plastic bag.  
The bread is best used as soon as possible, but it can be frozen for future use.

**Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. Is there anything in this article that surprises you?
2. If you have any memory of parish Sunday liturgy before the Council, which of the changes described in this article has had the most profound effect on your experience of parish liturgy since the Council?
3. If you have no memory of parish Sunday liturgy before the Council, which of the changes described in this article seems the most indispensable?
4. Of the practices described in this article, which are best implemented in your parish?
5. Of the practices described in this article, which need more work?
6. Of the practices described in this article, are there any that cause you concern or tension?
Concelebration at the eucharist has been a practice of the Eastern and Western Churches since at least the third century. For about the last seven hundred years, however, concelebration in the Roman rite was restricted to episcopal and presbyteral ordination. The Second Vatican Council signalled a return to the wider use of concelebration in the Church today. In doing this, it provided, for the first time, the opportunity for presbyters to concelebrate under the presidency of another presbyter; previously, concelebration took place only when the presbyters were gathered around the bishop.

Significance of Concelebration

The significance of concelebration is to be found in the nature of the eucharist as the fundamental expression of the Church:

Therefore all should hold in the greatest esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centred around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church. They must be convinced that the principal manifestation of the Church consists in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebration, especially in the same eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.

Concelebration, viewed within the eucharistic act of self-expression, is a clear sign of the collegial nature of the Church.

It highlights "the unity of the priesthood, of the sacrifice, and of the whole people of God." The wider practice of concelebration has resolved certain problems, such as the proliferation of altars and simultaneous celebrations of the eucharist. At the same time, its indiscriminate or improper use has sometimes led to an imbalance in the eucharistic celebration occasioned by too great an emphasis on the role of the concelebrating priests to the detriment of the fundamental participation of the entire assembly. The appropriateness of concelebration must always be judged on the basis of the sacramental sign.

Occasions for Concelebration

Provided that the needs of the faithful have been met, concelebration is always permitted and is encouraged.

Privileged Occasions

There are certain privileged occasions when concelebration is especially indicated:

• the Mass at which the diocesan bishop presides
• the ordination of bishops
• the ordination of presbyters
• the Chrism Mass
• the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper and the Easter Triduum
• the Easter vigil
• the visit of a diocesan bishop to another diocese.

Where the ordination of a bishop has taken place outside of the diocese, the

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1 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL), 57, 58.
2 CSL, 41; General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), 74; GIRM 2000, 112.
3 GIRM, 153; GIRM 2000, 199. See also Decree Ecclesiae Semper, Concelebration and Communion under Both Species, Sacred Congregation of Rites (Consilium), March 7, 1965.
4 Eucharisticum Mysterium, 47. See also The Code of Canon Law, c. 902.
5 See GIRM, 157; GIRM 2000, 203.
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bishop's reception or installation in the cathedral church is also a special occasion for concelebration.

The evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper is the first celebration within the Paschal Triduum, which is a single feast. Concelebration is thus indicated throughout the Triduum.

Other Appropriate Occasions
There are many other occasions when concelebration is particularly appropriate. The following may be noted:
• major diocesan anniversaries and feasts
• the pastoral visit of the bishop
• the parish celebration of confirmation
• episcopal and presbyteral assemblies, retreats, and days of recollection
• at the Eucharist celebrated in communities of presbyters, in seminaries, and in residences for presbyters
• at the parish weekday Eucharist, when there are more presbyters than there are scheduled celebrations
• at the funeral liturgy of bishops and presbyters
• at the funeral liturgy of parishioners, at least on the part of the parish priests.

Concelebration should be avoided, however, when the number of concelebrants creates an imbalance in the assembly. Moreover, it should not take place simply as a way of giving special honour to a person being buried or to a couple celebrating a wedding or an anniversary of marriage.

Principles of Concelebration
According to order and tradition, presbyters concelebrate under the presidency of the bishop.

When concelebration takes place in the absence of the bishop, one presbyter alone is designated to preside; the other presbyters concelebrate with him. Thus, the homily, which is presidential in nature, is usually given by the priest celebrant himself; the presidential character of the eucharistic prayer must always be respected.

Since concelebration is itself a form of ministry, concelebrants do not take on a second or third ministry in the eucharist. They do not take over the role of the deacon or reader; provision should still be made for extra-ordinary ministers of communion, especially if they are already scheduled.

When there is no deacon, a concelebrant (concelebrants) may assume the deacon's functions, proclaiming the gospel, raising the cup at the doxology and offering it to the faithful during communion.

Notes on the Ritual of Concelebration

Location of the Concelebrants
In any concelebration it should be evident to the assembly that there is only one priest who is presiding over the celebration, whether presiding at the chair or at the altar.

In large "concelebrations," the concelebrants should be seated in such a way that the rest of the assembly is not distanced from the altar. For the liturgy of the eucharist it is better if only a representative body of presbyters gathers around the presider.

At the altar the concelebrants stand in such a way that they do not interfere with the functions of the other ministers, especially the deacon, or obstruct the view of the assembly.

Eucharistic Prayer
The quality of the eucharistic prayer is a matter of first importance in every celebration of the eucharist. When concelebrants take part in this prayer, their first priority must be to ensure that its unity and its prayerfulness are not compromised.

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7 GIRM, 167; GIRM 2000, 215.

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The presider is allowed to assign parts of the eucharistic prayer to one or more of the concelebrants. Experience has shown, however, that this practice tends to fracture the unity of the prayer, disturb its effective proclamation, and draw the assembly's attention away from the content of the prayer itself. The liturgy is better served when the presider prays the prayer without distributing its parts.

When the concelebrants are to share in the eucharistic prayer, their parts should be assigned before the celebration begins.

Whenever the concelebrants join the presider in the recitation of the eucharistic prayer, they are instructed to pray "quietly," "inaudibly," "mentally." For the sake of the prayer, concelebrants should pray these parts in such a low voice that they cannot be heard by those around them. Those who are in charge of a concelebrated eucharist should make every effort to ensure that this is done.

The principal ways in which concelebrants participate in the eucharistic prayer are by their vested presence in at least alb and stole, by their association with the presider in the gestures of their hands in prayer and in the invocation of the Holy Spirit. The gesture of the imposition of the hands at the epiclesis should be the most prominent aspect of their concelebration.

During the invocation of the Holy Spirit (the epiclesis) the concelebrants extend their hands towards the offerings. During the institution narrative each concelebrant may extend a hand towards the offering.

During the memorial (anamnesis) each concelebrant extends his hands in the posture of prayer.

Communion

The communion of the concelebrants may take place in a variety of ways, according to circumstances.

The concelebrants may approach the altar and communicate directly there, or they may approach the presider and the deacon, who stand at the altar with the eucharistic bread and the cup.

Alternatively, the communicants may remain in their places. The presider and the deacon either bring the eucharistic bread and the cup to each of them or to the first communicant, who then passes the eucharistic bread and the cup to the concelebrant who is next to him.

When there is a large number of concelebrants, the communion of the rest of the assembly should begin as soon as possible after the communion of the presider.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Is there anything in this article that surprises you?
2. Has this article had any influence on your understanding of concelebration?
3. Has this article raised any questions within you concerning concelebration?
4. Of the aspects of concelebration addressed in this article, which are best implemented in your experience?
5. Of the aspects of concelebration addressed in this article, which need more work?
6. Of the aspects of concelebration addressed in this article, are there any that cause you concern or tension?

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8 GIRM, 170; GIRM 2000, 218.
9 GIRM, 174a, 180a, 184a, 188a; GIRM 2000, 222a, 227a, 230a, 233a.
10 GIRM, 174c, 180c, 184c, 188c; GIRM 2000, 222c, 227c, 230c, 233c.
11 GIRM, 174d, 180d, 184d, 188d; GIRM 2000, 222d, 227d, 230d, 233d.
12 See GIRM, 197, 201; GIRM 2000, 242, 246.
13 GIRM, 201a; GIRM 2000, 246a.
“Does this mean you don’t have to go to church anymore?”

This innocent and sincere question came from a respectful 10-year old trying to figure out what he had just witnessed: the confirmation of his 16-year old Catholic friend. Chrism still moist on his forehead, the older youth shot a nervous glance at his pastor, who had overheard the question. “No,” he comforted his young friend. “I’ll still go to church.” But don’t we all wonder?

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The succinct words of Sacrosanctum Concilium called for a renewal of confirmation both modest and broad in scope:

The rite of confirmation should also be rethought so that the intimate connection of this sacrament with complete Christian initiation may appear more clearly. Therefore, the renewal of the promises of baptism fittingly precedes the reception of this sacrament.

Confirmation may be conferred within mass when convenient. But there should be drawn up a formula to be used in the manner of an introduction, which pertains to the rite outside mass (71).

Confirmation was one among many rites of the Church to be reviewed after the Second Vatican Council. The liturgical constitution dreamed of making the

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Church's prayer more sincere. The specific issues varied from one rite to the next.

In this case, the single theological principal mentioned by the Council was the connection between confirmation and Christian initiation. It was only one principle, but its implications were immense. Ultimately it would call into question the occasion, minister, age, preparation and meaning of the sacrament.

To start the implementation of this vision, paragraph 71 made only two practical suggestions: inserting the renewal of baptismal promises into the rite and presenting alternative rites for the sacrament inside and outside of mass. Considering all the changes that happened after the Council, it is somewhat charming to see the issues the Council naively thought were so important they deserved mention in the Constitution.

In these few phrases the liturgy constitution changed the way we think about confirmation as well as the way we celebrate it.

Making the Connection

The Council's vision led to a series of changes. Surprisingly, the greatest change to confirmation—the actual words by which the sacrament is conferred—was not explicitly envisioned in Sacrosanctum Concilium. Formerly, the bishop said these words while anointing the forehead with chrism: “N., I sign you with the sign of the cross, and I confirm you with the chrism of salvation. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Now, the bishop or priest says, “N., be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The formula was changed to draw it closer to those used by the Eastern rites and to express more clearly the meaning of the sacrament. The former text basically articulated the rubric it accompanied. The new one calls the anointing “the seal of the Holy Spirit.” It also calls confirmation a “gift.”

Drawing on the image of the traditional gifts of the Holy Spirit, this word almost warned against making too much of preparation for confirmation. Seven-year olds were eligible for the sacrament, and it comes not as reward, but as gift. The new formula implied a new way of looking at the sacrament. But to alter the formula at all required immense courage, because it changed the centuries-old tradition for what constituted the valid conferral of confirmation, something that was also reflected in the struggle for an adequate translation.

The success of the renewal can be measured by the theological principle of Sacrosanctum Concilium 71: make the connection between confirmation and complete Christian initiation. Superficially, it seems to have worked. People commonly call confirmation a “sacrament of initiation.” However, that is not specifically what the Constitution said.

Throughout the history of our sacraments, the term “initiation” referred only to the baptismal rites themselves. By the 5th century, confirmation was commonly administered apart from baptism. By the 13th century, the first sharing of communion commonly took place apart from baptism. But in neither circumstance were these deferred rituals called “sacraments of initiation.” The expression came into theological parlance at the turn of the 20th century, but it still had not reached official Catholic documentation at the time of the Second Vatican Council. That is why Sacrosanctum Concilium wanted to see “the intimate connection of [confirmation] with complete Christian initiation.” Initiation happened with baptism; confirmation needed to be connected to it—but not identified with it. This nuance, however, was lost in succeeding decades until the Catechism of the Catholic Church firmly identified deferred confirmation and first communion as sacraments of initiation.

The Council's wording had the positive effect of connecting confirmation and
baptism. Formerly, if confirmation connected to anything, it was to the bishop. Inserting the renewal of baptismal promises helped to make the link between confirmation and baptism, even when a bishop presided.

But pastoral practice went further and called deferred confirmation a sacrament of initiation. When it appeared that way in official documents, the Church implicitly redefined initiation. Initiation no longer takes place in one event. It takes place over the course of some years. This would not have been clear to the authors of Sacrosanctum Concilium.

Based on the theological principle of connecting confirmation to initiation, other changes in the rite can be critiqued. The renewal of baptismal promises is a welcome addition. The liturgy not only includes the promises, but it also expands them with a special question about the Holy Spirit. This adaptation to the baptismal promises is unique in all of Church history, and it helps underscore the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament, just as the new formula of administration does.

The reformed rite of confirmation eliminated the sacrament’s most famous moment: the bishop’s slap. The slap first appeared in the 13th century. Incongruously, the bishop tapped the confirmand’s cheek while saying, “Peace be with you.” The slap inspired military imagery and fostered an interpretation of confirmation as a maturity rite. Durandus, who inserted the slap into the ritual, also thought it would serve as an exorcism and as a memory device to keep people from forgetting that they were confirmed. Its meaning was poorly understood. The removal of the slap supported the Council’s desire that confirmation be connected more closely to initiation. The slap never had anything to do with initiation and its removal helped purify the sacrament’s meaning.

No mention is made of a confirmation name. It does not appear in the rite, in canon law nor in the catechism. Although the taking of a new name is not expressly forbidden, it certainly is not promoted. Surely, the baptismal name is to be used, just as the baptismal godparents are to serve as sponsors. Confirmation is not about getting a nom-de-guerre or making a new personal choice; it is connected to baptismal grace.

By increasing the occasions when a priest might confirm, the post-conciliar Church also connected the sacrament to initiation. Specifically, a priest may confirm the adults and children of catechetical age he baptizes. This practice did more than show the “connection” between confirmation and initiation; it inserted confirmation into the complex of parish initiation for the first time in history.

**Muddying the Waters**

All these changes supported the link between confirmation and initiation, but in pastoral practice the connection is often lost. Just when the Council tried to purify the sacrament’s meaning, the pastoral practice of the Church raised the age of candidates, complicating the interpretation of the ritual.

The age of confirmation has risen in many dioceses of the world. Yet, it is still called an initiation rite. For the first time in history, many people are not considered “initiated” until many years after their baptism. This causes adolescents to think that they are not committed to the Catholic Church until they are confirmed, and many of them wonder if they are still Catholic if they choose not to be confirmed. Nowhere in the confirmation rite does the bishop ask, “Do you promise never to question the teachings of the Catholic Church and to remain a faithful Catholic for the rest of your life?” But when we place teenagers through months of preparation and line them up in front of the bishop, many people assume that is what is happening.

In spite of the theological principal of Sacrosanctum Concilium 71 connecting
this sacrament to initiation, confirmation has no singular meaning. It shines clearly as an initiation rite when it is celebrated in the same ceremony with baptism. But it resembles a maturity rite when it is celebrated some years after infant baptism. It looks like something else altogether when a Christian baptized in another denomination is received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. In this instance, it feels like a reconciliation rite, giving the gift of the Spirit to someone whose reception of the Spirit was deficient at baptism. These conflicting meanings make it very difficult to explain what the sacrament is all about. It is about too many things.

Problems and Futures

The Council did not go far enough. It could have named confirmation an initiation rite and called for it to be celebrated as such, together with baptism. But it settled for a mere connection between confirmation and initiation, leaving open the possibility of multiple meanings.

Consequently, confirmation is caught in a vortex of issues that keep its initiatory character obscure:

The Role of Bishops

For centuries, people viewed this sacrament as a responsibility of bishops. As confirmation's roots with baptism became more apparent, the Church allowed priests to confirm at the time they baptized adults. Doing so made it easier to see confirmation as a sacrament of initiation, but less easy to see it as a ministry of bishops. It has also given the Catholic Church two quite distinct baptismal rites: one that includes confirmation and one that does not. The theology of initiation cannot long tolerate this ambiguity, but no change will happen as long as confirmation is seen by bishops as the responsibility of bishops. Bishops could do so much more when they visit parishes: meet with Councils, dine with a family, tour the grounds or catechize the faithful. But confirmation takes their time and energy.

The Validity of Orders

Whenever we receive Christians baptized in another Church into the full communion of the Catholic Church, we confirm them. Some of them have experienced “confirmation” in their own denomination. But we do not recognize the validity of that confirmation because we do not recognize the validity of orders in other Churches. This same ecumenical issue underlies the refusal of the Catholic Church to share communion with other Churches. If the validity of orders could be recognized, tension over a number of issues would relax, freeing confirmation from the rite of reception and shepherding it to its post-conciliar purpose, a rite of initiation.

Historical Changes

More than any other sacrament, confirmation has changed considerably throughout its history. It has roots in Pentecost and the imposition of hands in the New Testament, and in the baptismal rites of the early Church. It did not exist as a separate rite with a separate name until the 4th or 5th centuries, and was not formally numbered among the sacraments until the 13th. The age of recipients has reached as young as infancy, but the separation of confirmation from baptism (and its exclusive link to the bishops) caused large numbers of Christians to go unconfirmed in every era. The sacrament continued to mutate in the 20th century, as more Catholics accepted the Protestant notion that confirmation completes religious education and rewards spiritual maturity, even as others argued it should precede the first sharing of communion in all instances. Because the history of the sacrament changed so much, theologians, pastors and bishops could make historical arguments for almost any meaning and practice of confirmation they wished to promote.

Adolescence

Adolescents question their faith as much as they question authority, custom and social values. Adults firm in their faith seek ways to ensure that adolescents will
become firm in their faith as well. Many have turned to confirmation in hopes that this ritual will elicit the commitment they want teens to make. Sometimes it backfires. Sadly, some adolescents endure the preparation and the celebration because, for them, it means that after confirmation they won't have to go to church anymore or because it is linked with rites of school passage. Neither the Council nor any official teaching since then has promoted such an interpretation. Calling confirmation an adult commitment to the Church—or a farewell to the Church—would have surprised bishops of the Middle Ages, catechumens of 3rd-century Rome, and the apostles themselves. If anything required a commitment, it was baptism, not confirmation. If confirmation was anything, it was a gift of the Holy Spirit, not a new commitment. Meanwhile, adolescents bear the burden of theology's prevarications.

**Catacombs and Confirmation**

A tour guide at the catacombs in Rome will inform every group that in spite of what they've been told, persecuted Christians never hid there. Everyone is surprised. The tour guide is correct. But the popular notion of the catacombs will be very, very difficult to change. The same is happening to confirmation. The Council tried to get people thinking about confirmation differently, in connection with initiation, but the change has not yet happened. We want to have it both ways. We want to confirm newly baptized adults at Easter, but we want bishops to confirm children some years after they were baptized as infants. Confirmation will remain confused in people's minds until its purpose becomes more focused.

_Sacrosanctum Concilium_ 71 led the way and introduced significant changes in confirmation, but more changes need to happen if the sacrament is to have its purpose clarified. The most dramatic solution is also the simplest and the one that will bring about all the desired results: allow the priest who baptizes to confirm in every instance of initiation.

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. **Is there anything in this article that surprises you?**

2. **Has this article had any influence on your understanding of the sacrament of confirmation?**

3. **Has this article raised any questions within you concerning the sacrament of confirmation?**

4. **If you have any memory of the celebration of confirmation before the Council, which of the changes described in this article has had the most profound effect on your experience of it since the Council?**

5. **If you have no memory of the celebration of confirmation before the Council, which of the changes described in this article seems the most indispensable?**

6. **Of the practices described in this article, which are best implemented in your diocese?**

7. **Of the practices described in this article, which need more work?**

8. **Of the practices described in this article, are there any that cause you concern or tension?**

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*National Bulletin on Liturgy*
A Reflection on the
Motu Proprio, Misericordia Dei

Raymond Vaillancourt

English translation by Gérard-E. Brunelle

This article originally appeared in Prêtre et Pasteur; it was translated into English for the Archdiocese of Ottawa and is reprinted here with permission. Although prompted by the publication of Misericordia Dei, it is reprinted here because Vaillancourt's reflections so aptly address the question of how well we have responded to paragraph 72 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. (The "Questions for Reflection and Discussion" were not part of the original article.)

On April 17, 2002, Pope John Paul II issued a reflection on reconciliation in a motu proprio document entitled Misericordia Dei. The document put a damper on the zeal of many a pastor who, over the years, had promoted "the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation with general confession and absolution." As I was asked to reflect on the document, it seemed appropriate, first, to examine its scope, i.e. its major points and focus, and secondly, to reflect on a few of its components.

The Motu Proprio, Misericordia Dei

The Major Points

In his opening reflection, Pope John Paul II focuses on the exhortations of the Precursor [John the Baptist] to repentance and conversion. He then recalls that throughout the history of catechesis, the "ministry of reconciliation" has been deemed an essential part of priestly ministry. Referring then to his 1984 Apostolic Exhortation, Reconciliatio et Paenitentia and to his Apostolic Letter, Novo Millenio Ineunte, he recalls how he invited pastors to restore the meaning of the sacrament of reconciliation in view of the crisis which seems to impact a great number of faithful. Referring to these documents, he affirms that …

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With these words, I intended, as I do now, to encourage my Brother Bishops and earnestly appeal to them—and, through them, to all priests—to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a requirement of genuine charity and true pastoral justice and we should remember that the faithful, when they have the proper interior dispositions, have the right to receive personally the sacramental gift.

Pursuant to this pressing invitation to the ministry of reconciliation, John Paul II lists certain standard obligations concerning the practice of the sacrament of penance. Consequently, he recalls that ... the faithful, as well as being aware of the sins they have committed, of being sorry for them, and resolved not to fall into them again should also confess their sins. In this sense, the Council of Trent declared that it is necessary by divine decree to confess each and every mortal sin.

He then lists some of the canonical laws in force concerning the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. In the Pope's view, "This seems especially necessary given that, in some places, there has been a tendency to abandon individual confession and wrongly to resort to 'general' or 'communal' absolution. In this case, general absolution is no longer viewed as an extraordinary means to be used in highly exceptional situations," this stemming from too broad an interpretation of the grave necessity clause promulgated by Paul VI in 1972 and taken up by the Code of Canon Law, the Apostolic Exhortation, Reconciliation et Paenitentia and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Following these reminders, the document urges local Ordinaries in turn to remind the ministers of the sacrament of penance of the following points:

1. Individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church.

2. In this context, priests are obliged to make themselves available for this ministry.

3. Local Ordinaries, as well as parish priests and rectors of churches and shrines, should periodically verify that proper facilities are made available to the faithful to confess their sins.

4. Moreover, since the faithful are obliged to confess all grave sins according to kind and number, "any practice which restricts confession to a generic accusation of sin or of only one or two sins judged to be more important is to be reproved." It is also recommended that they confess venial sins.

5. Following these recommendations, the document itemizes the two conditions authorizing the celebration of confession and general absolution:

   • the danger of imminent death, and
   • the case of grave necessity.

Since the latter lends itself to various interpretations, John Paul II offers six points for clarification:

a. He recalls that such situations are objectively exceptional and can occur in mission territories or in isolated communities of the faithful deprived of a resident priest.

b. Both conditions of canon law pertaining to the case of grave necessity are inseparable. He then warns of too broadly interpreting whether the faithful can have their confession heard "in an appropriate way" and "within an appropriate time."

c. In a separate paragraph, he specifies that "it is not a question here of a more extended pastoral conversation, which can be left to more

1 NBLEditor's note: When Vaillancourt uses the term "communal" in this article, he is referring to Form III of the sacrament (with general confession and absolution), not Form II.
favourable circumstances." Moreover, he warns of interpreting too broadly the justifying of the communal celebration under the pretext that the faithful would be deprived of the sacramental grace for an extended period of time. While recognizing a case for prudential judgment, he seems to reject any time under a month.
d. Moreover, he deems it unacceptable to allow the contrivance of situations of apparent grave necessity resulting from not administering the sacrament—namely individual confession and absolution—through a failure to implement the current norms, and still less by relying on the attraction of the faithful to this form of sacramental reconciliation.
e. The large number of penitents does not in itself constitute sufficient necessity.
f. Judgement as to the application of conditions required for this form of celebration is not a matter for the confessor but for the local Ordinary.
g. Moreover, he demands that the episcopal conferences "send as soon as possible to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments the text of the norms which they intend to issue or update in the light of this motu proprio on the application of Canon 961." Moreover, it is deemed appropriate for diocesan bishops to inform their respective bishops' conferences whether or not cases of grave necessity have occurred in their jurisdictions.

In his closing remarks, the pope reminds participants in the celebration of reconciliation in its communal form that they must fulfill certain requirements, such as firmly intending subsequently to confess their serious sins. He also recalls the obligation "to confess serious sins at least once a year." Finally, he notes some details as to where the individual sacramental celebration should take place.

**The Focus of the Document**

Quite obviously, the document focuses on two situations: first of all, the devaluation of the sacrament of penance in its individual form, and [second] a condemnation of too broad an interpretation of the conditions allowing for the celebration of the sacrament in its communal form.

The document argues clearly and unequivocally that the individual celebration of the sacrament of penance is the ordinary form of the sacrament. Its other form, namely the communal form, can be offered to the faithful only under conditions of grave necessity. And the too broad interpretation of the latter point, i.e., grave necessity, is exactly what the document warns against. In short, he recalls the classic norms while leaving little room for pastoral interpretation that takes into account the needs of local churches; this amounts to a condemnation of current practice in a great number of parishes.

It seems as well that the document is addressed to certain Canadian dioceses, primarily those in Quebec. Disciplinary reminders to local churches have often been delivered in a document to the universal Church. As far as I know, this form of the sacrament is unknown in many countries, especially in Africa and Latin America. Consequently, we should wonder why such a warning is extended to the universal Church. In fact, we should conclude that the document concerns us directly. Consequently, we are faced with quite a challenge!

**Personal Reflections**

The publication of the motu proprio potentially leads to five considerations:
1. acknowledging the diversity of theological opinions underlying the sacrament of penance;
2. validating the basic reminder that individual absolution is the normal form of the sacrament of penance;
3. admitting that our parishes have not committed themselves to renewing the
individual form of the sacrament of penance as described in the Paul VI Ritual;

4. allowing no consideration for the pastoral value of celebrations known as “communal”; and finally,

5. expressing concern over the omission of the Paul VI Ritual by Rome.

The Diversity of Theological Opinions Underlying the Sacrament of Penance

One of the principal causes of the uneasiness concerning the practice of the sacrament of penance stems from the fact, among others, that a diversity of theological opinions delineates the sacrament. The plurality of expressions surrounding it stands as eloquent proof.

One hears of reconciliation, of forgiveness, of conversion. Especially when addressing children, it has been called the sacrament of peace. What exactly is going on? Are all these terms simply synonyms, or do they manifest diverse realities, sensitivities and mind-sets?

The history of the sacrament seems to suggest a few invaluable leads as to the scope of the present practice in its various aspects: theological, pastoral and spiritual. When Jesus spoke of conversion, he certainly did not have in mind the rite of confession and the many ways it has been practised throughout the history of the Church. To convert meant to be faithful to his Father and to his message of love, mercy and compassion for human beings. It meant to commit to building the kingdom of God.

The earliest Christian communities expressed the commitment through baptism. Early on though, it became obvious that many members of the community did not abide by the teachings of Jesus. Therefore, after considering that baptism could not be repeated, it was resolved that a rite of penance would be instituted allowing reintegration into the community. This was taken as second baptism.

The accent was not on God’s forgiveness but rather on concrete conversion, that is, a renewal of one’s baptismal commitment. This non-renewable and burdensome practice, with its long penances, became obsolete. Faced with this penitential void, Irish missionaries to Spain and other regions of present-day Europe passed on their own penitential custom to their flock, which consisted in confessing their sins and their problems to one another in order to help one another to live according the message of Christ. This was viewed as a real revolution and was condemned by the Council of Toledo in 589.

With time, the practice developed into the individual form which has persisted until now and which, with both its negative and positive aspects, became an important part of the Christian experience. Although all its influences and consequences cannot be listed here, one must be mentioned, namely the manner by which this practice of fostering individual relationship with God caused people to withdraw within themselves. Add to this the great concern of whether or not in the end one was forgiven by God. Unfortunately, many people are still affected by this concern, as it still underlies many pastoral directives.

It seems that we should revert to the original problem of conversion, better translated by “penance” than by “reconciliation.” Being far from popular a term, “penance” might not be a good choice. However, it is the most suitable, since it translates the Greek term metanoia, meaning a radical change, a profound conversion, which, although burdensome at times, leads to a situation of renewal.2 3

2 NBL Editor’s note: i.e. the ritual now in use.
3 NBL Editor’s note: In popular understanding, the word “penance” is often considered to refer to an act of atonement, something involving a degree of unpleasantness and self-punishment. However, the Latin word from which it is derived, paenitentia, means “a turning around,” which the Church applies to an act of the heart and thus to “a change of heart.”
Most importantly, a perspective on the sacrament of penance that promotes conversion must be reached, as it must be seen as reviving the option bound with baptism, confirmation, matrimony, religious vows, ordination, with the relationship directed toward building the kingdom of God, in keeping with the social impact of the Christian experience. Certain documents, sermons, and pastoral instructions confine the faithful to the problem of forgiveness, rather than making them aware of their responsibilities as people of faith, in keeping with the gospel.

Validating the Individual Celebration of Penance

The document recalls the importance and the sound basis of celebrating the sacrament individually. There is cause for rejoicing over this, as long as the directive is not viewed in light of past experience—this being unfortunately the case among the faithful as well as among pastors. To grasp the meaning of this directive, faithful and pastors alike can refer to no model other than those regular confessions of the past, now considered humiliating, cumbersome and, in many cases, short-lived. Conforming to the discipline lacked real commitment to change.

Furthermore, in many instances, how could human reality ever be changed? For instance, is it possible to pray without distractions or to avoid all manner of temptations?

Therefore it would be only too sound to remember that the individual celebration of the sacrament of penance is the normal form of conversion. Of course, in keeping with the Paul VI Ritual, it is to be understood as an authentic encounter between a penitent and a priest for the purpose of discovering the truth about oneself and one's commitment. As stated in the ritual, the purpose of this encounter is not the telling of sins, but rather to pinpoint "the deep-felt motivations of one's choices and dispositions, solidarity and complicity with evil in both its individual and collective characteristics, and to discern what important choices are necessary to set out on the road to conversion."

In light of such a personally involved approach to conversion, the rubrics in the ritual suggest that the priest help the penitent to choose personally a sign of his/her sincere resolve to change. It is not a matter of imposing a penance viewed as "a painful compensation turned toward the past, but rather as a freely accepted first step heralding a new situation and reconciliation within the Church."

The present Roman discipline follows the Christian tradition obliging the faithful, at least since the Middle Ages, to confess mortal sins. This certainly can be interpreted in a legal perspective, such as it often was and still is. However, it can be understood as achieving a renewed spiritual and pastoral purpose. Confessing one's mortal sins to a priest does not mean to "sneak them in" hastily, but rather to take time to take stock of one's life …

1. by pinpointing those elements out of sync with one's obligations;
2. by praying with the priest to solicit the help of the Spirit, prompting the person's inner self;
3. by asking for the priest's advice concerning complex life-situations brought about by a lapse from the gospel.

It seems obvious that a sacramental experience of this sort cannot occur very often. Personal conversions do not happen on a weekly basis. Indeed, deep-rooted conversion takes time. And the encounter itself demands a minimum of time way

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4 NBL editor's note: The word "option" here is intended in its strongest sense, i.e. a life changing choice.
6 Op. cit., p. 36
A Reflection on the *Motu Proprio, Misericordia Dei*

beyond serial confessions heard before and during the eucharist. Besides, referring to a document issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium* in his pastoral notes, Paul VI “invites Christians to confess preferably outside the celebration of Mass.”\(^7\) Clearly, this seems to indicate that the sacrament of penance in its individual form requires some time.

In keeping with the teachings of John Paul II, and as stated in the *motu proprio*, individual confession is the most appropriate means of taking serious stock of one’s life as a whole. This, incidentally, only reflects the traditional teaching of the Church and its general practice. The Church has encouraged the confessing of so-called venial sins, yet it has never made it compulsory. Even the Council of Trent recognized the reconciliation outreach of the eucharist concerning mortal sins, this should apply all the more to venial sins. In fact, referring to the eucharist as the visible sacrifice in atonement for the living and the dead, the Council of Trent states: “Appeased by the offering of this sacrifice, the Lord, in granting the grace and the gift of penance, remits crimes and sins, even the most grievous.”\(^8\)

In practice, John Paul II’s directive endorses traditional teaching, providing it is not extended to all sinful situations, and especially not to imperfections, as it was even in the not so distant past.

**Deficient Investing in the Renewal of This Form of Conversion**

A more far-reaching presentation of the direction given in the Paul VI Ritual would be in order but is beyond the scope of this article. However, such a study was published in *Études canadiennes en liturgie*.\(^9\)

In view of how important the individual form of the sacrament of penance is, it must be acknowledged that our faith communities did not adequately attempt to revive the spiritual, theological and pastoral ends of this form of penance—for one simple reason. Following the 1983 Synod on penance and reconciliation, there arose expectations of a major opening toward communal celebrations. General disappointment followed, since in his apostolic exhortation John Paul II had recalled that “The first form—reconciliation of individual penitents—is the only normal and ordinary way of celebrating the sacrament, and it cannot and must not be allowed to fall into disuse or be neglected.”\(^10\) Such dissatisfaction is easily understood, since such a directive could only be evaluated from past experience, and earlier negative and traumatizing experiences were still too vivid in most memories. For the Paul VI Ritual to be properly implemented, there should have been, and there still should be, a collective loss of memory of past experiences of the sacrament of penance, in the same manner that pastors and faithful take time to re-evaluate their lives in light of the gospel.

According to many accounts, young people at the World Youth Day in Toronto [in 2002] experienced a type of reconciliation more in keeping with the new ritual than according to the cumbersome and humiliating rite of the past; they intended to review their lives in light of Jesus Christ assisted by a spiritual guide.

In spite of the general lack of investing in the sacrament of penance renewal, we must, in all fairness, recognize efforts made by many pastors, especially in lay organizations, pilgrimage sites, and in certain

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\(^7\) Op. cit., p. 30 (RR 13).


\(^10\) Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, n. 32.
A Reflection on the Motu Proprio, Misericordia Dei

Parishes, who innovated by making available areas for confession in lieu of traditional confessionals. This allowed for a new type of priest-penitent encounter in keeping with the direction suggested in the Paul VI Ritual.

However, another reason should be taken into account. The individual form was replaced by the communal form as if both were the same. Yet the Paul VI Ritual states quite clearly that one and the other refer to two distinct spiritual experiences and have no common objective. In my opinion, this is one of the main reasons why one form was adopted while the other was rejected, whereas they should have been considered as complementary, as the Canadian bishops had requested at the 1983 Synod. 11 This illustrates why the faithful put aside the individual form of the sacrament and demanded a less burdensome and therefore more meaningful practice. Pastors responded to this demand by investing in the preparation of communal celebrations, especially during Advent and Lent. The obvious consequence today is that the celebration of individual confession has become very sporadic, to the extent of nearly vanishing, and has been replaced by communal celebrations. Going back now seems almost impossible.

Lack of Evaluating Celebration Known as "Communal"

A reading of the present Roman document leaves one a bit bewildered by its restriction to the strictly legal aspect of the celebration. Indeed, there is no mention at all of a serious pastoral evaluation of this new practice. Nevertheless, the earnest, serious preparation given to these celebrations has to be taken into account: proclamation of and meditation on gospel passages, moments of reflection, developing awareness of life situations above and beyond the traditional examination of conscience preceding individual confession.

Pastors who have presided at this form of celebration concur as to the earnest spiritual quality of the method. And the faithful are in agreement, for they live out a profound experience to their great satisfaction. Moreover, it often initiates individual moves toward "seeking the most appropriate steps to be taken for a genuine conversion to Christ and to clarify new life-direction, in grave and complicated situations." 12

Concern over the Omission of the Paul VI Ritual in the Roman Documents

In keeping with the Council's request that sacramental rituals be redone, Pope Paul VI promulgated the ritual of penance, Ordo Paenitentiae, on December 2, 1973. In French, it was approved by the Francophone Bishops' Conferences, following a lot of work on the part of the International Francophone Commission. The new ritual was approved by the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on June 14, 1978. 13

Therefore, there is cause for concern over the silence of Rome regarding this ritual. All subsequent documents make no mention of it. John Paul II's apostolic exhortation on penance and reconciliation makes no mention of it, nor do the Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church. This all the more astonishing, since Roman documents usually accommodate tradition by relying on documents from the Councils or previous papal writings.

Yet there is no denying the theological, spiritual and pastoral riches of this ritual, which cannot be wholly described here.


13 NBL editor's note: The Canadian English translation (unchanged from the ICEL text), entitled "The Rite of Penance," was published in 1975 only in paperback and is now out of print.
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However, a few more meaningful points should be broached. First of all, the ritual views the issue as a question of conversion and not only of forgiveness. It does so by recalling that Christian tradition has always fostered numerous means of conversion. The ritual mentions “multiple forms of mutual forgiveness, sharing, through various forms of support services, all-out efforts to overcome one’s selfishness, rejecting injustice and the struggle for more justice in our interpersonal and social relationships, apostolic commitment implying a spirit of service and self-giving, prayer as a sign of hope in a future viewed as set out for us by God, in spite of our break downs and our confrontations.”

Moreover, the various forms of the sacrament are viewed as complementary. And, as a most innovative measure, individual confession is viewed as a pursuit for truth and not as an easy way out. The ritual aims at making confession neither easy nor less cumbersome. It aims rather at revealing one’s real situation regarding the message of Jesus. From this perspective, the process requires time and serious dialogue with the priest. In turn, the priest, besides his knowledge of theology and his own personal experience, should take into account what human sciences such as psychology and sociology have to offer.

It is therefore rather surprising and unfortunate that this ritual was ignored, since it promised such a meaningful renewal of the Christian experience of conversion. Perhaps it was too advanced for the times! And only time will tell.

**What’s in Store for the Sacrament of Penance?**

Predicting what will become of the sacrament of penance is very difficult. In spite of often warranted and admittedly justified comments of historians of Christianity, the sacrament has played an important role in Christian experience. Let us venture to advance a few paths toward an *aggiornamento* of this Christian process.

1. Undoubtedly, it will be difficult to backtrack. No one wants to relive past experiences. Never again will long lines of penitents be seen waiting to confess their sins hastily and anonymously. This type of experience is long gone, and solutions must be sought elsewhere. Celebrations known as communal offered a meaningful alternative for most good people of faith. Aware of their limitations, they wished to be challenged by the gospel and reminded that, in spite of their sins, the Lord renewed his confidence in them. On the other hand, history tells us that, with time, the sacrament evolved mostly according to very different mind-sets and theological or spiritual sentiments that came and went in succession. This is particularly true of our own times, constantly generating swift cultural change. There is reason therefore to let ourselves be challenged by a new culture many documents recommend whether issued by the Canadian and Quebec bishops or by Rome.

2. As emphasized in this article, there must be an investing in the renewal of individual form of the sacrament of penance in light of the Paul VI Ritual. In this regard, an appropriation of this ritual is necessary to ensure it is adequately implemented.

3. The pastoral and spiritual goals of the different forms of the sacrament should be well defined, and especially they must not be confused as they have so often been until now. Only after this distinction is made clear will the substance of the different forms of the sacrament as well as other means of conversion be implemented as complementary. One of the major factors causing the desertion of the

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individual form stems precisely from the confusion of the spiritual and pastoral goals of the different forms of the sacrament. Individual confession has taken over all means of conversion and all categories of sin. In such a context, many faithful have diminished it to mere piety, thus demeaning the sacrament itself.

4. As stated in the ritual, in keeping with tradition, it is necessary to rediscover and to make known all the resources of Christian conversion. Although it is a summit of conversion, the sacrament of penance is not the whole and does not rule out other resources of conversion. Moreover, an important reminder is that tradition has never obliged the confessing of venial sins. It was encouraged but never imposed.

5. There is reason not to get tied up in the problem of forgiveness as it still too often happens. On the contrary, all penitential efforts must be viewed as steps to an ongoing conversion, as is the case for sacramental reconciliation.

6. Legal language certainly has its merits. Again however, it is not the "be-all and end-all". On the contrary, all legal language must be translated into a pastoral idiom. In this regard, a good model of this is the Paul VI Ritual, at least in its 1978 French version. It sets the whole penitential process in a rich theological and pastoral perspective.

May the motu proprio issued by John Paul II instigate us to reflect on our procedures toward conversion to the message of Jesus, as well as to be challenged considering our intellectual and pastoral investments in an aggiomamento of the sacrament of penance among other means of conversion found in the Christian tradition.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Is there anything in this article that surprises you?
2. Has this article had any influence on your understanding of the sacrament of penance?
3. Has this article raised any questions within you concerning the sacrament of penance?
4. If you have any memory of the celebration of the sacrament of penance before the Council, which of the changes described in this article has had the most profound effect on your experience of it since the Council?
5. If you have no memory of the celebration of the sacrament of penance before the Council, which of the changes described in this article seems the most indispensable?
6. To what extent has the celebration of the sacrament of penance really changed in the last 40 years?
7. What still needs more work?
8. What continues to cause you concern or tension?
Pastoral Care of the Sick and Dying:

A Gift for Deeper Appropriation

James Donohue

Introduction

The rites of anointing the sick and viaticum were revised within the post-conciliar liturgical reform of the rites of the sick, the dying, and burial. The emergence of these reformed rites as they appear in the 1983 Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum (hereafter PCS) is the result of the adaptations made to the 1972 Latin editio typica of Ordo Uctionis infirmorum eorumque pastoralis curae (hereafter OUI), which itself was a revision of the 1614 Rituale Romanum.

The 1614 Roman Ritual took shape from the efforts at reform and unity, which followed the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Promulgated by the bull Apostolicae Sedis on June 17, 1614, the Rituale Romanum of Pope Paul V gradually replaced local diocesan rituals and gained an almost universal status, remaining virtually unchanged until the reforms following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

Title V in the 1614 Ritual is devoted to the care of the sick and the dying. Title V includes introductory notes on the sacrament of extreme unction, the rite of its ministration, the seven penitential psalms, the litany of the saints, the visitation and care of the sick, the spiritual ways to assist the dying, the order of the commendation of the soul, and the prayers for the final departure of the soul.

Communion of the dying, under the name viaticum, is treated with communion to the sick in Title IV as part of the section on the Blessed Sacrament. Hence, the 1614 Ritual separates the rite of viaticum

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1 Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum, the Roman Ritual Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI, Approved for Use in the Dioceses of Canada by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See, Prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983).
3 Rituale Romanum Pauli V. Pont. Max. ivssv editum (Rome: Ex Typographia Reuerendae Cameræ Apostolicae, 1614; Paris: CIPOL, Centre international de publications oecuméniques des liturgies, Documents en microfiches, 1973). [There are no title or chapter numbers in this edition of the 1614 Ritual; they were introduced in the nineteenth century. As new material is included in the 1614 Ritual in the form of either a new title (such as Title III, Confirmation, in the 1952 edition) or a new chapter (such as chapter six, Apostolic Blessing, in the 1752 edition), the numbering of titles and chapters continued to change.]

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from the other rites that were used to assist the dying as the hour of death approached. It should also be noted that none of the rites mentioned here constitute a ritus continuus (uninterrupted rite with all the various parts) as is found in more ancient orders, such as Ordo Romanus XLIX (ca. 800).4

Reforms of Vatican II

Approximately 350 years after the promulgation of the 1614 Ritual, the Second Vatican Council called for a general restoration of the liturgy. Sacrosanctum Concilium, in Article 73, called for a change in the name of the sacrament—a development that would lead to a more scriptural, historical, and pastoral understanding—and voiced its concern that the sacrament not be reserved for those at the point of death, but be made available for the faithful who begin to be in danger of death from sickness or old age.5

In Article 74, the Conciliar Fathers foresaw separate rites for anointing the sick and for viaticum, as well as a continuous rite wherein a sick person is anointed after celebrating the sacrament of penance and before receiving viaticum.6 For its part, Article 75 recognizes that the anointing rite will be used in different circumstances that correspond to the varying conditions of the sick person, and that prayers that accompany anointing should be revised accordingly.7

These recommendations to provide revised rites for both sickness and dying were put into effect by the promulgation of the OUI of 1972. Prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), they were adapted and approved for Canadian use in the 1983 ritual book (PCS)—Part I treats the Pastoral Care of the Sick and Part II treats the Pastoral Care of the Dying.

Outline of the Reform of the OUI and the PCS

US Edition

The Foreword to the American publication of the PCS notes the special features of the American PCS, in relation to the OUI. While substantially a translation of the Latin editio typica of the OUI, it has been expanded for greater pastoral effectiveness.8 This adaptation also includes original English texts, which address pastoral circumstances not fore-

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5 The Latin text, found in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, ed. Norman P. Tanner, trans. Edward Yamold (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:834, reads: "Extrema unctio, quae etiam et melius 'unctio infirmorum' vocari potest, non est sacramentum eorum tantum qui in extremo vitae discrimine versantur. Primaque tempus opportunum eam reddituriam certa habetur cum fidelis in, in periculo mortis proper infraitus ad senium." The English translation, found in the same work, 2:834, reads: "Final anointing,' which can also and better be called 'anointing of the sick,' is not a sacrament exclusively for those who are involved in the final crisis of life and death. There can be no doubt that the point when a Christian begins to be in danger of death, either through illness or old age, is already a suitable time to receive it."

6 The Latin text, found in ibid., reads: "Praeter ritus sanctissimae unctionis infirmorum et viatici, consciantur ordo continuus secundum quem unctio aegrotus conferatur post confessionem et ante receptionem viatici." The English translation, found in the same work, reads: "To supplement the separate rites of the anointing of the sick and communion for the dying, a continuous rite is to be drawn up, in which a sick person will be anointed after making a confession and before receiving communion."

7 The Latin text, found in ibid., reads: "Uncionum numeros pro opportunitate accommodate, et orationes ad ritum unctionis infirmorum pertinentes ita recognoscantur, ut respondant variis conditionibus infirmorum, qui sacramentum suscipiant." The English translation, found in the same work, reads: "The number of anointings should be whatever suits the occasion, and the prayers which belong to the rite of anointing should be revised in such a way as to meet the differing circumstances of the sick people who receive the sacrament."

seen in the Latin edition or in the provisional English edition of 1973. Further, the PCS includes texts from other parts of the Roman Ritual. In addition, the texts in this volume have been arranged, in accord with the directive of the Praenotanda (Introduction), in a format that will be as suitable as possible for pastoral use (38f). Finally, the PCS follows the Praenotanda's directive by adding other texts of the same kind, whenever the Latin Ritual gives several alternative texts (39).

**Canadian Edition**

The editorial notes supplied in the Canadian edition of the PCS provide some additional explanations that assist in the better use and interpretation of the ICEL edition. Of significance is the second editorial note, which indicates that each rite is given in its full and preferred form as the proper and normal way of celebration with members of the believing community. A shorter form is also given, but for use in emergencies and other occasions that may arise in the care of sick and dying Christians.

**Structure**

After the General Introduction, the 1983 PCS is divided into three parts:

- Part I: Pastoral Care of the Sick,
- Part II: Pastoral Care of the Dying, and
- Part III: Readings, Responses and Verses from Sacred Scripture, with an appendix containing the Rite of Reconciliation.

Table 1 (see p. 167) provides the Table of Contents from the 1972 OUI and the 1983 PCS in order to visualize how the rites in the Latin editio typica have been re-organized and altered in the edition prepared by ICEL.

One clear difference is that the ICEL Ritual has provided a format which joins initiation, penance, anointing of the sick, visits to the sick, viaticum, commendation of the dying, and prayers immediately following death, into one ordo. Mary Collins has pointed out that, at the very least, the concept of ordo involves the recognition of a larger pastoral plan, within which a variety of liturgies are appropriately celebrated. Collins identifies the central issue for this liturgical rite from its title: human sickness and the many ways that the Church can be present to those who are sick.

ICEL has also divided its chapters into two parts that are specifically directed for care of the sick and for care of the dying. In addition, under “Part I: Pastoral Care of the Sick,” the 1983 PCS has organized its chapters differently from the 1972 Latin editio typica, providing separate chapters for visits to the sick and for communion of the sick, while also including a new chapter for visits to a sick child. Under “Part II: Pastoral Care of the Dying,” the 1983 PCS has included a new chapter, “Prayers for the Dead.”

Furthermore, the 1983 PCS has replaced the 1972 OUI's De Confirmatione in periculo mortis with the rite of Christian Initiation for the Dying, which no longer stands as its own chapter but is now located within Chapter Eight: Rites for Exceptional Circumstances. By including the chapter of Rites for Exceptional Circumstances as its last chapter in the part devoted to the care of the dying, the

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9 Cummins, 9.
10 Cummins, 9.
11 Cummins, 9. The Latin text, found in OUI, 38f, reads: "In editionibus librorum liturgicorum cura Conferentiarum Episcoporum parandis, materiam ordinare modo qui ad usum pastoralem aptissimus videantur." 
12 Cummins, 9. The Latin text, found in OUI, 39, reads: "Quando Rituale Romanum plures exhibet formulas ad libitum, Ritualia particularia possunt alias formulas eiusdem generis adicere." 
13 PCS, viii.
1983 PCS more clearly signals that Thus, these rites are meant to be used, not as the norm or as an alternative on a par with the other rites, but in truly exceptional circumstances when the usual care for the dying has been neglected or rendered impossible due to circumstances.

Reform of the Rites of Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum/Commendation

Among the various post-conciliar rites devoted to the care of the sick and the dying, let us focus upon Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum (with the Commendation of the Dying), since these were the rites specifically named in Sacrosanctum Concilium. Attending to the revisions suggested by the Introduction and the rites themselves, we can also make some assessment of the reformed rites and how they are appropriated.

Anointing of the Sick

Although there are many different aspects of anointing of the sick that one may investigate, I would like to examine three areas that call for continued attention in the future:

- the restoration of anointing as a sacrament for the sick,
- the proper minister of the sacrament, and
- the role of the community.

A Rite for the Sick

We have already pointed out the conciliar directive, found in Article 73, that the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is to be administered, “when a Christian begins to be in danger of death, either through illness or old age, [for then it] is already a suitable time to receive it.” The General Introduction of the 1972 OUI gives evidence that this directive was followed, especially in no. 8, which states:

Therefore with every effort and diligence, this holy anointing is to be conferred on the faithful who are dangerously sick on account of infirmity or old age. Truly, to discern the gravity that pertains to the sickness, it is sufficient that a prudent or probable judgment of it be made, without scruple; and, if necessary, after having consulted with a doctor. 15

A footnote from ICEL in the PCS, 8, states: “the word periculose was carefully studied and rendered as ‘seriously,’ rather than as ‘gravely,’ ‘dangerously,’ or ‘perilously.” It would seem that the “careful study” by ICEL has introduced a change of meaning for “periculose,” which means danger of death, remote, perhaps, but real. This interpretation has found its way into our pastoral practice, wherein those who are “seriously” ill, and not only “dangerously” ill, are the subjects of anointing. Indeed, pastoral practice in many places seems to take an even more liberal interpretation, in part, recognizing the various types and broad sorts of illnesses from which people suffer.

The Praenotanda then lists several specific cases in which the sacrament should be administered:

- when the sick person recovers after being anointed and then again falls ill, or if during the same illness the person’s condition becomes more serious (9);
- when facing surgery whenever a serious illness is the reason for the surgery (10);
- when elderly people have become notably weaker even though no serious illness is present (11);

15 This is my translation of the Latin text, found in OUI, 8, which reads: “Omni ergo studio ac diligentia haec sacra Unctio conferenda est fidelibus qui propter infirmitatem vel senium periculose aegrosant. Ad gravitatem vero aegrationis diuidicandum quod attinet, saitis est ut prudens seu probabile de ea judicium habeatur, quibusvis remottis ansietatibus et collatis consilitis, si casus ferat, cum medico.” In the English translation of the 1972 OUI, found in Adolf Knauber, Pastoral Theology of the Anointing of the Sick, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1975), 23, this part of article 8 is translated as follows: “There should be special care and concern that those who are dangerously ill due to sickness or old age receive this sacrament.”
Table 1: Table of Contents of the 1972 OUI and the 1983 PCS

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1 Original Latin has been translated for easier comparison.

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when children who have sufficient reason to be strengthened by this sacrament are sick (12).

Article 13 urges that the faithful should be advised to ask for the sacrament and not follow the wrongful practice of delaying its reception. Hence, although the 1972 OUI wavers in some places,\(^\text{16}\) it has followed the directive of the Council by restoring the sacrament of anointing as a sacrament for the sick, not for the dying. This is most clearly stated in the Introduction to “Part II: Pastoral Care for the Dying,” where it maintains: “If death is imminent it should be remembered that viaticum rather than anointing is the sacrament of the dying” (174).

In a recent article, John M. Huels notes that after nearly thirty years since the reform of the rites for the sick, the mistaken notion still persists that the anointing of the sick is the last rite of the Church.\(^\text{17}\) While this is partly due to the centuries-old practice of delaying anointing until the point of death, Huels suggests that the notion persists for reasons that lie deeper than historical memory and practice. He points to the erroneous but commonly held conviction among Catholics that those anointed just before death go straight to heaven as the reason for the persistent practice of delaying anointing. Huels notes that from both the Letter of James and the Church's teaching, we know that anointing is connected to the forgiveness of sins, but neither Church doctrine nor mainstream Catholic theology has ever held that the anointing remits grave sins without contrition.\(^\text{18}\)

After a careful study of the need for faith, repentance, and conversion of heart when participating in the sacraments, Huels concludes:

Evidently the anointing of the sick does not make a saint out of an unrepentant sinner. There is no “free ticket” to heaven. That is a magical idea with no foundation in the Scriptures or Church doctrine, yet it is persistent and pervasive.\(^\text{19}\)

What might be done, pastorally, to combat this myth and restore the anointing of the sick as a sacrament primarily for the sick and not the dying? Huels makes several good suggestions, although they are also daunting challenges. The first is directed to all those involved in Christian formation. As is clearly stated in Praenotanda of the PCS, each in his or her own way must continue to educate, form, and remind the faithful that the optimal time for the anointing of the sick is at the onset of a serious illness.\(^\text{20}\)

In public and private catechesis, the faithful should be educated to ask for the sacrament of anointing and, as soon as the right time comes, to receive it with full faith and devotion. They should not follow the wrongful practice of delaying the reception of the sacrament. All who care for the sick should be taught the meaning and purpose of the sacrament (13).

Huels’ second suggestion is directed to all who are involved in pastoral ministry. He calls for more communal celebrations, at either the parish or deanery level. More

\(^\text{16}\) Vestiges of the use of the sacrament of anointing as a sacrament for the dying appear in the Praenotanda in article 15 where the priest is instructed to anoint conditionally if he is doubtful whether the sick person is dead, and in article 30 where if death is imminent, the priest is instructed to enable the person to make a confession, receive viaticum, and then, if there is sufficient time, be anointed.


\(^\text{18}\) Huels, 103–104.

\(^\text{19}\) Huels, 105.

\(^\text{20}\) Huels, 106.
Pastoral Care of the Sick and Dying

regular communal celebrations will provide occasions to explain that this sacrament is primarily for the sick, and indeed, will afford more opportunities for the seriously ill to receive the sacrament before they are hospitalized in a critical condition. 21

A third, very practical, suggestion that we can take from Huels is directed to those involved in health care ministry. He suggests that a leaflet be printed that would list on one side all the rites and services for the sick and on the other side all the rites and services for the dying. This practice would serve both to educate people about the appropriate rites of the Church for the sick and dying, as well as maximize the effectiveness of the ministry offered to the sick and the dying. 22

The Proper Minister

Current practice insists that the priest is the only proper minister of the anointing of the sick (16). Priests—with the assistance of religious and laity—have the pastoral responsibility both of preparing and helping the sick and others who are present, and of celebrating the sacrament (17). The Introduction notes that priests have a duty to care for the sick by personal visits and other acts of kindness, but it is especially when they minister the sacraments that priests should stir up the hope of those present and strengthen their faith in Christ who suffered and is glorified (35).

Certain aspects of our current conditions have continued to focus attention on the proper minister of anointing of the sick:

- the renewal of the anointing rite,
- the shortage of priests,
- the restoration of the permanent diaconate, and
- the increased number of laity and religious who minister in health care settings.

The work of Charles W. Gusmer is representative of those theologians who studied this question, shortly after the reform of the rites for the sick and dying. He cites historical precedent, where for 800 years, more attention was given to blessing the oil by the bishop than to the prayer over the sick conjoined with the anointing, and where no apparent distinction between the anointing by the priest or by lay people was made.

Gusmer also includes discussion by theologians who studied the teaching of the Council of Trent 23 to ascertain whether this is an infallible or reformable statement. In addition, he explores a suggestion originally made by Paul Palmer that "proper minister" is the ex officio or ordinary minister of the sacrament. This interpretation would leave room for other ministers to anoint in emergencies, as in the case of baptism, where even a non-Christian may validly baptize in emergencies, when he or she has the intention of doing what the Church does. 24

With a different approach, John Huels reports that among others, the German bishops have, in the past, requested that deacons be permitted to anoint the sick. In addition, the Bishops' Committee on

21 Huels, 107.
22 Huels, 110-111. The pamphlet that Huels suggests is actually quite extensive. For the sick, for example, one might list, in addition to counseling services, regular liturgical services, such as the celebration of the Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick, and rites available when a minister (clerical or lay) is on call, such as the Order of the Blessing of the Sick, the Rite of Holy Communion outside Mass, etc.
23 The pertinent text, found in Tanner, 2:713, reads: "If anyone says that the presbyters of the church who, as blessed James enjoins, should be brought in to anoint the sick person, are not priests who have been ordained by a bishop, but the elders in any community; and that on that account the proper minister of last anointing is not exclusively a priest: let him be anathema."

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the Permanent Diaconate of the NCCB petitioned the Holy See for the faculty to allow deacons to anoint.25

Despite these various avenues of investigation, Huels concludes, from his own study, that, "a pope or an ecumenical council could reexamine the issue, but I think it unlikely that it will be addressed soon."26 Indeed, Huels cites two recent documents (the 1997 Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Lay Faithful in the Ministry of Priests, and the 1998 Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons of the Congregation for the Clergy) that would indicate that the Holy See considers the matter closed.27

The Role of the Community

In May, 2001, the National Association of Catholic Chaplains gathered in Baltimore to hold an international symposium on the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. There are 3,400 chaplains in the NACC. Of these, 70 percent are board certified, 70 percent are women, 48 percent are religious, 32 percent are laity, 17 percent are priests, and 3 percent are deacons.28

Joseph Driscoll, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the NACC reports the mixed feelings of many at the symposium: on one hand, there were these faithful men and women who, in our post-Vatican II Church, have responded to a baptismal call to pastoral care ministry; and, on the other hand, there were the frustrations from their experience that, with fewer ordained priests in chaplaincy, and with priests in parishes already stretched with the decline in their numbers, the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing were becoming less available—even in places where health care administrators and religious sponsors rightly viewed sacramental care as core to the mission of Catholic health care.29

In the midst of their frustration, however, Driscoll noted a pivotal moment—a shift in energy—when John Huels raised a serious challenge to the chaplains in a question he posed: "Instead of asking what you [chaplains] can't do, why not focus on what you can do?"30 This is fertile ground to explore, for it points to the roles and ministries that various members in the community are called to in the pastoral care of the sick and dying. In fact, the Praenotanda details the pastoral assistance that the entire Christian community should render to the sick and dying. It reminds all baptized Christians that they share in the ministry of mutual charity within the body of Christ:

• by doing all that they can to help the sick to return to health;
• by showing love for the sick; and
• by celebrating the sacraments with them (33).

The family and friends of the sick and

25 Huels, 87. See John J. Ziegler, Let Them Anoint the Sick (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1987), 1. Ziegler reports that "the response was strongly in the negative."
26 Huels, 87, note 15.
27 Huels, 87. I am indebted to Huels' article for these references. The first document, found in Origins 27 (1997-1998) 397, 399-409, states: "With regard to the administration of this sacrament [of the anointing of the sick], canon law reiterates the theologically certain doctrine and the custom of the Church of many centuries that regards the priest as its only valid minister .... It must also be affirmed that the reservation of the ministry of anointing to the priest is related to the connection of this sacrament to the forgiveness of sins and the worthy reception of the holy Eucharist. In no way can another person act as ordinary or extraordinary minister of the sacrament, for such constitutes simulation of the sacrament." The second statement, issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education and Congregation for the Clergy, on February 22, 1998, states: "It is defined doctrine that the administration of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is reserved to bishops and priests since this sacrament involves the forgiveness of sins and the worthy reception of the holy Eucharist" (34).
29 Driscoll, viii.
30 Driscoll, ix.
those who take care of them have a special share in this ministry:
• strengthening the sick with words of faith;
• praying with them;
• commending them to the suffering and glorified Lord;
• encouraging them to contribute to the well-being of the people of God by associating themselves willingly with Christ’s passion and death;
• informing the pastor of their condition; and
• prudently disposing the sick for the reception of the sacraments at the proper time (34).

Indeed, because of its very nature as a sign, the sacrament should be celebrated in the midst of the family and representatives of the Christian community whenever possible, for then it will more clearly signify this experience as the prayer of the Church and an encounter with the Lord (99).31

Health care workers, chaplains, family, friends, liturgical ministers, and representatives of the Christian community all have a role and contribute to the pastoral care of the sick. To the extent that they are all able to participate fully, consciously, and actively in the care of the sick person and in the liturgy of the anointing, the reformed rite of anointing will be more fittingly celebrated, for then Christians will be able to exercise mutual charity—providing assistance to one who suffers, and who, at the same time, gives witness to his or her willingness to conform him or herself to Christ’s passion and death.

Vaticum and Commendation of the Dying
Perhaps of all the reformed rites made available for the sick and the dying, viaticum, and its complement, the Commendation of the Dying, are the most neglected. In this section, I would like to examine the changes that these rites underwent in the reform and highlight their meaning for the dying Christian. Afterwards, I would like to make a few pastoral suggestions concerning the use of these rites for the dying.

The 1614 Rituale Romanum
In the 1614 Ritual, there are a number of sacramental rites that are devoted to the care of the dying: confession and absolution, viaticum, extreme unction, and the commendation of the soul.

Among the rites, attention should be given to the placement of the commendation rite in relation to viaticum and anointing. In the 1614 Ritual, communion given as viaticum is a distinct rite, separated from the other rites of the dying. Unlike more ancient rites, it was no longer provided as the immediate preparation for death, but was to be used early in the course of grave illness, and perhaps repeated. In addition, the communion rite itself was a penitential rite that emphasized the forgiveness of sin, deliverance from pain and punishment, and the need for protection against the enemy. These concerns are illustrated in the formula used when communicating the dying: “Receive brother, or sister, the food for your journey, the Body of our Lord

31 Care for the dying is no less a ministry for the whole Christian community. Echoing the Praenotanda’s 33, the 1972 Introduction to the Ordo commendationis morientium indicates that charity impels Christians to express communion with their dying brother or sister, imploring the mercy of God and confidence in Christ (138). The parallel text in the 1983 PCS speaks of the responsibility that Christians have of expressing their union with Christ by joining the dying person in prayer for God’s mercy and confidence in Christ (213). Furthermore, the 1972 Praenotanda, and its 1983 counterpart, indicate that priests and deacons, with the dying person’s family and friends, are to assist the dying person to recite the prayers of commendation and expiration, for their presence shows more clearly that the Christian dies in the communion of the Church (OUI, 142; PCS, 213). Specificaly, it notes that in the absence of a priest or deacon, other members of the community should be prepared to carry out this ministry (OUI, 142; PCS, 213). The introductory notes to “Part II: Pastoral Care of the Dying,” in the 1983 PCS, reiterate the importance of the efforts of priests, other ministers, and family and friends in the care of the dying (162), reminding the faithful that the Christian community has a continuing responsibility to pray for and with the person who is dying (163).
Jesus Christ. May he keep/preserve you from the wicked enemy, and lead you into everlasting life.”

We should also note that the 1614 Ritual provides extreme unction as a sacrament of preparation for the dying, wherein this anointing (unctio) would be received by those who seem near death (in extremis). Following the administration of extreme unction, a rite whose focus is on the forgiveness of sins, spiritual healing, and protection from the evil one, the commendation rite sought to move the dying person to a deeper personal conversion as assurance for forgiveness of sins, for deliverance from the pains and punishments of hell, and for hope and confidence in everlasting life.

Table 2: The 1614 Rituale Romanum Arrangement of Rites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confession and Absolution</th>
<th>Vaticum</th>
<th>Extreme Uction</th>
<th>Commendation of the Soul</th>
<th>Prayers on Expiration</th>
<th>Funeral Rites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The 1972 OUI and the 1983 PCS

The ritual context of viaticum and the commendation rite for the dying has changed in the post-conciliar rites, relative to their position among the rites of 1614. In that Ritual, the commendation of the soul is used after a number of sacramental rites that are devoted to the care of the dying: confession and absolution, viaticum, and extreme unction. In comparison, the commendation rite in the 1972 OUI (the Latin editio typica) and the 1983 PCS follows the sacraments of anointing of the sick and viaticum.

Table 3: The 1972 OUI and the 1983 PCS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anointing of the Sick</th>
<th>Viaticum</th>
<th>Commendation of the Dying</th>
<th>Prayers on Expiration</th>
<th>Prayers after Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In contrast to the 1614 Ritual’s order of rites for the dying, the 1972 OUI and the 1983 PCS provide a different arrangement. In the first place, while provision is made to celebrate the sacrament of penance before the sacraments of anointing of the sick and viaticum (OUI, 65 and 100; PCS, 101 and 187), the rite itself is given as an appendix in the 1983 PCS. Secondly, as we have noted above, following the prescription of Sacrosanctum Concilium, 73, the sacrament of anointing of the sick in the 1972 OUI and the 1983 PCS is restored as a true sacrament of the sick, administered to the seriously sick, not to those facing imminent death. This is reflected in the arrangement of rites in the 1983 PCS, where the sacrament of the anointing of the sick appears in “Part I: Pastoral Care of the Sick,” and not in “Part II: Pastoral Care of the Dying.”

Further, the post-conciliar reforms clearly indicate that if death is imminent, viaticum, rather than anointing, is considered the sacrament of the dying (PCS, 174). This stands in sharp contrast to the former rites of extreme unction and the commendation of the soul. Following the administration of extreme unction, a rite whose focus is on the forgiveness of sins, spiritual healing, and protection from the evil one, the 1614 Ritual’s commendation rite sought to move the dying person to a deeper personal conversion as assurance for the forgiveness of sins, for deliverance from the pains and punish-

32 The Latin text, found in RR, 55, reads: “Accipe frater, vel soror, Vaticum Corporis Domini nostri IESV Christi, qui te custodiat ab hoste maligno, et perducat in vitam aeternam.”
ments of hell, and for hope and confidence in everlasting life.

Thirdly, in contrast to the 1614 Ritual, which provided viaticum early in the course of grave illness, the 1972 OUI and the 1983 PCS see viaticum as a rite for the dying, which immediately precedes the commendation rite. Again, this is particularly clear in the arrangement of rites in the 1983 PCS, where the Celebration of Viaticum is located in Part II, Chapter Five, which immediately precedes the Commendation of the Dying, located in Chapter Six (see Table 1). In addition to retrieving the more ancient pattern of viaticum-commendation,\(^3\) the post-conciliar reforms restore viaticum as a sacrament of passage, in the strength of which a person passes through death with Christ, going from this world to the Father in the hope of resurrection (PCS, 175). No longer a rite of remote preparation for death concerned with preparing the dying person for death by providing pardon, absolution, and remission of sins, warding off the power of the enemy, and alleviating the fear of punishment after death with the hope of everlasting life, the post-conciliar rite of viaticum is celebrated as a more proximate rite for the dying, and is restored as a rite of passage in which the dying person, united with Christ, is strengthened with the body and blood of Christ in the hope of the resurrection (PCS, 26).

In its new ritual context, the commendation of the dying complements and seeks to sustain what has been realized in the preceding rite of viaticum. In viaticum, the dying person is united with Christ in his passage out of this world to the Father. Now, the Church, through the prayers and readings of the commendation of the dying, seeks to sustain this union until it is brought to fulfillment after death, assisting the dying person to overcome the natural human fear and anxiety concerning death that increases as the moment of death approaches (PCS, 212 and 215).

### Pastoral Suggestions

Following the pastoral suggestions made earlier, the celebration of viaticum and its complement, the Commendation of the Dying, would be enhanced through increased Christian education about these rites and their benefits, both for the dying and the community—family, friends, and local community—who negotiate this difficult loss of one of their members.

Secondly, there is room in these rites for the dying to include more devotional prayers that may be familiar and helpful to the dying person and his or her family and friends. The “Salve Regina” is the only devotional element left in the 1972 OUI’s and the 1983 PCS’s commendation rites. By contrast, the 1614 Ritual’s commendation of the soul allowed for a flexible format or content, and included the use of devotional practices and prayers. While this directive is not at all at odds with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the 1972 and 1983 commendation rites are lacking in optional devotional practices and prayers. This could be rectified by following the lead of several national bishops’ conferences, such as the

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\(^3\) Ordo Romanus XLIX provides an early witness to both a different context and meaning for viaticum. One of the various ordinæ that penetrated Gallican territory during the period of 700 to 750, Ordo Romanus XLIX is totally focused on the resurrection on the last day. Communion given as the person approaches the point of departure is given as the defense and help against death, and for assurance of resurrection. The passions of the Lord, read after communion has been received, until the soul departs the body, serve to provide hope and confidence for the dying person so that, united with the Lord, he/she too will pass from this world to eternal life. As late as the thirteenth century, we find holy communion administered in close proximity to the commendation of the dying person. In time, however, viaticum became separated from the moment of death by the rites of extreme unction and the commendation of the soul. The Franciscan Regula Brevis (1260) served to spread and perpetuate the separation of viaticum from the hour of death. Two important sixteenth-century liturgical rituals, Alberto Castellano’s Liber Sacerdotalis (1523) and Julius Santori’s Rituale Sacramentorum Romanum (1584–1602), give witness to this entrenched practice, which was taken up and continued in the 1614 Ritual.
Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops, that have included more devotional elements among the commendation prayers. Family, friends, and parishioners should take the lead from these additions to use devotional prayers and practices that will assist the dying person in their last moments.

Similarly, there is room for a greater selection of biblical texts. For instance, in its selection of biblical texts for the commendation rite, ICEL omits the selection from Mark 15.33–34 and adds the selection from Luke 23.44–49, indicating a preference of the Lucan account of the death of Jesus over that of the Marcan account. However, in an attempt to eliminate "discomforting" or "troubling" readings, we may prevent the very acceptance of the anxiety of death that the rite intends to support. A good pastoral minister will be attentive to the particular state of the dying person and will choose readings that will assist him or her in his or her passage from this life to the next.

The final suggestion is more of an opportunity to be seized. Because they are official representatives of the Church, there is a clear preference for priests and deacons to administer the rites to the dying; but there is nothing in the rite of viaticum or the commendation rite that is exclusive to the ordained. The rites for the dying provide a richness of prayers, litanies, aspirations, psalms, and readings for use by the minister—ordained or lay—and the members of the family who are present. These rites are offered by the Church to strengthen and comfort a dying Christian in passage from this life, to help him or her to "embrace death in mysterious union with the crucified and risen Lord, who awaits them in the fullness of life" (PCS, 163). Even in the absence of a priest or deacon, other members of the community should be prepared to carry out this ministry, for their presence shows more clearly that this Christian dies in the communion of the Church (OUI, 142; PCS, 213).

The rite of viaticum and its complement, the commendation rite, are a pastoral treasure; only through their continued study and use, however, will we be able to realize their full potential, which up to this point, has barely been tapped.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Is there anything in this article that surprises you?
2. Has this article had any influence on your understanding of the sacrament of anointing of the sick?
3. Has this article raised any questions within you concerning the sacrament of anointing of the sick?
4. If you have any memory of the celebration of anointing of the sick before the Council, which of the changes described in this article has had the most profound effect on your experience of it since the Council?
5. If you have no memory of the sacrament of anointing of the sick before the Council, which of the changes described in this article seems the most indispensable?
6. Of the practices described in this article, which are best implemented in your experience?
7. Of the practices described in this article, which need more work?
8. Of the practices described in this article, are there any that cause you concern or tension?
The Marriage Rite: Revised, Enriched, and Signifying the Grace of the Sacrament

Bernadette Gasslein

The Dignity of the Sacrament and of Those Celebrating It

Recently a friend reminisced after a wedding, "When I got married," she said, "if you both weren't Catholic, you couldn't get married in the church. You got married in the rectory or in the sacristy. I'm so glad we don't do that anymore."

Most Catholics would share her pleasure at this aspect of the renewal of the rite of marriage mandated by Vatican II (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy [CSL], 77, 78). The issue of mixed marriages was high on the list of suggestions for topics of discussion made by the Canadian bishops during the pre-conciliar consultation process. The Laval University theologian and historian, Gilles Routhier, notes, "Cardinal Leger once again put forward an ecumenical concern about mixed marriages. In his opinion, it was important that the non-Catholic party not be humiliated. Celebrating a wedding in the sacristy or in the rectory parlour showed a lack of reverence towards the sacrament." The possibility of celebrating marriage within the context of a liturgy of the word represents a tremendous gain in our culture, in which at least 50% of marriages are ecumenical.

Like the other sacraments, the celebration of marriage was inserted into the eucharist, with provision made for it to be celebrated within a liturgy of the word (CSL, 78). Many dioceses now have policies indicating that marriage is to be celebrated within mass only if both partners are Roman Catholic. This emphasizes what unites the parties, enabling the bride and groom and their families and friends to participate equally in the celebration. Most couples receive this well, although sometimes they report resistance from parents who think that a liturgy of the word is a "second class" liturgy. Certainly one of the problems can be an approach that treats the celebration of marriage within the liturgy of the word in a perfunctory manner. Some couples want the Mass because they view it as a more substantial (read "longer") celebration.

The Rites

The Entrance Procession

The entrance procession remains one of the most difficult aspects of the revised rite. Few couples are willing to welcome their guests at the door of the church. Often there is great concern about seeing the bride before the wedding ... even from people who have been living together for a number of years! In very few instances

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are couples willing to walk in together. While some are comfortable having each of the bride and groom escorted by their parents, major resistance still arises when it is suggested that they come in together. Some pastors simply ignore this aspect of the rite; others impose it. Neither is an effective solution. Helping couples understand that this rite authentically reflects their relationship sometimes reduces this resistance. Perhaps most persuasive is the modeling provided by those couples who do walk in together: people see that it is beautiful and meaningful, and they know that they are not the first to walk this path.

The Word of God
The revised rite offers a selection of readings from which couples can choose. This choice enables couples to express their own sense of commitment as they ponder the readings and make their selection. It also brings them into closer contact with the rites of the Church as they read and select from the various options. However, depending on the faith commitment of the couple, using fewer readings in the celebration might be more appropriate.

The Rite of Consent
The rite of consent now offers an option to the traditional "I do's" pronounced by each of the spouses in response to the priest's questions about their intentions. Under this option the bride and groom can now memorize or read and pronounce the wedding vows on their own: "I, Bernadette, take you, Gordon . . . " "I, Gordon, take you, Bernadette . . . "

Some people will be relieved to learn that the bride takes no vow to obey her spouse. But they might also be surprised to learn that the vow to obey the husband has not recently—even in the rite immediately preceding the Council—been a part of the Catholic marriage ritual. (In the 1543 Sarum Manual, the woman promises to her husband to be "bonoure and buxom, in bed and at borde," that is, agreeable and compliant."

3) However, both the Book of Common Prayer and the Reformed tradition, represented by John Knox, include promises of obedience and subjection and obedience, respectively.

4) I suspect these sources are generally used in other media, such as novels, TV and film, thus popularizing the notion that the bride promises to obey the man. Since few people actually read the wedding rite unless they're getting married, this usage is imbibed uncritically.

The Nuptial Blessing
That the nuptial blessing now blesses both the bride and the groom emphasizes the equality between the genders at the heart of a Catholic wedding. It makes it clear that this is not "the bride's day"—despite the fact that this perception still lingers in the minds and imaginations of many couples. It takes two to make a covenant!

Problems in Preparing to Celebrate the Sacrament
Unchurched Catholics
Those who prepare the wedding liturgy with couples face huge challenges when the couple is not engaged in their faith tradition—and the number of such couples is growing. Many couples don't even know a piece of music that could serve as an entrance hymn—and those making up the congregation would not know the repertoire either. Often the very shape of the ritual—opening, liturgy of the word, rite of marriage, nuptial blessing and dismissal—is totally unfamiliar. So is the shape of the individual parts. So, for example, the basic structure of first reading (Old Testament), responsorial psalm, second reading (New Testament writings),

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3 Searle and Stevenson, 219;
4 Searle and Stevenson, 229, 231.
The Marriage Rite

The Bridal Fair Image

Perhaps the biggest challenge those who prepare the wedding liturgy with couples face is what I call the “bridal fair image” of the wedding. Often others—such as wedding consultants—have been involved in preparing the wedding long before Church personnel are involved. The image of the perfect wedding seen in the pages of bridal magazines or in the movies usually doesn’t come close to corresponding to the Church’s liturgy (perhaps one of the best recent examples of this was the playing of the Lohengrin Bridal Chorus—“Here Comes the Bride”—at the beginning of the Orthodox wedding liturgy in Joel Zwick and Nia Vardalos’ 2002 hit My Big Fat Greek Wedding). Even the fact that the assembly sings at a Catholic wedding runs contrary to the prevailing notion that the guests are spectators at a wonderful theatre piece. Brides, their mothers, or sometimes couples themselves have invested years in imagining what their wedding will look like. Their disappointment and anger are very tangible when they discover that the Catholic liturgy does not look quite like the wedding they have imagined. I dream of the day when dioceses will have booths at bridal fairs so they can provide couples (brides) with appropriate information early in their planning process. And I am convinced that catechesis about weddings needs to be done with parents of the bride and groom, as well as with the engaged couples themselves.

Does the Revised Marriage Rite Work?

Regardless of whether they are both Catholic, the rite works—very well—when both people participate actively in their faith tradition. Like any rite of the Church, it is a celebration of faith that requires faith on the part of participants. When it is simply a “church wedding” (as in “a wedding being held in a church”) as opposed to a celebration by two believers of their covenant in the context of God’s covenant, the rites ring hollow. This is not to say that the revised rite does not work; in the final analysis it can only work if those making their commitment bring faith to the celebration.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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Sacramentals:
From Object to Blessing

Kenneth Pearce

Introduction

By sacramentals, of course, we do not mean blessed objects, but rather all those prayers, exorcisms, anointings, and ceremonies with which [the Church] surrounds the matter and form of the sacraments as well as all the blessings and consecrations which she uses to bring her assistance and the benefits of grace to our private prayer and even to the material world about us. Blessed objects would better be called the effects of sacramental action.¹

No, this is not a quotation from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy but from a basic “textbook” of the pre-conciliar days; and it begs the point. Asked to define a sacramental, some might recall variations on “a sign instituted by the Church to give grace” paralleling the classic catechism definition of a sacrament. Asked to identify some sacramentals and the reply, in spite of the opening quote, would definitely be a list of objects: medals, scapulars, rosaries, pictures and so forth. Perhaps some more liturgically connected objects would be included: holy water, ashes, palms, and candles. But the focus would still be on objects, on things that had been blessed, either in the course of a liturgical event or simply (usually with a quick sign of the cross and unintelligible prayer) by a priest. Somehow these objects became holy and (certainly in the case of the rosary) capable of gaining the user specified and


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Sacramentals: From Object to Blessing

sometimes numerous indulgences. There was also the idea that certain individuals, especially members of particular religious orders, would attach higher indulgences than regular priests could. (The above paragraph should read with a generous addition of quotation marks to all appropriate words).

A certain disconnect existed between the officially taught and the generally practiced. Focus was on a particular object, set apart for veneration (less for use) by a minister (invariably a priest) and carefully kept or displayed (sometimes in interesting locations—such as a car mirror) to bring about a religious (some would suggest superstitious) benefit, while not necessarily being used.

Enter Vatican II

The Church has, in addition, instituted sacramentals. These are sacred signs bearing a kind of resemblance to the sacraments: they signify effects, particularly of a spiritual kind, that are obtained through the Church’s intercession. They dispose people to receive the chief effect of the sacraments and they make holy occasions in human life (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 60).

There is the primary theological statement. A few paragraphs later, the bishops of the Council set out the practical ramifications of that view and the central paragraphs for our consideration:

The sacramentals are to be reviewed in the light of the primary criterion that the faithful participate intelligently, actively, and easily; the conditions of our own days must also be considered. When rituals are revised, in accord with article 63, new sacramentals may also be added as the need for them becomes apparent.

Reserved blessings shall be very few; reservations shall be in favor only of bishops and Ordinaries. Let provision be made that some sacramentals, at least in special circumstances and at the discretion of the Ordinary may be administered by qualified lay persons (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 79).

There was a general sense that the sacramentals needed reform so that they could be “seen in the context of the sacraments and hence in the perspective of the paschal mystery.” How and to what extent that vision was put into practice is the scope of this article.

From Hippolytus to Trent

The Apostolic Tradition (ca. 215) is not the oldest possible read but its language indicates that the concept of blessing things was certainly part of early Christian practice.

As soon as first-fruits appear, all shall hasten to offer them to the bishop. And he shall offer them, shall give thanks and shall name him who offered them, saying: “We give thee thanks, O God …

Only certain fruits may be blessed namely grapes, the fig, the pomegranate, the olive … the plum. Not the pumpkin, not the melon, nor garlic nor anything else having an odour.

But sometimes flowers too are offered …

The point is that by 200 CE, Christians saw the blessing of food and flowers as

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2 This deals with the use of the vernacular.


normal and proper, even including restrictions on what could be blessed (hold the garlic ... and only roses or lilies, if you please).

Old Testament passages go into great detail concerning the consecration of Aaron and the objects in the Tabernacle as well as mandating the blessing of first fruits. The ritual blessing of the meal in particular and the wealth of blessing prayers for use throughout the day touching almost every important aspect of Jewish life are well documented. The Christian community continued this tradition. Fifth century Roman Church practice continued this, although here the tradition was that objects (such as liturgical vessels and even church buildings) were dedicated by virtue of their first use rather than with special ritual or prayer. For persons, the laying on of hands was common as a sign of blessing as well as (sacrament) of commissioning.

Christians took it for granted that persons, places and things would be consecrated, dedicated and blessed—and celebrated. This happened without a distinction between sacrament and sacramental because no such distinction existed. Thus "the history of many sacramentals is much older than their explicit treatment in theology." They were taken for granted as part of the life of the Church.

The discussion of what constituted a sacrament, including their number, was left for the 12th century. Peter Lombard was the first to formalize the number seven; other writers proposed as many as thirty. At the same time it is Lombard who distinguishes the traditional seven sacraments from the "other sacred signs and rituals" that would be called sacramentals. A distinction evolved between the central seven and the other signs. "Among the sacramentals were included such things as stations and crucifixes, holy water and oils, blessings and prayers, religious promises and vows, and other church ceremonies."7

The description of sacramentals as objects or actions that resemble or point to the sacraments came into common use only when theology agreed on the idea of seven (and only seven) sacraments. The naming and numbering was first identified at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. After this time the distinction of the sacraments as "signs and causes" of grace with sacramentals as "signs" of grace becomes common. (This is also expressed in the more technical phrases ex opere operato and ex opere operantis ecclesiae—the sacraments bestow grace themselves, sacramentals offer grace through the action of the Church.)

In the common mind, however, sacramentals became more and more linked to the objects themselves rather than to their wider context. Baptismal water (kept locked up because of its possible use in superstitious gestures, such was its perceived power) becomes holy water disconnected from the sacrament of baptism. The blessed palm is displayed with little reference to Palm Sunday or the paschal mystery. Blessed candles become a protection from storms rather than a sign of the light of Christ and a remembrance of February 2nd. It was partly this objectification that resulted in the rejection of sacramentals by the reformers and their followers.

The Council of Trent dealt more with the controversy around sacraments than with a theology of sacramentals. However, one of the results of this council was the publication and subsequent imposition of the first Rituale Romanum by the authority of Pope Paul V in 1614.

5 Lohrer, 376.
7 Martos, 50-51.
From Rituale Romanum to De Benedictionibus

The ritual of Paul V was the first universal handbook of blessings. Like most of the liturgical books of the day, it was intended to be both definitive and restrictive. It defined the number and scope of sacramentals; but it never defined what they were. The Rituale was quite small: 17 common blessings and 11 “reserved” blessings, special actions (rituals) that were to be administered only by the bishop or his delegate. It provided both language (formal text always in Latin) and rite for these sacred gestures. It also established the principle that deciding what constituted a sacramental and the language for its use (blessing) would be strictly reserved to the Holy See.

The last version of the ritual published before Vatican II appeared in 1952. (A revision was prepared at the request of Pius XII as part of his general liturgical reforms but was never published.) By this point the ritual had grown. This edition contained an extensive section of blessings: with 11 chapters and 172 entries. It included 28 blessings reserved to the bishop (or his delegate), 6 that could be delegated to priests by special indult (formal permission) and 53 that were proper to certain religious congregations or that were subject to special regulation. There were also exorcisms, processions, and blessings connected with sacraments (for example, the blessing of a mother after childbirth, published with the rite of baptism). Over the years and especially in view of the necessity for formal authorization before any new blessings could be authored, more and more texts were simply inserted. (Once in the ritual, the blessing/sacramental became official and universal.) These had widely differing value, sometimes-dubious usefulness and no continuity in language or approach. (Pius XI added a blessing for mountain climbing equipment in 1931; he liked to climb mountains.) In some cases they were also tediously long.

Herbert Vorgrimler’s commentary on the Constitution provides a good sense of the discussion around article 79. The ritual at that time had texts of different origin, often with little sense of liturgical form. Some blessing texts were exuberant, others simply poor. Often there was little sense of the importance (or lack of importance) of the object to be blessed. While the Constitution articles on sacramentals are few, they are important, because “it is exactly in the sacramentals that the consecration of the world is to be continued and applied to the conditions of life which vary according to time and space.”

Article 79 called for special attention to be paid to persons and articles in terms of specific life situations. There was a perceived need for some sense of innovation, especially in mission territories where other blessings could well be useful. One part of the discussion that did meet resistance was any possibility of allowing laypersons to celebrate rites of blessings; this was eventually included.

The first change in the celebration of ritual blessings came in the decree Inter Oecumenici of September 1964. For the (Ash Wednesday) blessing of ashes and the (February 2nd) blessing of candles only one prayer was required (the Roman Missal had a half dozen, one upon the other); reserved blessings would pertain only to the bishop and were reduced to seven.

Vatican II mandated the reform of the Roman Ritual. There was a perceived need to recover the authentic meaning of sacramentals (now more and more placed under the category of blessings) and to translate this into appropriate rites and texts. As Archbishop Bugnini points out in his reflections on the development of the post-conciliar liturgy: "God’s blessing

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is invoked first and foremost on human beings. Only secondarily is he asked to bless the things that aid human beings in attaining their end.9

Some basic issues guided the discussion around sacramentals. There would have to be a shift from a totally material view—of sacramentals appreciated only as objects. Although canon law had traditionally included consecrations, blessings and exorcisms when dealing with sacramentals, the Ritual adding processions as well, this expansiveness was certainly not generally appreciated. Emphasis should be placed on those sacramentals that pointed to or were directly connected with the sacraments (water with baptism, ashes with penance) and sacramentals in general should be integrated into a wider theology of the Church’s prayer of intercession. Continuing reverence for those things blessed as sacramentals should be considered; objects should not be blessed if later profane use cannot be avoided or if there is a sense of the superstitious.

The fundamental question: Does sacramental refer to the object blessed or to the blessing itself?

The Constitution indicated that lay persons could also be included in the celebration of sacramentals; this notion met with some initial resistance, although it was later included. Also to be considered was the question of who could participate in the sacramentals (non-Catholics? the non-baptized?), especially if they were to be regarded first of all as blessings and not as things.

The result of the deliberations suggested 50 blessings; these would be presented with new rites and texts. This eventually became the De Benedictionibus of 1984.

From Definition to Celebration

Defining a sacramental may be the easiest part.

- Objects or actions that the Church uses after the manner of sacraments.10
- Things or actions that the Church is accustomed to use, in imitation of the sacraments, in order to obtain through her intercession certain effects, especially spiritual ones.11
- Outward signs instituted by the Church to give grace.12

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy simply takes any definition for granted. Even the Catechism of the Catholic Church leaves the matter quite open, citing the new Code of Canon Law (c. 1166) and simply calling sacramentals: “Sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments” which have been instituted by the Church (1667). And perhaps there lies the key to understanding. As the General Instruction on the Roman Missal puts it: “For well-disposed Christians the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals causes almost every event in human life to be made holy by divine grace that flows from the paschal mystery” (236). The sheer wideness of the concept reflects the richness that belongs to sacramentals; it means that they are better understood in terms of their celebration rather than their definition.

Yes, sacramentals are objects ... but also events, ceremonies, vows, persons, places, processions ... and even (traditionally, as listed in the Ritual) exorcisms. The Catechism refers to persons, meals, objects and places.

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11 Code of Canon Law (1917) canon 1144.
12 Traditional catechism definition.
13 GIRM 2000, 368.
Various attempts have been made to establish some general principles for a presentation of sacramentals. These include:

- a simple distinction between actions and things;
- the Rituale with its chapter divisions into exorcisms, processions and the largest section containing 'everything else';
- objects directly connected with sacraments (for example, holy water, altars, churches), blessings of persons (the Council called for a revision of the consecration to a life of virginity) and again 'everything else' (exorcisms are included as a form of restricted blessing of persons);
- even a six-fold set of categories (complete with a mnemonic Latin verse) of public prayer, holy water and anointing, food, confession of faults, alms ... and blessings (in other words, 'everything else').

All of this is likely more interesting as historical trivia than liturgically helpful, but it does indicate just how wide a concept is involved in sacramentals and how difficult and perhaps inadequate it is to classify them.

The categories that were considered in the reform of the Roman Ritual (and Pontifical) begin with one concept—"blessing"—and consider it under:

- blessings that make a person or thing sacred by destining the object for worship or consecrating the person to a special state (constitutive);
- blessings that can be administered by someone other than a priest or deacon (invocative);
- blessings to do with family life and are properly celebrated first by lay persons.

This reflected the distinction in the former Code between invocative (blessing a car) and constitutive (blessing an abbot or church)—a distinction no longer mentioned—while taking it in a new direction. Sacramentals are now blessings, events and celebrations of grace. "They dispose people to receive the chief effect of the sacraments and they make holy various occasions in human life."\(^\text{14}\)

The Roman Missal provides an interesting insight into the two approaches of sacramentals: the blessing of the object and the blessing of those who will use the object. Compare the two texts for the blessing of palms during the Passion Sunday procession.

Almighty God, we pray you bless these branches and make them holy. Today we joyfully acclaim Jesus ...

and

Lord, increase the faith of your people and listen to our prayers. Today we honor Christ our triumphant King by carrying these branches ...

The first text centres on the object (complete with gesture) while the second blesses the palms by referencing the event and those who celebrate it. Similar sets of prayers are found for the blessing of ashes (Ash Wednesday) and the blessing of candles on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

**A Book of Blessings**

*De Benedictionibus*, the new edition to the *Rituale Romanum* was published May 31, 1984. This is more a next generation successor than a straightforward continuation; sacramentals are approached in quite a different manner. Never offering a definition, the book declares that sacramental is a wide concept and places blessings within the context of "created by the Church for the pastoral benefit of the people of God" (Decree: Prot. N.

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\(^{14}\) Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 60. This text is referenced and quoted in no. 14 of the Introduction to *De Benedictionibus*. 

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What is clear is that the sacramental has moved from its product (the blessed place or object) to the prayer or blessing of the Church—without distinction regarding the one who administers it. Object has become blessing.

Blessings therefore refer first and foremost to God, whose majesty and goodness they extol, and, since they indicate the communication of God's favor, they also involve human beings, whom he governs and in his providence protects. Further, blessings apply to other created things through which, in their abundance and variety, God blesses human beings.15

Besides the general approach that places the spotlight on event rather than object, there are a number of points worth citing.

1. Blessings refer first of all to God and then "to other created things through which, in their abundance and variety, God blesses human beings" (7). The focus of the blessing has moved from thing to context.

2. "Blessings are signs that have God's word as their basis …" (10). In keeping with this, rituals are set out within a context of a formal liturgy of the word (or within mass, usually at the Prayer of the Faithful).

3. Since blessings are part of the work of the Church, "their communal celebration is in some cases obligatory but in all cases more in accord with the character of liturgical prayer" (16). Active participation and celebration are essential to these rites, no matter how large or small their celebration.

4. The Council had decreed that "reserved blessings shall be very few" and then "in favor only of bishops and Ordinaries" (Constitution 79, 2) and allowed for celebration by "qualified lay persons" (79, 3). Rather than listing reserved rites, the Introduction suggests that the occasion itself will dictate the proper presider.

Thus, occasions "celebrated with special solemnity" or that "involve the entire diocesan community" will belong to the ministry of the bishop (18a). Blessings that are more the responsibility of the parish will involve the local pastor, unless the bishop is present (18b). Laypersons will preside as appropriate: for example parents on behalf of their children or when an individual exercises a particular charge in the Church (18d).

The deacon is also mentioned as presider, but with an interesting note. Canon 1169, 3 indicates that the deacon is to administer only those blessings "permitted by law" which seems a somewhat negative restriction in view of the clear possibility of celebration by laypersons. Perhaps the sense is basically that the deacon has his particular role in any celebration as minister of the altar and the word. Whether bishop or priest presides, the deacon assists by carrying out his proper functions; he is the proper minister whenever there is neither bishop nor priest to preside.

The Catechism presents a simple rationale for the reservation of blessings: the more the blessing concerns the ecclesial and sacramental life of the Church, the more it is reserved (that is, the importance determines who celebrates). This also provides a solid context for the celebration of exorcisms, as noted both in the Catechism (1669) and in Canon 1172.

One particularly far-reaching note in the Introduction shows just how far the theology of sacramentals and the renewed sense of their proper celebration have come. The document takes it for granted that some action truly occurs at the

inauguration (blessing) of any sacramental, no matter how simple.

The outward signs of blessing, and particularly the sign of the cross, are in themselves forms of preaching the Gospel and of expressing faith. But to ensure active participation in the celebration and to guard against any danger of superstition, it is ordinarily not permissible to impart the blessing of any article or place merely through a sign of blessing and without either the word of God or any sort of prayer being spoken (27).

The implication is that the blessing of even one object as a sacramental involves a true inauguration, a celebration with at least a short audible prayer with the one who brings the object "to be blessed" by the priest (deacon). A mumbled prayer and quick sign of the cross are insufficient; God's word and the prayer of blessing are core. Also, since the blessing sees even one other person as a small community, there should be at least some minimal participation in the event (at least a response to the prayer).

From Universal to Local

The publication of the first Roman Ritual and any decision concerning what it contained was the sole responsibility of the Holy See, through the Sacred Congregation of Rites. The Constitution opened the possibility of the addition not only of new sacramentals but their designation on a local level. The 1983 Code of Canon Law (c. 1167) again reserved the designation of new sacramentals to Rome; this is stricter than the Council and seems to be a reaction to a concern about superstitious elements. At one level this seems restrictive, but not necessarily. First of all, in view of the wide designation of sacramental expressed within the context of blessing, it is hard to imagine any action or object that is excluded, even if not specifically singled out by a page in a ritual. Secondly, the Introduction (39) gives conferences of bishops some of the widest latitude for adaptation permitted by any of the liturgical books.

The bishops of the United States published a ritual book—Book of Blessings—in 1989. It is far more than a translation of the Latin and includes many blessing rites (in fact, a whole chapter) that are not in the Latin version. "Part V: Blessings Related to Feasts and Seasons" is entirely new.

The bishops of Canada did not prepare a formal ritual book. In 1981, A Book of Blessings was published, providing texts for general (and even liturgical) use, but without incorporating or translating the elements of the Latin ritual. The Latin and American books provide complete rites; the Canadian text provides the prayer of blessing (praise) for the event, leaving the provision of context (scripture, rites of introduction and conclusion, and so on) to the local gathering. A revision of the 1981 publication, in a similar and even wider context, is currently in preparation. Perhaps the major difference between the two books—American and Canadian—is in their approach. The American ritual is designed for formal liturgical (parish) use, to be adapted for simpler occasions. The Canadian book provides the basics (for communities, families and individuals), leaving the preparation of formal celebrations to local creativity.

The Latest Word

The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy issued December 17, 2001 provides an approach that is both current and reflective of the movement to the wider sense of blessing.

16 Also occasionally known as the Congregation of Sacred Rites.
17 Available at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents.
With the sacramentals which have been instituted to assist the faithful at various times and in various situations, [the Church] prays that their activity might be directed and enlightened by the spirit of Easter" (81).

Noting that the Church has from the beginning blessed people, places, food and other objects, the Directory (272) offers three principles to guide the use of and discussion of sacramentals.

- A blessing is an authentic expression of faith.
- A blessing has a "typical" structure, which always includes the proclamation of scripture (allowing us to "make sense" of the sign) and the appropriate prayer (by which the Church praises God and implores divine help).
- A blessing is properly celebrated in community with active and conscious participation.

These principles are exactly what the journey from object to blessing has been about.

Conclusion

In his article for Sacramentum Mundi written shortly after Vatican II, Magnus Lohrer made the following comment:

A reform of practice with regard to sacramentals must aim at the elimination of meaningless signs, as of abuses. It must aim at simplification and under certain circumstances at the creative transformation of sacramentals, especially in missionary countries. Genuine telling symbols must be sought for, especially such as appeal to whole communities. 18

More recently Patrick Bishop wrote:

[A] more general care for and use of sacramentals would go a long way towards integrating the sacraments with our overall growth in humane Christianity. 19

Perhaps the continuing appeal of sacramentals as well as the theological openness that surrounds them comes from their wide inclusiveness. They can touch every aspect of life and be celebrated by all members of the Church.

The Council called for a review of sacramentals ... of what they are and of how they are celebrated.

Question: Are sacramentals holdover signs of an outdated worldview or constant reminders of universal grace?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Is there anything in this article that surprises you?
2. Has this article had any influence on your understanding of sacramentals?
3. Has this article raised any questions within you concerning sacramentals?
4. What role do sacramentals play in your spiritual life?
5. What role do sacramentals play in the life of your parish?
6. Discuss or reflect on the author's concluding question above.

18 Lohrer, 378
Gracious God,
we remember and give thanks
for one who taught us to sing your praise
in psalms, spiritual songs and canticles.

Dr. George Black
June 30, 2003 in Paris, France.

Readers of the National Bulletin on Liturgy
may not have known Dr. Black personally,
but his music lives on in the hearts of
every one who celebrates Sunday in our
parishes. George served as consultant for
each of the three editions of Catholic Book
of Worship, helping the various com-
mitttees shape our congregational song
through hymnody and psalm settings. As
one deeply attuned to the language of
psalmody, George composed numerous
settings. In CBW I he first introduced us
to the simple 2-measure psalm tone. This
particular melodic pattern was used for
every single responsorial psalm from
numbers 172-191. Such a straightforward
approach to chanting the verses of the
responsorial psalms was a sure technique
to help cantors take up their newfound
ministry. In reviewing CBW II one notices
not only the inclusion of these same 2-
measure tones, but also the addition of
George's 4-measure settings, which
encouraged the advancement of cantorial
style. Finally CBW III includes 8 of
George's psalm settings consisting of
refrain and psalm tone. Readers may refer
to CBW III #35, a setting of Psalm 84,
ever so appropriate for this memorial:
"Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O
Lord."

A professor, liturgist, hymnist, and church
musician of international renown, George
taught French Language and Literature,
Latin, Church Music and Liturgics at
Huron College, London, Ontario, retiring
in 1995. After a long and distinguished
joint tenure in the Departments of French
and Theology, he ended his academic
career in the Chair of Liturgy and Church
Music. The Faculty of Theology conferred
on him the extraordinary honour of
Doctor of Divinity (honoris causa)—only
the second election to that degree of a
layperson in the college history. He served
on the Doctrine and Worship Committee
for the National Anglican Church of
Canada and was instrumental in the
development of the Book of Alternative
Services for the Anglican Church. He also
chaired the Hymn Book Task Force,
which published Common Praise in 1998.
Both National and Diocesan Synods have
made George a member of their Merit
orders. George also served as President for
the Hymn Society in the United States
and Canada. He held positions as assistant
organist at St. Thomas Church, Toronto;
organist and choir director at St. Edmund
the Martyr, Toronto; St. Mary the Virgin, Toronto; St.
James Westminster, London; director of
chapel music, Huron College, London;
and coordinator of music, Christ Church,
London. He also conducted the London
Singers and the George Black Singers. As
well as commissioning a number of
compositions by John Cook, Barrie
Cabena, Derek Healey, Philip Ross and
Rae Davis, George published his own
Music for Sunday Psalms (Anglican Book
Centre) and Holding In Trust: Hymns of the
Hymn Society (Hope Publishing).

George leaves his wife Margaret McLean,
son Hugh and his wife Carole, Daughter
Clare and her husband David Bowley and
grandchildren Nathan, Lauren, Kate and
Liz. Predeceased by Adrienne Salmond
Black.

George manifested a true ecumenical
spirit in sharing his wealth of knowledge
and experience of sung prayer with the
Diocese of London. Indeed our first
experience of Taizé was facilitated by him
In Memoriam

in the mid 1980's after one of his frequent trips to France. George leaves his wife, Margaret and his children: Claire, Hugh and their families. We in the Roman Catholic community give thanks to God for the legacy of song and wisdom left to us by George Black, and with the communion of saints praise and glorify our Triune God at all times and all places as George so readily modeled.

Loretta Manzana, CSJ

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MUSIC FOR THE SUNDAY ASSEMBLY:
Year C: Advent and Christmas Seasons

Advent is only four Sundays long; this does not allow much time either for boredom with repeated songs or for the learning of new ones. Often it is wise to repeat at least one song on each of the Sundays of the season as a way of uniting the season musically. In an assembly of reluctant, insecure or inexperienced singers, it is unwise to vary the music to any great extent.

Several pieces have been suggested for the same moment in the liturgy. If this is the year to introduce a new Advent song, use this listing as an aid for selecting one that will best serve your community; then begin teaching it well in advance of the season. All listings are from CBW III.

In general, the entrance hymns suggested are truly processional expressing the joyful nature of Advent waiting and preparation. Less rhythmically strong pieces are assigned to the procession for the presentation of the gifts. Generally speaking, the suggested hymns are in harmony with the whole season rather than only one day’s readings.

The communion processional hymn is an integral element of the communion procession. It is more important that the piece selected be in harmony with the action of the liturgy (see General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 561) than with the season.

The sung recessional is, of course, completely optional; however, most parishes have embraced the practice. The recessionals suggested here are lively, rhythmically strong, and express the energy of the community sent from eucharist to mission in a world that is often overwhelmed by the spirit of the consumer society in these surrounding December 25.

Holy Family, Epiphany, Mary the Mother of God, and the Baptism of the Lord do not require more than one hymn focussed on the specific feast, especially if the community is not familiar enough with these songs to sing them with energy.

Introductory Rites
Advent Wreath

The use of the Advent wreath in the church is entirely optional. It should never become the focal point of the celebration, nor should the rites surrounding it dominate or overshadow the gathering rites or the celebration of God’s word. On the First Sunday of Advent, one candle may be lit prior to the celebration. Following the greeting, the wreath may be simply blessed, and penitential rite be celebrated as usual. On subsequent Sundays, the appropriate number of candles is lit prior to the celebration and the introductory rites take place as usual. There is no need for any music connected with the Advent wreath; use of such music would certainly distort the introductory rites of the mass.
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

The Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling with water may be used during celebrations of this day. One of the following may accompany the sprinkling:

236 May This Water Keep Us Aware
237 You Will Draw Water Joyfully

Seasonal Psalms

Where singing the proper psalm of each Sunday would be discouraging for the assembly or overly taxing to the ability of the cantor, a seasonal psalm refrain may be used with the verses proper to the day.

Advent 15, 16, and 23
Christmas Season 29A, 29B

Processional Songs

Communion

597 Bread of Life
608 Now in This Banquet (note optional refrain especially for Advent)
611 Take and Eat

Other Processionals

1st, 2nd and 3rd Sunday of Advent

303 Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn Entrance
315 The Advent of Our God Entrance
(TUNE: FESTAL SONG, 302)
*304 Awake, Awake: Fling off the Night Entrance
341 Arise and Shine Entrance
*302 Arise, Your Light Is Come! Entrance
308 Every Valley Entrance

*307 Creator of the Stars of Night Presentation of Gifts
309 Listen, My People Presentation of Gifts
*318 The King Shall Come Presentation of Gifts
314 God of All People Presentation of Gifts

305 Be Light for Our Eyes Recessional
317 Prepare the Way Recessional
433 The Voice of God Recessional
345 City of God Recessional
557 Let Heaven Rejoice Recessional

4th Sunday of Advent

464 The God Whom Earth and Seas and Sky Entrance
575 Tell Out My Soul Recessional

Christmas and Holy Family

346 In the Darkness Shines the Splendour Entrance
303 Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn Entrance
346 In the Darkness Shines the Splendor Entrance
320 Angels We Have Heard on High Entrance
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1 Suggestions for alternative melodies may be found in the choir and instrumental editions of CBW III, #700 "Metrical Index".
WORKBOOK FORLECTORS
AND GOSPEL READERS

Canadian Edition 2004 – Year C

Notes and Commentary by
Aelred Rosser


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