

Chapter One

The First Secret: The Glorious Gift of God

It is the responsibility of each Catholic to cooperate personally with sacramental grace. It is the responsibility of the Church to teach us how to cooperate with grace, to exhort and encourage us to do it, and to foster environments that support it. Unintentionally and through no fault of our ordained leaders, pastoring in the advanced world gives insufficient attention to the truths that are, in fact, most important to our spiritual formation. For historically understandable reasons, even doctrinally sound spiritual formation too often keeps those truths, in effect, "secret." In this chapter, I will discuss only one of those truths but one that affects the very foundation of our cooperation with grace: the nature of what the New Testament calls "the gift of God" (Jn 4:10; Ac 8:20) and "his inexpressible gift" (2 Co 9:15). An adequate awareness of what and how great "the gift of God" is is one of the dispositions we need to overcome the secular influences on our lives.

An appreciation of the gift of God is by no means the only disposition our spiritual life needs. But examining this omission first should show those who are skeptical just how deep the problems in our formation, and our understanding of Vatican II's teaching on the priesthood, have been even where sound doctrine is taught. Those problems prevent our spiritual formation from achieving the full effects of the Eucharist itself. With those things established, subsequent chapters will treat truths about other dispositions essential for cooperating with God, truths that, for all practical purposes, current spiritual formation keeps secret.

1.

We know God to the extent that we know, no matter how imperfectly, his love for us; we know his love for us to the extent that we know how great "the gift of God" is. That gift is the Holy Trinity itself present in us and making its life our life.¹ "If anyone loves me, .

. . . my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (Jn 14:23). To have the Trinity really present in us is to have the same glory that Jesus and the Father have. "The glory which you have given to me, I have given them . . . I in them and you in me" (Jn 17:22-23). Second Peter says that Christians "become partakers of the divine nature" (1:4). The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that we have been "divinized" (1988, 460). St. Paul tell us "Those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rm 8:30). Jn 7:39 (with Jn 4:10) and Ac 8:19-20 identify "the gift of God" with the Holy Spirit.² But the fourth gospel also says (and Acts implies; see Chapter 5) that receiving the Spirit make us aware that we are united with the other persons in the Trinity: "In that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:20). And the Church has always taught that receiving the Holy Spirit makes the whole Trinity present in us.

We have the Trinity fully present in glory from the moment we are baptized, by water or desire. There are no parts in God's nature; so "sharing" or "participating" in it cannot mean having only a part of it. The fact that our Christian life grows means that the way the divine family lives its life in us develops, but that development concerns created effects of the uncreated persons already present in us. If genuine, our most imperfect act of loving the Trinity for its own sake is infinitely greater than any merely natural act; such an act can merit eternal glory only because it is already a sharing in eternal glory. Jesus's spiritual life grew as ours does (Lk 2:52), except for his not needing to repent of sin for himself. That did not prevent the Trinity from being fully present in him from the time of the Incarnation.

The Trinity is present and active in all creatures, and the Trinity is the primary cause of the actions performed by creatures. But only in those who have been baptized are created activities going on, acts of faith, hope and especially love, which are at the same time acts of the creature and acts of the Trinity living its life in us. That is the theologically precise and all-important answer to the question what is difference between the specific way God is

present in Christians and the generic way he is present in all human beings: Only in those who are Christian, by water or desire, does the divine family cause its own infinite life to be the creature's life. Those who have not yet received "the gift of God" do not yet have the "inexpressible" (2 Co 9:15) privilege of living the Trinity's infinite life.

Until death, the real presence of the Trinity in us is infinitely more important than anything else that can possibly happen to us, sacred or secular. Other things deserve to be called gifts of God, of course; in fact everything is a gift from God. But Scripture can call the Trinity's life "the gift of God" because the preservation and perfection the Trinity's life in us is the sole ultimate purpose of absolutely every other gift, including the institutional Church, confirmation, marriage, ordination and Holy Communion. There is an infinite distance between those who are and who are not living divine life; there is a finite distance between those are living divine life at different levels. Likewise, there will be only a finite distance between our stations in heaven, but there will be a infinite distance between those who are and are not in heaven. That infinite distance will only be a continuation of the difference at death between those who are and are not living the life of the Trinity. The real presence of the Trinity in us is "the one thing necessary" (Lk 10:42); it is the meaning of human life.

To live the Christian life is to permit the Trinity to make its life our life. That is what Christianity is, its essence, the awesome reality of living the life of the Trinity who are present in us.

The most exalted way we share the life of the Trinity is our participation in the liturgy, the greatest conceivable created act. The liturgy is the earthly consummation, anticipating the heavenly one, at which the Trinity's life in us aims. The liturgy is the source and summit of the Church's life.³ The Church's life is the life of the Trinity, which is lived both in individual Christians and, since it is the life of a family of persons, among brother and sister Christians. "The glory that you have given me I have given them, that that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly

one" (Jn 17:22-23). "One even as we are one," how are the Father and Son one? They are a family of persons ecstatically in love with each other, and that family's life is the life of its extended family, the Church. To be the summit of the Church's life is to be the summit of the life of the Trinity already dwelling in us when we come to the liturgy. To be the source of the Church's life is to be a sign that is the real presence of the signified, Jesus' saving acts which are the ultimate source of that life. So we cannot appreciate what it means for the liturgy to be the source and summit of the Church's life unless we understand what the Church's life is: the infinitely glorious life of the divine family.

Baptism, where the Trinity's presence in us begins, is the most important sacrament. The liturgy is the greatest sacrament. Likewise, in contrast to the Trinity's presence in us, the Eucharist is the greatest mode of Jesus' presence. To see in what sense it is the greatest mode of his presence, consider that we can point to the Eucharist, but not to anyone who shares the Trinity's life, and say "This IS God!" Another way to see why this mode of presence is the greatest is to consider that after the consecration, we can worship the host and the liquid without idolatry. We cannot worship any other physical thing. Receiving the Eucharist is incomparably greater than any privilege we can have other than living the Trinity's life. But the Eucharist is not the real presence of Jesus that is most important to us or to him. He would rather be present in us than in all the tabernacles in the world, since the goals of the Eucharist are the preservation and perfection of the Trinity's life in us, for both of which the Eucharist is indispensable.⁴ We can even say that the Trinity's real presence in us is the only thing Jesus thinks about while present in the Eucharist.

A priest who read an earlier version of these thoughts told me we should not compare the importance of the Trinity's presence in us and in the Eucharist. How true. You cannot compare the infinite and the finite, and presence of divine life in us is infinitely more important to God and to us than any other created gift could even possibly be. Between the most devout daily communicant and the child murderer who has not yet received

Communion since repenting of and receiving absolution for his sins, but only for his mortal sins, there is a finite distance; between that murderer and someone who has not yet received the gift of God, there is an infinite distance. Jesus could have saved us without giving us the institutional Church and the sacraments. He could not have saved us without giving us divine life, by definition. Again, living the life of the Triune God is what Christianity is.

Priests need not have divine life to offer Mass validly. But when we participate in the Mass worshipfully, our worship is an act of the divine life that is already in us.

The celebration of the Eucharist, however, cannot be the starting-point for communion; it presupposes that communion already exists, a communion which it seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection. The sacrament is an expression of this bond of communion both in its *invisible* dimension, which, in Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit, unites us to the Father and among ourselves, and in its *visible* dimension, which entails communion in the teaching of the Apostles, in the sacraments and in the Church's hierarchical order. . . . Invisible communion, though by its nature always growing, presupposes the life of grace, by which we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4), and the practice of the virtues of faith, hope and love. Only in this way do we have true communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nor is faith sufficient; we must persevere in sanctifying grace and love. (Pope John Paul II, The Church of the Eucharist, 35-36).

Here the Pope uses another term, "sanctifying grace," for the gift of God, the Trinity's real presence in us. Where John and Luke might be incorrectly interpreted to mean that the gift of God is solely the Spirit to the exclusion of the other persons of the Trinity, Paul identifies God's "inexpressible gift" with the "surpassing grace of God in you" (2 Co:14-15), meaning sanctifying (or abiding) grace, not actual (or transient) grace. And the Church has always taught that sanctifying grace is a real participation in the Trinity's life. I have

avoided using "sanctifying grace" until now because my purposes are pastoral, not theological. For one thing, given the pastoral state of the Church that I will discuss in a moment, calling the gift of God sanctifying grace would have risked serious misunderstandings. When they hear "sanctifying grace" or "the state of grace," many people think of a white mark on their soul that replaces a black mark of mortal sin when they go to the sacrament of reconciliation. Or they think of it as a ticket out of hell and into heaven and so as something that has no significance in their earthly life until the moment of death.

For another thing, the intricate subtleties a detailed theological analysis of grace demand can cause even the brightest seminarians to miss the divine forest for the created trees. The created way the Trinity lives its life in us develops and grows through multiple acts and stages, but in it itself, the divine life we possess is unchanging and without any multiplicity of parts. So to support our growth in that life, God must give us other created gifts distinct from sanctifying grace itself. For example, John Paul II alludes above to the distinction between sanctifying grace and the virtues of faith, hope, and love, on one hand, and the acts of those virtues, on the other. And those are just a few of the technical distinctions theology must use when seeking to understand our created participation in the uncreated. Perhaps that is why two priests who read earlier drafts of these thoughts told me that sanctifying grace is a wonderful gift of God, but only one among others.

Sanctifying grace would be only one wonderful gift among others were it not infinite glory really dwelling in us and were living the Trinity's life not what Christianity is. Christianity is not just one gift among others, and Christianity is living the life of sanctifying grace. But the state of grace can seem like one gift among others when we are reading even a good theological treatise like Ott's or a great one like Aquinas'. One remedy for that is what Paul says, using the language of grace, in Ephesians, "He destined us . . . to be his sons . . . to the praise of his glorious grace" (1:5-6). The praise of his grace? Are we not supposed to praise God for what he is, not for what he gives us? But just a few lines later,

Paul says, "We . . . have been destined . . . to live for the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:12, 14). Paul sees no difference between being destined to praise God's own glory and to praise the glory of his grace; the glory of God's grace in us is the same as the glory he has in himself. Jesus' glory is not yet visible in us, but it was not always visible in him. His glory is identical with the divine life he possessed from conception, and we share that divine life. As Paul tells the Corinthians, other Christians "long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift" (2 Co 9:14-15)

And some of God's other gifts, such as faith, hope and love, are so connected to the gift of God that we cannot have that gift without having those other gifts; necessarily, people in the state of grace have those other gifts also. Since my purpose is not theological but pastoral, when I refer hereafter to sanctifying grace, or the gift of God, or the indwelling of the Trinity, etc. I will be including in the reference all the things that necessarily accompany the state of grace. One pastoral justification for this, in addition to the obvious pedagogical one of not making the formation we give more complicated than necessary, was stated above: absolutely every other gift has the sole ultimate purpose of preserving us in the Trinity's life and bringing the way the Trinity lives its life in us to the perfection the Trinity intends it to have.

But in this discussion there is an even more specific pastoral justification for not always mentioning the distinction between the Trinity's life in us and the ancillary gifts that necessarily accompany it. We are talking about one disposition needed for fully cooperating with grace, an awareness of what the inexpressible gift of God is; that awareness is itself an ancillary gift but one without which the inexpressible gift can still exist in us. We get whatever ancillary gifts do not accompany the inexpressible gift necessarily by asking for them with faith and repentance, two ancillary gifts that do necessarily accompany it. So we acquire the needed awareness of the inexpressible gift by exercising other gifts ancillary to the inexpressible gift. But that awareness exists for the sake of our appreciating the gift of

God, not for appreciating the ancillary gifts except as necessary supports for the Trinity's infinite life in us.

Unfortunately, the last few paragraphs illustrate their point by example. Already, this discussion is tending to get so didactic and complex that it distracts from the fact that an appreciative awareness — and so a non-didactic and incomplex awareness — of the glory of God's gift is a disposition needed for responding fully to grace.

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.⁵ (Mt 11:25-26; Lk 10:21-24)

When we are talking about dispositions for cooperating with grace, we principally mean actual rather than sanctifying grace. But our awareness of the individual and communal meaning of sanctifying grace is important for our cooperation with actual grace, and so it is important for the development and perfection of the way the Trinity lives its life in us. For that reason I will also call the gift of God "divinizing" grace.

Why should we think that an awareness of what divinizing grace is is important for responding to actual grace? When Paul was trying to reform the recalcitrant Corinthians, he repeatedly appealed to that awareness to give them their motivation to reform.

I warned those who sinned before and all others. . . that if I come again, I will not spare them. . . . Examine yourselves to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you — unless indeed you fail to meet the test! (2 Cor 13:2-5)

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Cor 3:16)

The immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? (1 Cor 6:18-19)

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! (1 Cor 6:15)

So important for cooperating with grace is our awareness of God's presence in us that the way Paul pastored the Corinthians makes it the main motivation for them to repent. And, again, he also told the Corinthians that other Christians are motivated to love them

because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. (2 Co 9:14-15)

And how often do almost all of the epistles remind us of the glorious dignity we have as Christians? Did those writers ever assume that Christians no longer needed to be reminded of it, or did they ever get tired of talking about it? Did they think it something that could be taken for granted so that they could tell the Christians about more interesting things? And those men were writing pastoral documents, documents for our spiritual formation. Another thing John Paul II alludes to above is the difference between the invisible and visible aspects of Christianity. It is much easier for us to focus on the important visible, rather than the all-important invisible, aspects of Christianity. That is another reason why our first pastors, as well as John Paul II, kept reminding us of the "surpassing," "inexpressible," invisible gift of God, divinizing grace.

That an appreciation of the real presence of the Trinity in us is an essential disposition for full cooperation with grace simply means that fully responding to grace presupposes an awareness of what the Christian life really is. I will now show how weak that awareness is at the pastoral, as opposed to theological, level in today's Church.

2.

Does the normal pastoral life of the doctrinally sound parts of the Church support the kind awareness of the Trinity's real presence in us that Paul expects the Corinthians to have? I will cite typical recent statements of otherwise doctrinally sound members of the hierarchy, priests, theologians and others — statements that no one has deemed to need

correcting, despite their public character and often prominent authorship — that show the widespread and scandalous inadequacy of our current appreciation of what Christianity is, as well as the meaning of the priesthood.

One of our best apologists, Professor Peter Kreeft, said:

Where is (Christ) present now? In His Church. This means essentially two things.

First, He is present in the Church's sacraments, primarily in the Eucharist. Second,

He is also present in the Church's members, in the souls and lives of those who have believed in Him.⁶

Was Kreeft using "primarily" to mean that the Eucharist is the greatest mode of Jesus' presence and taking it for granted that the most important mode, the presence that is the essence of the Christian life, is the indwelling of the Trinity in every Christian? No, in the same place, he contrasts Jesus' Eucharistic presence to his presence in souls as an "objective" to "just a subjective" presence, respectively. You read that correctly; he called Jesus' presence in us merely subjective. But Dr. Kreeft did not intend to deny the nature and primary importance of the gift of God; he just forgot about it. It just slipped his mind — and the minds of the editors of the well known Catholic magazine that published him. To reason from the absence of an effect to the absence of an adequate cause, would such a learned person forget about the very nature of Christianity and would a solidly Catholic journal publish views like these if the normal pastoral life of the Church had made Catholics sufficiently conscious of what Christianity is? Is the infinite glory of God's inexpressible gift just another fact that can slip our minds, like the fact that Jesus compared that gift to living water? And wouldn't we consider it scandalous for otherwise doctrinally sound writers and editors to publish an article about sanctifying grace that made the slip, not followed by any correction, of calling Jesus' Eucharistic presence merely subjective? (I wrote Dr. Kreeft about this, and he graciously agreed with my criticism.)

Fr. Andrew McNair of the Legionaries of Christ wrote in one of their periodicals:

“Where may the . . . Lord be encountered as a living person, not just as an idea? Primarily, in the Eucharist.”⁷ Was McNair, unlike Kreeft, just focusing on the greatest mode of Jesus’ presence while taking it for granted that what the Christian life is was understood? No, I phoned him to find out. According to him, what the seminary taught about the relation of sanctifying grace to the sacraments after baptism, and what justified calling the Eucharist our primary way of encountering Christ, was that sanctifying grace begins as something small and grows by our receiving the other sacraments. We do grow in grace. But if seminaries do not teach why Christ’s personal indwelling through grace is immeasurably more important than any other encounter with him, they are not teaching what Christianity is. Theologians sometimes speak as if the state of grace starts as something embryonic. That is not a bad metaphor,⁸ but only if we believe that the human embryo is a complete person with a complete human soul, just as the state of grace is the presence in glory of the complete Trinity.

One of our best prelates, Cardinal O’Connor, said the Eucharist “is the most important teaching (of the Church) for me personally.”⁹ Was he thinking about the Mass’s being the real presence of Jesus’ redeeming acts? That fact is important only because of what redemption is and the fact that it has occurred. And Jesus could have saved us without giving us the Eucharist or even without dying for us; again, he could not save us without divinizing grace by definition. In a book on the Mass with an Imprimatur, Fr. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., one of our best preachers, said, “The only thing that we ever do in this world that is a real participation in the life we hope to live forever is to worship with Christ at the Liturgy.”¹⁰ If he really believes that, is he more focused on what Christianity is or on the Eucharistic ministry that is specific to his vocation? Fr. Groeschel does much good and certainly did not intend to teach heresy. What Christianity is just slipped his mind. But can we even imagine what the Eucharist is slipping his mind or the mind of any doctrinally sound

priest? And wouldn't it be a scandal if that happened in a public statement without being corrected? Then why isn't it more of a scandal when what Christianity is slips a priest's mind without being corrected?

The contexts of all these statements show that they were made with the good pastoral intention of enhancing the Eucharist's effectiveness. In fact, they were doing a great disservice to the supreme sacrament by suppressing one of the conditions, our understanding of what Christianity is, most necessary to achieve the Eucharist's goals of preserving and perfecting the Trinity's life in individual Christians and among brother and sister Christians.

I have more than once seen this kind of misperception in another form, when doctrinally sound Catholic publications name the Eucharist as the way Jesus keeps His promise never to leave us.¹¹ But we cannot be ordained without first belonging to the body that is Christ already really present in the world, the Church.¹² So there can be no Eucharist without the Church, any more than the fullness of the Church can exist without the Eucharist.

Other typical examples will follow, but not as many as could be given. Examples, of course, are just anecdotal evidence. Is any other kind of evidence for the imbalance in our spiritual formation possible? Yes. In this chapter I have given a direct explanation of one of the neglected truths necessary for unleashing the power of the sacraments. In subsequent chapters I will continue the direct explanation those neglected truths. If the explanations are correct, they constitute non-anecdotal evidence against any spiritual formation that does not give those truths the prominence they must have for the sacraments to bear fruit. You can judge for yourself what place these truths have in the Church's pastoral life as you know it. Your own experience can supply the evidence. How aware, for example, has today's formation made you that Christianity is the Trinity making its life our life? How often do

pastors describe Jesus' dwelling in us as more than a vague presence "in our hearts," "in our lives," or just "with us"?

Perhaps the most common way pastors try to communicate that we share the Trinity's infinitely glorious life is by saying that we are children of God or members of God's family. But saying that isn't enough today. In our society, "children of God" refers to all human beings, and God is said to be present in all human beings in a sense that, no matter how crucial, is infinitely different from what Christianity is. If you were reading, for example, a speech of Martin Luther King and came across the statement that all of God's children deserve justice, would you assume he was referring only to Christians? And try telling someone, in the course of ordinary conversation, that not all human beings are children of God. Proclaiming the truth about Christianity's essence today is not easy; the pastor needs more than the sincere intention to be referring specifically to the way God is present in Christians. That is why I have emphasized the language of living the life of the Trinity and divinizing grace, to make clear that we are talking about something specific to Christians and to those who are Christians "by desire." (Another even more disastrous belief that is common today is that God would not condemn anyone. If so, either divinizing grace is not that important, or everyone is going to wind up having it no matter what they do. One of our pastoral problems is to refute that belief adequately without returning to fear-based spiritual formation. I address that problem in Chapter 4.)

No one should assume, however, that anecdotal evidence itself is deficient unless they can provide counterexamples, anecdotal evidence supporting the opposite conclusion. For where are the exceptions to, including the corrections of, the very common claims I have quoted and will quote? Most of these claims were publicly made in venues where doctrinal soundness is always expected. Yet for as many times as I have seen and heard this severe lack of appreciation of the glorious reality that Christianity is, I have never seen anyone try to correct statements like these no matter how publicly and prominently they

are made.¹³ The fact that views like those I am criticizing are so common makes the argument from the lack of an effect to the lack of an adequate cause hard to ignore. If the normal spiritual formation the Church gives us is in balance, why did not anyone, whether an ordained minister or a lay person whose awareness of what Christianity is derives, ultimately, from ordained ministers, think this absence of awareness of what Christianity is important enough to correct?

And the problem is not so much incorrect information but the lack of correct information that is pastorally crucial. Most importantly, then, where are the positive counterexamples, the clear proclamations of the true nature of Christianity made with enough frequency and clarity to have prevented the misperceptions I am pointing out from being so widespread?

Some of those I have and will quote are lay people and/or converts, like Kreeft. Are those examples unfair because the misinformation could have sources other than the Church's ministers, for instance, parents or teachers? Then why were those parents and teachers not conscious of what Christianity is? Was their initial catechesis inadequate? Then why was the inadequacy not corrected by their subsequent contact with the normal pastoral life of the Church? Ordained ministers must have either caused the problem originally or failed to correct it by adequately emphasizing the nature of Christianity in the normal course of their pastoring. We must follow the cause-effect argument to its logical conclusion: If the contact of so many people, or the contact of their parents or teachers, with the normal pastoral life of the Church has not supplied the missing appreciation of the glorious nature of what Christianity is, those in charge of our formation must be failing to stress truths that need emphasizing for the sacraments to bear fruit.

Lest there be any confusion, however, I hasten to add that the problem I am pointing out is not about the Eucharist itself, its glory or its theology. The problem I am concerned with is Catholics having the dispositions necessary to cooperate with sacramental grace.

Those dispositions presuppose our being sufficiently aware of certain truths about what we must believe and do. The statements about the Eucharist I have and will present are simply meant as evidence that we are not sufficiently aware of what we need to believe and do to cooperate with grace, with Eucharistic grace especially. The problem is not overemphasis on the Eucharist; it is underemphasis on more fundamental truths. (This chapter concerns only one of those more fundamental truths; Chapters 2 through 5 deal with others.)

These statements about the Eucharist are also meant as evidence for something even more revealing from the standpoint of the Church's ability to provide effective spiritual formation (as opposed to just not being doctrinally false and providing the sacraments). The reason I have chosen to make contrasting them to the truth about the inexpressible gift of God my starting point is that they represent a failure to give the Church's official teachers, our dedicated self-sacrificing priests, an adequate understanding of their own mission; for a pastoral misunderstanding of the Eucharist on the part of Eucharistic ministers is a pastoral misunderstanding of their ministry, as Sections 3 through 5 will explain.

Although the theology of the gift of God takes nothing away from the glory due the liturgy, the views I am criticizing do by unintentionally preventing the liturgy from achieving its goals. The better we understand what the Eucharist is actually doing for us, the more we will love it. The better we understand what Jesus did for us, the more we will be devoted to him who remains really present with us as our food and drink. Many will cite the tragically widespread disbelief in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist as a worse problem for the Church than these pious misrepresentations of the Eucharist's purpose. Doctrinally, it is a worse problem, except for the implied and unintended denial of what Christianity is that these misrepresentations contain. But depriving us of the formation needed to make the Eucharist effective is a grievous injustice to the whole Church, to ordained Eucharistic ministers and to the greatest sacrament itself.

3.

Why are Catholics not more in awe of the (literally) in-comparable glory of the gift of God? Many of those responsible for our spiritual formation must either not be sufficiently in awe of it themselves or not be sufficiently aware of what and how to teach us. In either case, why are they not?

A little reflection will show that the potential — though only the potential — for this kind of imbalance in our pastoral formation is inherent in priests' seminary education. It is an avoidable danger but one that seminaries must work, and so must be aware of, to avoid. Seminaries influence their students not just by the curriculum but by the environment they create. During the years that are most formative for people's professional identities, future priests are in an environment where they cannot avoid having their attention focused on the dignity and importance that are specific to their vocation; for they share an intense communal experience with other men who expectantly look forward to the same exalted service. In such an environment won't the mere omission of adequate teaching about the glory of the Church's life be enough to produce an unbalanced view of the relation of the sacerdotal sacraments, the sacraments that require ordination, especially the Eucharist, to the Church's life? Nature abhors the vacuum. If balancing elements are absent from their formation, won't priests tend, consciously or unconsciously, to understand the Church's life from the viewpoint of the genuine spiritual glory specific to their sacramental ministry rather than understanding the meaning of that ministry from the viewpoint of the Church's life? And won't that misunderstanding diminish the de facto fruits of the spiritual glory of their ministry?

As Chapter Three will fully explain, another de facto "secret," for all practical (that is, pastoral rather than theological) purposes in today's Church is that Jesus' New Law (Jn 13:34-35) commands Christian love specifically for other Christians, not specifically for all humankind; the latter had already been commanded by the "Second Greatest

Commandment," to love our neighbors as ourselves. The New Law directly concerns the life of the Church as a body; the Second Greatest Commandment directly concerns our lives as individuals. Christ was giving his future pastors the solemn pastoral mission of leading Christians to the goal of be a loving brother/sisterhood, and he was telling his future Eucharistic ministers how important that pastoral goal is to their Eucharistic ministry is. Why? Because the Church is meant to be a visible sacrament of a God who is a family of persons ecstatically in love with each other. And it is by the Church as a body witnessing to that love that the world will come to know Jesus.

"The glory which you [identified here as a "Father"] have given me (his "Son") I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (Jn 17:22-23; and see 13:34-35).

I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me that they may be one, even as we are one" (Jn 17:9-11).

Vatican II confirms this understanding of how the Church presents God to the world:

It is the function of the church . . . to make God the father and his incarnate son present and in a sense visible. . . . What does most to reveal God's presence, however, is the brotherly charity of the faithful who are united in spirit . . . and who prove themselves a sign of unity (The Church in the Modern World, 21; emphasis supplied).

The sign of God's presence is familial life, Christian brother/sisterhood, not just individual Christian lives. (Chapter 3 will explain why mutual love of Christians for Christians does not imply any discrimination against non-Christians.)

Do our pastoral leaders understand the life of the Church as Scripture and Vatican II do, or do they understand the life of the Church from the point of view of the sacerdotal sacraments specific to their ministry? Archbishop Cyril Bustros is the Melkite Catholic Eparch

for the United States and was an invited participant in the Vatican's 2005 Synod on the Eucharist. Shortly before the Synod, at a seminary conference that many priests attended, he asserted deliberately and emphatically "The Eucharist is the principal means that the Church offers to the world for meeting the true God . . . in Jesus Christ." But according to Scripture and Vatican II, isn't the principal means the Church offers the world for meeting the true God in Jesus supposed to be the way Jesus says the world will know "that you have sent me," which is also the way Vatican II says "does most" to fulfill the Church's function "to make the Father and his incarnate Son present and in a sense visible." This excellent Archbishop's fully intentional statement constitutes a misunderstanding on the part of a chief pastor of the Eucharist's pastoral goals and therefore of the priest's pastoral ministry.¹⁴

And if that statement was true, the principal way that the Church presents Jesus to the world is as true food and drink (Jn 6:55), true sacrificial and mutually shared food and drink (1 Cor 10:16-21); for that is the pastoral meaning of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, since the sacramental sign is what reveals that meaning.

Also, don't forget that the early Christians did not allow catechumens to be present for the liturgy of the Eucharist. So was the Eucharist "the principal means the (early) Church offered" the catechumens "for meeting the true God in Jesus"? It would be more accurate to say that the Eucharist is the principal means the Church offers already evangelized, catechized and baptized Christians for meeting God in Jesus. That would be even more accurate if we understand celebrating the Eucharist to be the chief act of Christians consciously striving to be a loving brother/sisterhood, which is the main pastoral goal of the Eucharist since loving brother/sisterhood is "what does most to reveal God's presence."

According to Fr. William Halbing writing in a solidly Catholic journal, whose editors participate in the normal pastoral life of the Church, something other than the unity shown by Christian brother/sisterly love will make Jesus known to the world:

Imagine what will happen to our world when Catholics really believe . . . the teaching of the Eucharist — that Jesus is truly present body, blood, soul and divinity . . . Yes, then the world would know that Jesus is alive!"¹⁵

Perhaps Fr. Halbing meant that when we really believe in Jesus' Eucharistic presence, we will achieve that goal of the Eucharist which is the mutual Christian love through which Jesus will be known to the world. If that is what he meant, however, he gives no indication of it. Nor does he or most of the priests and deacons I have been listening to and reading for the last forty-five years give any indication of having learned that the unity Jesus talks about in John 17 is a unity not just of doctrine but of love, love of Christians specifically for other Christians, as is the love of "one another" in Jesus' New Law of John 13. And if they have learned these truths, those priests and deacons do not give any indication of having learned that these truths have enough pastoral importance to define the goal of their pastoral ministry and be proclaimed as such to the rest of us. (Again, where are the counterexamples?)

If the training of other pastoral leaders makes them think that the Eucharist is our principal means of presenting God to the world and/or that our belief in the real presence is what will show the world that Jesus is alive, it should be no wonder that the pastoral life of the otherwise doctrinally sound Church is so weak. Like the pastors and theologians quoted earlier, Archbishop Bustros and Fr. Halbing probably wanted to enhance devotion to the Eucharist. But in fact, their method of trying to enhance that devotion does a disservice to the Eucharist—a disservice to that which is most holy—by interfering with the Eucharist's goals. The actual result is a diminishment, not the intended enhancement, of the Eucharist. Such leaders are unaware of Jesus' pastoral plan, his plan for those who act in persona Christi capitis (in his person as head of the community) to help us respond properly to grace, a plan explicitly taught by Scripture and the Church. (I repeat, however, that this

kind of unawareness, not devotion to the Eucharist itself, is the problem, and so achieving the fruits of Eucharistic grace is the problem.)

Christian brother/sisterhood is not optional for Christians, as is joining a community of religious brothers or sisters; Jesus makes it a new commandment (Jn 13:34-35). But it does not occur just spontaneously; we have to be led to it. So if our leaders do not know they are supposed to lead us to it or do not understand the high priority Jesus places on it, we may not achieve it. Why does the author of the fourth gospel present Jesus promulgating the New Law only to his chosen pastoral leaders, and only at the same time that he gives them the Eucharist and the instruction to continue it? As Chapter 3 will explain, the author was saying that Christian brother/sisterhood is a crucial pastoral responsibility of Jesus' Eucharistic ministers; the full fruits of the Eucharist depend on it.

4.

Prior to Vatican II some of the elements necessary for a balanced pastoral perspective in seminary education seem to have been present at least enough to have, though far from perfect success, more success than today.¹⁶ The goal of Vatican II was the pastoral reform of the Church of that time, but not everything in the Church needed reform. The council fathers meant to build on certain things that they took to be established, not to build the Church from the ground up. After Vatican II seminary training appears to have concentrated on what the council fathers were trying to build while overlooking the foundations the fathers did not stress because they assumed them to have been established. Given that omission in seminary education, Vatican II's emphasis on the liturgy and the nature of the hierarchy reinforced the seminary environment's potential for leading priests to understand the Church's life from the perspective of their ministry rather than their ministry from the perspective of the Church's (inadequately understood) life, which is not what Vatican II intended. For example, the teaching that the liturgy is the source and summit of the Church's life seemed to tell us to understand the Church's life from the

viewpoint of the liturgy rather than requiring us to appreciate the essence of the Church's life in order to understand the meaning of the liturgy.

At baptism, when we first receive the gift of God, we are incorporated into Christ: we become other Christs, are configured to Christ, are enabled to act in the person of Christ and become sharers in Christ's royal priesthood, a priesthood that will last forever.¹⁷ Phrases like "other Christs" and "configured to the person of Christ" are today much more often used of the ministerial priesthood, which will not last forever, than of being Christian. Presbyters have a specific way of acting in the person of Christ that is due not only respect but awe. But since having the gift of God is immeasurably more important and glorious than anything else that can happen to us, we should be incomparably more in awe of the way of being other Christs, being configured to the person of Christ, being enabled to act in the person of Christ and being priests that comes with baptism than comes with ordination. Ordination configures us to Jesus and his priesthood in a way dependent upon and subordinate in glory to the way baptism does. The common priesthood is nothing other than our participation in Jesus' infinite life of worshiping the Father.

While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace — a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit —, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians (The Catechism, 1549).

If you object that "configured to Christ" in the case of priests means they are forever configured to him, in contrast to baptismal grace that we can lose, recall that baptism and confirmation both cause a permanent, irradicable change in us, an indelible characteristic. Those characteristics permanently configure us to Jesus by permanently relating us to his communal body, though not necessarily as living members. If baptism did not cause a permanent relation Jesus in his communal body, we could not receive any other sacrament, especially reconciliation, if we lose the state of grace. Likewise, presbyters are permanently

configured to Jesus by their additional role in his communal body, as will be explained in a moment. But without the permanent characteristic of baptism in other Christians, the permanent characteristic of presbyters would not enable them to minister to other Christians. And without the permanent character of confirmation, which other Christians share, presbyters would not have the power, additional to their sacramental powers, required for their pastoral ministry to achieve their goals of their sacramental ministry. For the apostles had already been ordained when Jesus commanded them to wait in Jerusalem until they receive "power from on high" (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8), power for the Church's mission that all confirmed Christians continue to share with them (see Chapter 4). So whatever else the permanent characteristics of baptism, confirmation and holy orders do, they relate us to the Second Person of the Trinity by way of relating us to the other the *alteri Christi* who are bodily members of Christ. Those characteristics are what enable all of us, presbyters included, to be ministered to by presbyters, and enable all of us, presbyters included, to minister to other *alteri Christi* with pastoral power.

As a divine person, Jesus had a role in his community that he could not share with other members of that community while he was on earth; for not every member of a community can be the head. Presbyters share in the headship role in the Church that Jesus could not share while he was with his community, a role made necessary by his divine personhood. To have that social role is to be in a state higher than that of the laity. Likewise, in the Trinitarian community the Father's role (*Genitori*, the begetter) is primary relative to the Son's (*Genito*, the begotten), and in human families parents have the role of governors relative to children, the governed. But the inequality in status between these social roles does not compare in value to the equality of the members of these communities as persons. Being living members of the Christian community means sharing the life of the Trinity itself, and the state of being other Christs and priests that is identical with being

living members of the Christian community is incomparably more important and worthy of awe than is the social role we play in that community.

Unfortunately, priestly formation too often seems not to have given an appreciation of these elemental and crucial facts. The Boston Globe quoted a newly ordained priest as saying of ordination "This is the greatest gift God can give to man." Perhaps he was misquoted, but what reason do we have for thinking that a modern priest could not say that?

Before over ten-thousand Catholics at a national conference, a learned and otherwise doctrinally sound priest-theologian, licensed to teach in pontifical faculties, was speaking about Catholics' relations with priests. He reasoned that since priests act in the person of Christ, lay people must not; he reasoned further that, therefore, while priests are united to the person of Christ, lay people must only share in Christ's powers.¹⁸ The problem this illustrates is not just the omission of a theological fine point in this excellent priest's academic training; his training did not just fail to explain the meaning of the qualifier capitis in the phrase in persona Christi capitis (in the person of Christ in his role as head of his community).¹⁹ More importantly for making the sacraments effective, his pastoral formation did not give him the appreciation of what Christianity is that St. Paul used to motivate the Corinthians to Christian behavior. No one who had that appreciation could think that Christians are not united to Christ's person but only to his powers (see Acts 9:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12; Mt 25:35-45; Jn 14:20; etc.), or think that the ministerial priesthood is as glorious as the royal priesthood, which is nothing other than the life of divinizing grace. Of course, ordination gives presbyters an increase of divinizing grace for the sake of their ministry. But they do not even have to be in the state of grace to act in persona Christi CAPITIS in their sacramental, teaching and governing roles; that only requires their having additional powers of Christ, the converse of what this learned priest thought.

The fact that we are united with Christ by being united with his humanity might be taken to mean we are not united to his divine personhood, as if his humanity were some sort of obstacle between us and his personhood, like a firewall shielding his personhood from our human natures and vice versa. Of course, the opposite is true. Jesus assumed human nature so that it could be the vehicle, the gateway, for our union with him, the Second Person of the Trinity. The Son assumed his human nature so that he could become an extended "corporate person," "the fulness of him who fills the universe in all its parts" (Eph 1:23). We are the fulness of a divine person who fills the universe in all its parts. (If Jesus' risen human nature also "fills the universe all its parts," that would only strengthen our union with him, since we would be filled with his human nature.)

The mystery of our way of being identified with the Son leaves room for another mystery that might seem to oppose that identification but in fact corresponds with it: the mystery that we are his bride (Rev 21:9; 22:18). Obviously, a marriage takes place between distinct persons. But as a kind of friendship, marriage also requires a kind of equality between the partners. "You have loved them as you loved me" (Jn 17:23) has been traditionally taken to refer to equality of love between God and divinized humanity. The Son can only be the groom of a divinized person. The image of marriage is actually another way of expressing the fact that our union with Christ makes us one corporate divine person with him, since marriage makes the partners one corporate person, as the head and the body constitute one multi-part person (Eph 28-30).²⁰

5.

These facts do not diminish the ministerial priesthood's dignity; they are its dignity. Unless we appreciate the surpassing dignity of life in divinizing grace, we cannot appreciate the dignity of the ministerial priesthood. The restoration, preservation and perfection of the Trinity's life of love in and among Christians is the ministerial priesthood's only purpose. And

the end, here the flourishing of the royal priesthood, is always more important than the means.

Those who use descriptions like “other Christs” or “acting in the person of Christ” as if these descriptions were exclusive to presbyters, rather than applying to presbyters in a less glorious sense, probably think they are enhancing the dignity of the presbyterate. In fact, they are diminishing its dignity—just as those who use the phrase “real presence” exclusively for the Eucharist in fact diminish the Eucharist’s effectiveness.

Consider the presbyter’s ministry of reconciliation. Under which of the following interpretations does that ministry have more dignity? Interpretation A: Reconciliation restores a sinner to full living unity with Jesus such that the sinner can now truthfully say “It is no longer I who live [and so acts], but Christ who lives [and so acts] in me, such that the sinner can now participate in the Second Person of the Trinity’s own act of worshiping the Father, and such that anyone who mistreats that sinner is mistreating Jesus himself.

Interpretation B: Reconciliation of the sinner does not and cannot do any of these things. Or consider a presbyter’s Eucharistic ministry. Interpretation A: The Eucharist preserves and perfects the life of union with the person of Christ just described. The Eucharist preserved and perfects the life that is infinitely greater than anything else than can possibly happen to a creature. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our really participating in the life of the Trinity by really participating in the life of the Second Person of the Trinity.

Interpretation B: The Eucharist does not and cannot do any of these things.

Clearly, Interpretation A gives the presbyter’s ministry incomparably more dignity than Interpretation B. But let us assume there was a legitimate way to make a description like “acting in the person of Christ” exclusive to presbyters. Then, whatever that description would mean, it would have to mean something infinitely less glorious than being in the state of grace, because everything is infinitely less glorious than being in the state of grace.

(Archbishop Gomez of San Francisco recently told his priests “Only the priest is ordained to

participate in Christ's own sacred ministry of redemption."²¹ The word "ordained" saves that statement from falsehood. Only the priest participates in Christ's ministry of redemption in the way that is specific to ordination. But as Chapter 4 will show, another de facto "secret," at the pastoral, not the theological, level, is that the ministry of redemption belongs to the whole Church, the royal priesthood, and the absolutely necessary role of the presbyterate is Christ's ministry of headship in the community that, as a whole, carries on the work of redemption.)

Chapter 3 will explain that viewing the Church's life in terms of the sacraments rather than vice versa can also tend to make the Church act like a service institution, a delivery system for spiritual goods, instead of a brother/sisterhood visibly living the Trinity's life of familial love for each other. Correspondingly, viewing the Church's life in terms of the sacerdotal sacraments can unintentionally foster an unChristian clericalism. If the Church's main purpose is to provide services that only a select group can provide, the Church's life will revolve around the roles of those service providers, especially if we do not place an incomparably higher value on every Christian's way of being united with the person of Christ than on the presbyter's way. Without judging any particular case, it would be rash not to consider the possibility that a kind of clericalism was behind the scandalous response of some in the hierarchy to priestly sexual abuse; for some of them gave the impression of trying to avoid scandal to protect, not the family of God, but the institutional Church.

The institutional aspects of the pilgrim Church are necessary for it and belong to its nature. But they are necessary as means to the end of the Church itself being a sacrament, a sign of a God who is a family of persons ecstatically in love with each other. Scripture, tradition and Church teaching tell us that the visible sign of that God is supposed to be Christians loving their fellow Christians as the Father and Son love each other, not the Church's institutional and doctrinal unity, no matter how necessary the latter kinds of unity are. If the Church's institutional aspects are not fostering visible brother/sisterhood, they

are not serving their purpose as taught by Scripture and Vatican II. To strengthen the Church as an institution, seminary training must strive to ensure that ordained ministers put the institution second. To do that, we have to restore balance in their training by giving them a firm and appreciative grasp of what “the surpassing grace of God in you” (2 Cor 9:14) is.

Good priests — and they are by far the vast majority — are not responsible for our pastoral problems, but their leadership is essential to solving them. So the issue of priestly training cannot be ignored. If the cause of the imbalances in our normal spiritual formation was not omissions in priestly education, the cause would have lie in our self-sacrificing priests, by whom the rest of us are taught, themselves. Blaming good priests would be a gross injustice made even worse by the fact that they have already suffered enough from the omissions in their formation. For the sake of their own spiritual lives, priests need to learn the principles that are essential for knowing how to respond to grace. By keeping essential truths “secret,” seminary education is not just failing the ministries of the ordained; it is failing their spirituality. Like the rest of us, they need an appreciation of the real presence of Christ that is the essence of Christianity for their spiritual lives as well as for their ministry. They cannot have that appreciation unless they know that the glory of “the gift of God” in us surpasses everything.

If “overemphasis” was a problem in priestly pastoral training, it would be better described as an overemphasis, not on the Eucharist, but on the sacrament of Holy Orders, on the dignity their exalted service bestows on presbyters. And our pastoral imbalance cannot be avoided, as some seminaries attempt to, just by stressing that priests are supposed to be servants. For there is too often a tendency among both clergy and laity to view the Church’s life from the standpoint of the priest’s sacramental service rather than that service from the standpoint of the far under appreciated life of the Church. Still, this problem is more the result of an underemphasis on what Christianity is than an

overemphasis on what the ordained priesthood is. And the problem does not come just from what seminarians are or are not taught in the classroom; it comes from their total environment. (I am not calling for us to abandon the seminary system; see Chapter 6, where I return to the issue of priestly education.)

To be a pastoral handicap this de facto "overemphasis" need not rise to the level of clericalism. Still, some presbyters, deacons and conscientious lay people tell me they find clericalism to be widespread. Deacons as well as presbyters are obligated to say the Divine Office. A class preparing for the diaconate at one solidly orthodox seminary asked if they could say the office with those preparing for the presbyterate. The presbyterial seminarians turned down the request, thinking that they shouldn't let laymen share the office with them. Where did those otherwise generous young men get such an idea? Aren't they supposed to be thrilled at the chance to be servants who wash the feet of Christ's members? They certainly wouldn't have gotten that idea on their own; so they must be innocent victims of a culture that gave it to them, and not just via the classroom. And those in charge of the culture that gave it to them must be innocent victims of the same culture.

But whether clericalism is widespread or not, there is a widespread and pastorally damaging misunderstanding of Vatican II's teaching on the ministerial priesthood and its sacramental dimension. The misunderstanding can be summarized as a distortion of two truths: that the priest acts in persona Christi capitis and that the liturgy the priest celebrates is the source and summit of the Church's life. Both distortions result from an under appreciation of the Church's life of divinizing grace. The consequence is that many of those whom we depend on to teach and foster the dispositions necessary for cooperating with sacramental grace have been ill prepared for that mission in crucial ways. People with pastoral beliefs like those I have quoted have an admirable love of the Eucharist. How sad and ironic that those beliefs prevent the pastoring needed to fully achieve the Eucharist's goals, to allow its graces to fully bear fruit.

6.

Another contributing factor to undervaluing the real presence of the Trinity as the essence of the Christian life is the common misconception that the sacerdotal sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are distinctively Catholic. For example, Fr. Dale Fushek, director of the Life Teen program, risks giving his participants this impression by teaching that the inclusion of the liturgy in the program is what "makes it Catholic" and that without the liturgy it would not be "authentically Catholic."²² Of course, and as Fr. Fushek knows, the liturgy and the other sacerdotal sacraments are not distinctively Catholic. They are at most "quasi-distinctively" Catholic, since we share them with other Christians who have apostolic succession. What is distinctively Catholic is the continuing ministry that Jesus gave to Peter, and there is no question that we cannot receive the fullness of Christianity, which Christ wants to give everyone, without having the benefit of Peter's ministry.

This misconception about what is distinctively Catholic often combines with another misconception, that distinctively Catholic doctrines are more important than doctrines we share with other Christian traditions. I have several times seen public statements that the Eucharist is the "core," "central" or "fundamental" belief of Catholics go undisputed, even at meetings of highly educated Catholic scholars, including priests, who are otherwise doctrinally sound. To link effect to cause once more, when people make that kind of statement, what has been stressed in their experience with the pastoral life of the Church are things that are quasi-distinctively Catholic, not distinctively Christian. (Again, to avoid the cause-effect argument, it is not enough to assume the source of this frequent problem is parents or teachers; the Church's normal spiritual formation must have either caused this problem to begin with or failed to correct it. Either way, something crucial is missing from that life.) But the purpose of what is quasi-distinctively Catholic is the restoration, preservation and perfection of the life that can be shared by all baptized (by water or desire) Christians. Releasing the power of the sacraments requires ensuring that Catholics are firmly

rooted in truths that we happen to share with other Christian traditions and on which the effectiveness of the sacraments would depend even if there were no other Christian traditions. (If you are a convert from another Christian tradition, however, it is understandable if you tend to focus on the distinctively and quasi-distinctively Catholic since you have correctly sought what the Catholic Church can give you that your previous tradition could not.)

So one way of describing the problem with our formation is that it does not reflect the importance of the Church's teaching on the "hierarchy of truths": Some Christian beliefs have a higher priority than others because the other beliefs are based on them and so need to be illumined by them.

In the message of salvation there is a certain hierarchy of truths (cf. UR,²³ 11), which the Church has always recognized when it composed creeds or summaries of the truths of faith. This hierarchy does not mean that some truths pertain to faith itself less than others, but rather that some truths are based on others as of a higher priority, and are illumined by them.

On all levels catechesis should take account of this hierarchy of the truths of faith. (Congregation for the Clergy, General Catechetical Directory, 43²⁴).

The truths to be believed include God's love. He created all things for the sake of Christ and restored us to life in Christ Jesus. The various aspects of the mystery are to be explained in such a way that the central fact, Jesus, as he is God's greatest gift to men, holds first place, and that from him the other truths of Catholic teaching derive their order and hierarchy from the educational point of view (ibid., 16).

The object of faith embraces a content which of its very nature is complex, namely, God in his own mystery and in his saving intervention in history. All these things are known through what God himself has revealed about himself and about his

works. Christ has central importance both in the salvific intervention of God and in the manifestation of him to men. . . .

A catechesis that neglects this interrelation and harmony of its content can become entirely useless for achieving its proper end (ibid., 39).

Just as Christ is the centre of the history of salvation, so the mystery of God is the centre from which this history takes its origin and to which it is ordered as to its last end. The crucified and risen Christ leads men to the Father by sending the Holy Spirit upon the People of God. For this reason the structure of the whole content of catechesis must be theocentric and Trinitarian: through Christ, to the Father, in the Spirit (ibid., 41).

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity (Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation On Catechesis in Our Time, 5).

What is at the center of the hierarchy of truths is Jesus of Nazareth. To say that is not to say that the center of the hierarchy is Jesus' mode of presence in the Eucharist or that more fundamental mode of his presence, without which there could not be a Eucharist, in his communal body, the Church. Nor is Jesus' role as founder and head of the Church the center. It is not truths about the Church and the sacraments that illumine Jesus of Nazareth; it is truths about Jesus of Nazareth that illumine the Church and the sacraments. It is not truths about God and Jesus that are based on truths of a higher priority, namely, truths about the Church and the sacraments; it is truths about the Church and the sacraments that are based on truths of a higher priority, truths about God and Jesus. Just look at the creeds, which the General Catechetical Directory (43) cites as reflecting the hierarchy of truths.

Even the truths we have seen about the presence of Jesus by the gift of God are not at the top of the hierarchy, although they are very close. They depend on truths about who

Jesus is and what he did for us, not vice versa. Adults who have yet to convert to Christianity do not respond to actual grace by entering a relation with Jesus living within them through divinizing grace; for they do not yet share the life of the Trinity. They enter a relation with Jesus who is present in them because the risen Jesus "fills the universe in all its parts" (Eph 1:23, NAB). As a consequence of entering into a relation with the risen Jesus, converts then have Jesus present in them in another way, through divinizing grace.

We are discussing the dispositions necessary for cooperating with actual grace. One, though only one, such disposition is an appreciative awareness of what God's inexpressible gift is. To have that disposition, however, we need more than a catechetical knowledge (as catechesis is usually practiced, rather than as John Paul II and the General Catechetical Directory wish) of the gift of God. We need a personal relationship to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Responding to sacramental grace is responding to a person, Jesus, and responding to him in a personal way. It is not just by intellectually understanding that some truths in the Church's hierarchy "are based on others as of a higher priority, and are illumined by them" (ibid., 43) that we come into the relationship with Jesus necessary to live the life of the Trinity. What matters is our personal response to those truths on which the others depend and which illuminate the others. This means having a personal relation, not just to true statements, but to the realities, Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit of mutual love, that those higher truths tell us about. As several recent renewal movements have shown, that requires the personal evangelization of the already "catecheticized" and sacramentalized.

Chapter 2 will deal with the personal evangelization of already sacramentalized Catholics. To understand personal evangelization, pastoral leaders need an appreciation the real presence of Jesus that is the essence of Christianity. But if leaders who make statements about the Eucharist and the priesthood like those quoted above truly believe what they are saying, they cannot preach the Great News as effectively as we need because they cannot have a sufficiently clear understanding of how to preach it according to the

hierarchy of truths. If we do not know that the glory of divinizing grace surpasses everything, we do not know how great the Great News is. If we do not know how great it is, we cannot preach it as it needs to be preached to counter secular influences on Catholics. In the light of the hierarchy of truths, however, even that glory is not all that makes the Great News great and so not all we have to repeatedly stress to preach it effectively. Chapter 2 will explain that to know how great the Great News is we must also know that God's glorious gift is an entirely free gift. In fact, an appreciation of divinizing grace is not the most fundamental disposition needed for making the Eucharist effective. Chapter 2 deal with the dispositions that, from the viewpoint of the hierarchy of truths, are most fundamental and so most necessary. It will explain what our core preaching to Catholics about how to respond to grace should be.)

Some pastoral leaders with whom I have discussed these matters believe that treating the Eucharist as if it were the center of the Christian message is pastorally justified because "It's all there in the Eucharist." Yes, all the doctrines of Christianity are summed up in the Eucharist, but what pastoral conclusions should we draw from that theological fact? For centuries, remember, we drew the conclusion that we should discourage frequent reception of the Eucharist; does the fact that the conclusions we now draw are at an opposite extreme make our pastoral reasoning any more valid? The realities expressed by the truths that have the highest priority in the hierarchy should have the highest place in our spiritual lives. The question is whether we can expect to get the spiritual benefit of truths that have a higher priority than the Eucharist if the way we present the Eucharist omits to give those other truths the attention that their intrinsic importance deserves. Does the way the Eucharist contains the other truths, as defined by the sacramental sign of food and drink, make focusing on the Eucharist itself sufficient to proclaim the Christian message in an effective way according to its hierarchical structure? Not if

The various aspects of the mystery are to be explained in such a way that . . . Jesus . . . holds first place, and that from him the other truths of Catholic teaching derive their order and hierarchy from the educational point of view (General Catechetical Directory, 16),

and not if

A catechesis that neglects this interrelation and harmony of its content can become entirely useless for achieving its proper end (ibid., 39).

Instead of fostering an appreciation of the Eucharist to get the benefit of the truths of a higher priority, we need to ensure that the truths of a higher priority are appreciated to get the full benefit of the Eucharist. Chapter 2 will discuss how to accomplish that.

In fact it is because "It's all there in the Eucharist," because the Eucharist sums up all the most important Christian truths, that we cannot adequately communicate those truths by focusing on the Eucharist; we especially cannot communicate them according to their place in the hierarchy. To counter secularism we must do more than sum up those truths, we must explicitly proclaim them with the prominence they deserve in their own right. To expect people to get them primarily from a place where they are summed up is to expect people to get them by inference rather than directly.

In a very important sense, "there can be no danger of excess in our care for" the Eucharist, "for in this sacrament is recapitulated the whole mystery of salvation" (The Church of the Eucharist 61). But the Pope is here assuming that the "whole mystery of salvation" has been properly taught and understood according to the hierarchy of Christian truths. For in The Church of the Eucharist itself the Pope reminds us that the Eucharist is not "the wonder that surpasses them all," but that "the redemptive incarnation" is (58). When our formation omits to sufficiently emphasize the whole nature of that mystery, it underemphasizes by omission one of the fundamental conditions needed for the Eucharist to achieve its goals. Distorting the place of the liturgy does not honor the liturgy. But our

formation does not do that by overemphasizing the Eucharist as much as by underemphasizing other things.

If we could take for granted that Catholics had a firm appreciation of truths about what Jesus did for us that are logically prior to such truths as, for example, that he perpetuated his work by forming a hierarchical community (rather than, say, writing a book), then when we focus on quasi-distinctively Catholic truths, the Eucharist foremost, our pastoral work can bear the fruit it should. In the absence of that firm grounding and its continual reinforcement, however, focusing pastoral work on the quasi-distinctively Catholic can only distort the meaning both of what is distinctively Christian and of what is distinctively and quasi-distinctively Catholic. If Vatican II could assume that most of the groundwork for the effectiveness of the sacraments had been done, we can no longer make that assumption. Vatican II wanted us to repair the rest of the house; now we have to repair the foundation. We cannot rely on the Eucharist, or on teaching about the Eucharist, to do that when the lived effectiveness of the Eucharist itself needs to be renewed.

7.

The remaining chapters will show that more is needed to fill the voids in our formation than an appreciation of God's inexpressible gift. I hope, however, that starting with the issue of what Christianity is has shown that we cannot explain the first-world Church's pastoral weakness in dealing with secularism solely by the existence of so much watered-down and heterodox doctrine. Pastoring greatly needs reform even where sound doctrine is taught.

Before going on, however, it is important to know that this is not the fault of Church leaders, including seminary officials. To explain why, I will offer some reflections on the pastoral history of the Church prior to Vatican II that show how the insufficiently stressed truths became "secret" at the pastoral, though not theological, level to begin with.

There appears to be a tendency for the Church's spiritual formation to place an unbalanced emphasis on whatever was stressed — or is perceived to have been stressed — by the most recent council or major encyclical. Councils and encyclicals are meant only to address specific theological and pastoral issues. Their teachings presuppose that in other respects Christian doctrine, with its hierarchical structure of truths, is understood. Still, although that doctrine is the necessary background for putting the parts they focus on in perspective, it would be impossible for them to restate the whole of the Christian message every time. That impossibility will always create an opportunity for jumping on a pastoral bandwagon that places unbalanced weight on what the council or encyclical taught to the extent of not paying sufficient attention to things that what they taught depends on. The result can be a de facto overemphasis on some things, even though the overemphasis is really just the unintended consequence of the underemphasis on other things.

After the Council of Trent, the Church's spiritual formation tended to stress what was distinctively and quasi-distinctively Catholic — such as the sacerdotal sacraments, the hierarchy and the magisterium, devotion to Mary and the saints, Purgatory, and tradition — as a way of countering the Protestant Reformation.²⁵ That may have been a good pastoral strategy, especially at the beginning. It required placing what would have otherwise been a disproportionate focus on truths that are not at the top of the hierarchy of Christian truths, since most Protestants then shared those central truths. But at the beginning and for a long time after, you could assume that Catholics were sufficiently grounded in the more basic truths that focusing on others would not diminish the importance of the more basic in Catholics' spirituality; for most of society continued to believe, and so supported Catholics' belief in, truths at the top of the hierarchy.

In that historical context (and actually for many centuries before) training its leaders for evangelism did not have to be high on the Church's agenda. Seminary education could presuppose that a community of faith already existed and teach how to maintain and

nourish that faith. As time went on, however, less and less of society believed the central Christian truths. Secularism replaced Protestantism as our main opponent. Society no longer supported our belief in the central truths. But that social change happened so quickly, because of the unprecedented power of modern technology, that seminaries did not respond to it and continued to train priests and deacons to minister in a (no longer existing) context of faith. The result, as the quotations above illustrate, is that the training of the ordained and the laity does not reflect the importance of the hierarchy of truths in a way sufficient to release the sacraments' power against secularism. So Church leaders and seminary officials are inculpable victims of historical and cultural conditions that have prevented them from seeing what changes spiritual formation now requires. (Chapters 3 and 6 will describe more of those conditions; Chapter 3 also will explain why our pastoral weakness is predominantly a first-world problem, though only for the time being.)

I am not saying that truths that are specifically Catholic received all of our attention since Trent, not even that they received most of the attention. But given importance of the central truths in the Christian hierarchy, it turns out that it does not take much, at least in the right social context, for our attention to the central truths to be insufficient for the sacraments to bear the fruit they should. A technologically advanced secular society that no longer supports belief in the central truths has proven to be such a context; in it our focus on quasi-distinctively Catholic truths has become pastorally disproportionate in fact though not in intention. We are living in a laboratory example of what can happen when happen when the hierarchy of truths gets insufficient attention; the very essence of Christianity can be overlooked or misunderstood.

Due to Pius XII's encyclical, Mystici Corporis, for example, the real presence of Christ that I remember hearing about most often prior to Vatican II was not the Eucharist but the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. The doctrine of the Mystical Body is not at the very top of the hierarchy; it presupposes truths about the Trinity, creation, sin, Jesus and

salvation. But it is closer to the top than, say, truths about apostolic succession and the liturgy, which presuppose the truth that Jesus is really present in the world through the Church: You cannot be ordained or receive the Eucharist unless you are first a member of the community that is Christ himself continuing to be humanly present in the world. Given society's gradual drift away from foundational Christian truths and toward secularism, however, so little were documents like Mystici Corporis able to prevent our post-Vatican II pastoral imbalance that the crucial doctrine of the Mystical Body has become almost an afterthought today.

Vatican I reinforced the trend started at Trent by putting stress on the only truth that is truly distinctively Catholic, the ministry of Peter. It also gave rise, however, to another kind of pastoral imbalance, one that illustrates a different way that the omission of other things can have the effect of an unbalanced focus on what the latest council or major encyclical emphasized. Vatican I taught that natural human reason was capable of knowing that God exists. That teaching, coupled with Leo XIII's encyclical on philosophy, Aeterni Patris, motivated a gigantic pastoral effort on the part of Catholic colleges to use natural reason to make students convinced Christians. First, Vatican I's teaching about knowing the existence of God had to be defended by making students learn proofs for God's existence. That meant requiring them to take metaphysics and/or natural philosophy — and why not throw in proving the immortality of the soul while the opportunity was there? Second, students were taught an ethics based on natural reason, with little attention to Christians' obligations specifically to their fellow Christians.

One result was an excessive pastoral reliance on natural reason. Of course, it would be disastrous to go to the other extreme and suppress the contributions natural reason can make. (For the record, I am a former philosophy professor who thinks it entirely appropriate for a Catholic college to require a student to take some philosophy courses.) Those contributions are good and important — just think of ethics — and they deserve a place in

our pastoral efforts. But does their pastoral value justify the human investment represented by the thousands of courses, hundreds of text books and the attempt to make philosophy teachers out of so many religious and priests who lacked sufficient philosophical ability?²⁶ Not if that strategy diverts our attention from the primary way Jesus' pastoral plan calls for us to combat atheism.

The remedy which must be applied to atheism, however, is to be sought in a proper presentation of the Church's teaching, as well as in the integral life of the Church and her members. For it is the function of the Church . . . to make God the Father and his incarnate Son present and in a sense visible. This result is achieved chiefly by the witness of a living and mature faith. . . Many martyrs have given luminous witness to this faith and continue to do so. This faith needs to prove its fruitfulness by penetrating the believer's entire life, including its worldly dimensions, and by activating him toward justice and love, especially regarding the needy. What does most to reveal God's presence, however, is the brotherly charity of the faithful who are united in spirit as they work together for the faith of the Gospel (cf. Phil 1:27) and who prove themselves a sign of unity (The Church in the Modern World, 22; emphasis supplied).

These words of Vatican II do not contradict what Vatican I taught about our ability to know God by natural reason, nor do they neglect the importance of natural ethics ("justice and love, especially regarding the needy"). But these words certainly help balance the pastoral conclusions we reached after Vatican I. We were again jumping from theological truths to incorrect pastoral conclusions just as we did for centuries when we thought that the theological truth about the Eucharist required us to discourage frequent reception. The unbalanced emphasis on the natural in relation to the supernatural before Vatican II helped prepare for an otherwise salutary emphasis on social action following Vatican II that in some quarters was disproportionate since it was at the expense of the Church's spiritual mission.

Vatican II has been described as the official end of the post-Tridentine period in the Church. With respect to Vatican II's intentions, as well as to many of its accomplishments, that description is probably true. With respect to the sacerdotal sacraments, however, and therefore to the ministry of priests, the problem of an underemphasis on some parts of Christian doctrine, especially the more foundational, having the effect of an overemphasis on others, especially the quasi-distinctively Catholic, reached its peak after (though not at) Vatican II.

The first document promulgated by Vatican II was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. That constitution's teaching about the liturgy as the source and summit of the Church's life presupposes an understanding of the divine, Trinitarian nature of the Church's life, as we have seen. The constitution did not expound on the glory of the gift of God, divinizing grace; that was not its purpose. But the fact that it didn't created the opportunity for its justifiably exalted praises of the liturgy to be taken out of the context their justification depends on. Too often its statements were not read against the background necessary for understanding their true meaning.

A pastoral misunderstanding of the sacerdotal sacraments, again, is a misunderstanding of the role of priests. If we forget the nature of the Church's life, we can think that the priest's way of being configured to Christ and of acting in his person is more important than the baptized Christian's. Later Vatican II documents stressed that the priest is a servant, but the absence of enough counterbalancing teaching after Vatican II allowed the pastoral misunderstanding of the roles of priests and the sacerdotal sacraments to take root. Both the servants and the served could view the Church's life in terms of priests' sacramental service, rather than vice versa, and so not understand the need to subordinate that service to the ends for which it is a means, or at least not understand pastoral principles that are necessary to achieve those ends — even though for the vast majority of priests the desire to serve comes from the purest Christian motives.

As the summit of the life for which the sacraments are the principal means, the liturgy itself is an end, not just a means. But if those responsible for helping us respond to sacramental grace do not appreciate that life for what it is, the liturgy's role as the summit of that life can only be weakened. For example, when the life of which the liturgy is the summit is not that of Catholics who are consciously trying to make the Church a functioning and visible brother/sisterhood, something pastorally essential — I do not say theologically essential — is missing. As the real presence of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, the liturgy is also the source of the Church's life. But between a foundation and a roof there is a building, and between the liturgy as source and the liturgy as end (summit) there is the Church's life. If we are not sufficiently aware of the nature of the life that has the liturgy as its source, the liturgy as end will be a magnificent roof on a building not adequately connected to its foundations.

The council fathers probably thought that stressing that the priest was a servant would prevent clericalism. If clericalism was a factor in the bishops' cover-up scandal, the disproportionate emphasis on the quasi-distinctively Catholic after Trent was a major contributor to the clericalism since it resulted, though unintentionally, in an unbalanced stress on the role of the sacerdotal sacraments and the priesthood. But the council fathers understandably did not restate all the more fundamental doctrines, and in their entirely correct respect for and love of the sacerdotal sacraments they did not see that their way of honoring of those sacraments could have the unintended consequence of enhancing clericalism. Also, the emphasis on the priest as servant after Vatican II probably, and unintentionally, reinforced the de facto state of the Church as a service institution and delivery system for spiritual goods, despite many sincere words about parishes being families and communities.

The temptation to place unbalanced stress on some parts of the Church's doctrine or pastoral life will probably always arise after events like councils and ground-breaking

encyclicals. A similar imbalance might occur if the ideas in a book like this were to catch on. Again, I have cited misperceptions about the Eucharist and priesthood not as evidence of overemphasis on them but of our insufficient awareness of other things. So I urge anyone who might want to make use of these ideas not to do so in any way that would diminish the importance and dignity of ordination, the other sacerdotal sacraments or anything else distinctively or quasi-distinctively Catholic — most especially the Eucharist. That would just be another distortion that would hinder the full releasing of the sacraments' power. There can be no better way, for example, to pray for renewal in the spiritual formation the Church provides than adoration of Jesus really present in the Eucharist — the more so the better we understand what Jesus has done for us.

Finally I offer two more statements from the magisterium that confirm the theological validity of these pastoral ideas. The first is from Bl. John the XXIII who, as Pope John Paul II reminded us "loved to say again and again that 'What unites us (Catholic and non-Catholic Christians) is much greater than what divides us'."²⁷ The second is from John Paul II, "How little divides them (Catholic and non-Catholic Christians) in comparison to what unites them."²⁸ Consider the things those Popes knew to be included in "what unites" and "what divides" Christians.

Notes

¹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church 51, 260, 265, 460, 797, 1127, 1129, 1265, 1691, 1692, 1695, 1812, 1988, 1997, 1999, 2565. The Trinity's life consists of having each other as objects of awareness and love. Having the Trinity itself as object of awareness (by faith) and especially of love is having the Trinity really present in us sharing its own life.

² The parable of Lk 11:11-13 probably identifies the Holy Spirit with the gift of God also. And see Heb 6:4. The New Testament uses several Greek words meaning "gift," including the words we translate "grace" and "charism." But in speaking of the gift of God, it only uses

one Greek word, a word with the same root. "do," as "donation" and "dowry."

³ Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 10.

⁴ Jn 6:53; obviously, the Eucharist is not indispensable for the baptized who die before being able to receive the Eucharist.

⁵ Perfectly valid and necessary theological distinctions can create another psychological obstacle to appreciating the glory of the Trinity's real presence in us. We are told, correctly, that this means the persons of the Trinity are present in us "as object," that is, as being objects of our knowledge and love. At that, we are tempted to wipe the fear-based sweat off our brow and say "Whew! I thought you were asking me to believe another 'hard saying,' like believing that Jesus' body and blood can be true food and drink (Jn 6:55, 60). Having to believe one of those is quite enough! Thank God all you mean is that the Trinity is 'in' us in the quasi-metaphorical, or indirect, or at least minimal sense in which things we know and love are present in our mind and heart." But the relations between a knower and lover and the objects of the knowledge and love is all the infinite life of the Trinity is, not just in us, but in itself. Only because God's existence is identical both with his knowledge and love and with the object of his knowledge and love is God a family of persons. By knowing himself, God is a Father who generates the Word in which he contemplates the object of his knowledge, his own divine nature, and expresses that knowledge to himself. By their mutual love for the divine nature and so for each other as possessing it, the Father and the Word breathe the divine Sigh or Moan (see Rm 8:23,26; "Spirit" means breath) of love that "Word"-lessly (8:26; that is, affectively in contrast to "conceptually") expresses and contains the love that is identical with the divine nature as perfectly as the Word expresses and contains the knowledge that is identical with it. There is nothing metaphorical, indirect or minimal about saying that sharing the Trinity's relations between God's knowledge and love and the object of his knowledge love makes the Trinity really present in us and really makes

its infinite life our life. That is what the real presence of the Trinity is — even in God. (For more on the technical theology of the Trinity as it relates to these pastoral ideas, see the Appendix to Chapter 5.)

⁶. Peter Kreeft, "What I Learned from a Muslim About Eucharistic Adoration," Crisis, December, 1998, 30.

⁷ Andrew McNair, L.C., "Making Holy Thursday Last All Year," The National Catholic Register, April 8, 2001, 9.

⁸ All of our earthly union with the Trinity is a "seed" of the heavenly union; 1 Jn 3:9.

⁹. Quoted in "Corpus Christi and 'The Wonder of His Presence'," The National Catholic Register, May 30, 1999, 3.

¹⁰ "Foreword" to The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth," by Scott Hahn (New York: Doubleday, 1999) xv.

¹¹ For example, "Exposed," The National Catholic Register, December 24, 2000, 1.

¹² The Church of the Eucharist, 23, 28, 35.

¹³

With one exception, a letter to the editor written by this author; Crisis, June, 1999, 3-4.

¹⁴ If you worry that I am taking this statement out of context or distorting the Archbishop's views in any other way, the talk was recorded. Contact me at cahalanj@comcast.net.

¹⁵ "Holy Communion, *Pentecost Today*, October/November/December, 2005, p. 7.

¹⁶ Balancing elements can come from the religious culture of society as a whole. See Section 7 of this chapter.

¹⁷ The Catechism 783-786, 901, 904, 941, 1129, 1268, 1272, 1361, 1391, 1546, 1547, 1591, 1694, 1997, 2157, 2565, 2717, 2782.

¹⁸ I am not naming this fine priest since he is a personal friend to whom I am very indebted.

¹⁹ The Catechism, 1591.

²⁰ For an explanation of the metaphysics behind our union with the Son, see John C. Cahalan, Ph.D., "The Real Presence of the Trinity in Jesus' Human Nature and Ours" at <http://home.comcast.net/~theoideas/onlinestorage/Sgrace2.pdf>

²¹ *National Catholic Register*, May 8, 2011, p. 3.

²² "The Eucharist," videotaped talk in the Life Teen program (Mesa AZ: Catholic Life, Inc., 1999)

²³ Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*); and see The Catechism 90, 234.

²⁴ Available at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_11041971_gcat_en.html

²⁵ See David Carlin, The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America (Nashua, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2004). I suggested to Carlin, and he agreed, that what he pejoratively calls "generic" Christianity would be better described as lowest common denominator Christianity. The most important truths in the Christian hierarchy are generic in the sense that they are shared by many Christian groups. Carlin had no intention to deny that doctrine should be taught and understood according to the hierarchy of Christian truths.

²⁶ One result was that many students learned to hate the only philosophy that even has a chance to preserve the genuine though partial insights found in other philosophies. I would be very interested to see how Thomism would flourish in the context of a better balance between the natural and the supernatural.

²⁷ Address of John Paul II to the Catholic Bishops of the Russian Federation on Their "Ad Limina" Visit, February 9, 2002, 4; also quoted in Pope John Paul II, That They May All Be

