

Session A --- Evening of the First Day

First Talk

Important Information for the Speaker

The first talk needs to give priests a reason why it is going to be worthwhile to take this retreat, committing five days of their lives to it. Therefore the talk seeks to achieve two different kinds of goals: first, to impart a certain content; and second, to help each priest attending be disposed to receive the rest of what the retreat has to offer in the days to come. The speaker, therefore, should strive to convey the specific content presented below and to do that in a manner that will help the priests want to hear the rest of what the retreat has to say.

The material covered in this talk is essential for the retreatants to be properly attentive and receptive to the material to be covered in the subsequent talks. All the retreatants need to be aware of these points in order for the subsequent talks to be sufficiently beneficial to their pastoral ministry. And for most of the retreatants this will be the first time they have learned at least some of these things.

This talk presents information pastors need to know, which they may not yet understand due to historical reasons. Lay Catholics do not have the same need for this information. Subsequent talks on the retreat, on the other hand, mostly present material that all Catholics need to know, but in general do not, and that pastors are responsible for teaching them.

Since this talk is the introduction to the retreat, it should not go more than 30 minutes.

Goals

To ensure that the retreatants:

- Understand how the change from a Christian to a post-Christian society calls for new pastoral approaches.
- Understand how the Church's doctrine of the Hierarchy of Christian Truths can help pastors lead Catholics to be strong Christians in a post-Christian society.
- Will be receptive to the rest of the retreat.

Checklist for the Speaker

To achieve these goals the speaker should ask himself: As a result of my talk, how well will the retreatants appreciate Catholics' need to grasp the following points, and how well will the retreatants understand how to present these points?

1. Cooperating with grace is not solely the individual's responsibility. Since we are social beings influenced by our environments, the Church must teach us and help us.
2. Much of pastoral training given in the past presupposed something no longer true –

namely, that the family could, and would, accomplish the prior evangelizing on which catechesis builds.

3. Past omissions in pastoral training are not anybody's fault, but result from rapid social changes beyond anyone's control.
4. A more theologically oriented training is not adequate for all the tasks of pastoral ministry, since pastoral ministry is primarily concerned with fostering Catholic spirituality. I.e., that understanding truths doctrinally is not the same as understanding their significance for a life of holiness.
5. Some Christian truths have a higher priority because other truths are based on them and must be illumined by them.
6. The relative priority of some Christian truths is not simply a theological concern, but is also an important consideration for Catholic spirituality and for the kind of pastoral ministry that fosters Catholic spirituality.

If any of the points in this checklist are things the speaker does not wish to include in his talk, for the sake of teamwork the speaker should (1) inform the rest of his team of the specific points he does not wish to cover (2) inform the rest of the team what he plans to do instead, and (3) get the consensus of the team for his plan.

If there is a consensus about not covering those points from the checklist, the team can do one of two things instead. (1) They can agree to cover the points in other talks and work out which talks will cover them and how. (2) They can agree not to cover the points at all, since the checklist is not infallible. But before choosing (2) each member of the team should read the paragraphs in the "Explanation of the Outline" and in the Appendix that explain those points and why they were considered pastorally important in the first place.

So checklist points should be deleted from the retreat only if the entire team understands why they were originally considered important from a pastoral point of view, whether or not they are important from any other point of view. The reason why they were included in the first place *may not always be obvious*, especially to alumni of post-Trent seminaries. For example, the reason may concern cultural conditions unique to us but so prevalent that we hardly notice them. (See, for example, the discussion of the phrase "children of God" in Section II.5 of the "Expanded Outline" and the "Explanation of the Outline.")

Since the team's discernment of whether to delete a checklist point, and what to cover instead, will take time, a speaker who does not wish to include a checklist point should give the rest of the team ample advance notice.

Brief Outline

- I. Grace presupposes and perfects nature. By God's design we are social beings influenced by our environments. The Church has always adapted its pastoral ministry to new social environments.

- II. Pastoral training since Trent stressed the distinctively Catholic against Protestantism. That strategy assumed that the family could, and would, fulfill the indispensable evangelism that pastoral ministry presupposes.
- III. Defense of distinctively Catholic truths against Protestantism required that priestly education focus so much on theology that insufficient time was left for training in leading Catholics to holiness.
- IV. Vatican II's underappreciated idea of the "Hierarchy of Christian Truths," that "some truths are based on others and need to be illumined by them," can guide us in renewing our pastoral ministry in these times in which its foundations can no longer be taken for granted. This retreat looks at those truths, not doctrinally or theologically, but from the practical viewpoint of what Catholics need to know to live the spiritual life, especially in an anti-Christian society.

Expanded Outline

- I. Grace presupposes and perfects nature. By God's design we are social beings influenced by our environments. The Church has always adapted its pastoral ministry to new social environments.
 - A. Cooperating with grace is the individual Catholic's responsibility, but not solely. It is also the responsibility of the Church to teach them how to go about it, to exhort and encourage them to do it, and to foster environments that support it.
 - 1. Read aloud quote 2 (Ezk 3: 17-19).
 - 2. Mention some examples of new pastoral approaches, *both good and bad*, the Church has used in response to new historical conditions.
 - B. Vatican II brought pastoral ministry up-to-date for the modern world, but at the same time that world was undergoing dramatic changes the council fathers could not foresee.
- II. Pastoral training since Trent stressed the distinctively Catholic against Protestantism. That strategy assumed that the family could, and would, do the indispensable evangelism that pastoral ministry presupposes.
 - A. After the Protestant Reformation, priestly training could afford to focus on distinctively Catholic truths since most of society believed, at least, that Jesus spoke for God. The main issue was the correct interpretation of Jesus' teaching.
 - B. Even before the Reformation, the Church could rely on the family to do the indispensable evangelizing without which distinctively Catholic catechesis cannot be effective.
 - 1. Now technology brings anti-Christian messages into the home itself and undermines evangelization within the family. Outside the home also,

children (and adults) used to live in environments that at least did not contradict basic Christianity, much less assault it as they do now.

2. The Church is now flourishing in many countries where technology does not yet undermine evangelization in the home. When those countries become technologically advanced, the Church is likely to face the same problems there, unless we learn how to deal with them.
- C. Due to social changes not under our control, we have not always learned how to pastor in ways that meet the needs of Catholics in today's culture.
1. This is the fault of neither the Church's leaders, in general, nor of our conscientious seminary officials, in particular. Technological changes have occurred so quickly that it is hard for pastoral training to keep pace.
 2. Post-reformation pastoral ministry needed to stress truths that are specifically Catholic, like apostolic succession and the sacraments that require it. But an appreciation of such distinctively Catholic truths depends on an appreciation of other truths that are in fact shared by many other Christian traditions.
 - a. The speaker should read aloud and hand out printed copies of "Distinctively/Nondistinctively Catholic" quotes 4 and 5.
 - b. As long as much of society believed in the more basic truths, or at least did not openly assault them, pastoral ministry could focus on distinctively Catholic truths and count on the more fundamental truths being sufficiently appreciated.
- D. Vatican II could assume that most of the groundwork for effective reception of the sacraments had been accomplished in the Church it was addressing. 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.

Pastors have been trained largely for maintenance, but the state of affairs they were trained to maintain no longer exists.

- III. Defense of distinctively Catholic truths against Protestantism required that priestly education focus so much on theology that insufficient time was left for training in leading Catholics to holiness.
- A. Understanding a doctrine theologically is insufficient for appreciating its place in Christian spirituality. (The speaker should use the following classic example; so that other speakers can refer to it.)
1. For centuries Church leadership discouraged frequent reception of Communion; only in the 20th-century did that change. The Church never officially taught against frequent reception, but knew that it was being

discouraged. At the same time, nothing official was done to change this approach until the pontificate of St. Pius X.

2. Yet the Church always had the same doctrine about the Eucharist. So understanding a doctrine theologically is not the same as understanding its spiritual, and therefore pastoral, meaning.
- B. The necessary complexities of dogmatic theology can cause us to miss the spiritual and pastoral forest due to the immense number of theological trees. Not all doctrines have equal significance for holiness.
 - C. There are good reasons to spend time on theology. But when we see the disadvantages of a certain allocation of time in priestly formation, we should find ways to compensate for those disadvantages.
- IV. Vatican II's underappreciated idea of the "Hierarchy of Christian Truths" (that "some truths are based on others and need to be illumined by them") can guide us in renewing our pastoral ministry, now that we can no longer take its foundations for granted. This retreat considers those truths, not doctrinally or theologically, but from the practical viewpoint of what Catholics need to know in order to live the Christian life, especially in an anti-Christian society.
- A. Many Catholics, among them some priests, do not even know that "In Catholic doctrine there exists a 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith." (Vatican II, "Decree on Ecumenism," 11.) Pastors need to have at least a basic understanding of the relative priority of Christian Truths.
 1. Hand out printed copies of "Hierarchy of Truth" quotes 6 through 9. Read aloud the whole of quote 6 and one of quotes 7, 8, or 9.
 2. The hierarchy of truths does not mean we can refrain from believing some Magisterial teachings or that being lower in the hierarchy makes a truth less important. It means that some have higher priority because an understanding of the others depends on an understanding of them.
 3. What matters is not that we use the phrase "Hierarchy of Truths" in our pastoral ministry but that our pastoral ministry reflects the relative priority of truths. Using the phrase "Hierarchy of Truths" could even be impractical in that it may require an extensive explanation, especially an explanation of what it does *not* mean.
 4. Modern culture gives us little leeway in the use of time. The priority of truths must guide us in allocating that time wisely.
 - B. Pastoral ministry must give Catholics useful practical knowledge about the interior dispositions that dispose them to receive the work of God within them.

1. Catholic spiritual and pastoral theology should reflect the relative importance of Christian truths as much as dogmatic theology should. There are a few foundational truths that we all know, or should know, whose spiritual and pastoral significance is not adequately appreciated in our new pastoral environment. These truths are essential for Catholics to be able to flourish in their spiritual life.
 2. Intellectual understanding is not enough. What matters is our personal response to those truths on which the others depend and which illuminate the others.
 3. Truths about the Trinity are among those with the highest priority in the hierarchy. Catholics need a relation, not just with those doctrines, but with the persons those truths tell us about: Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit of love. Pastors must present those truths in a way that leads people to such personal relations.
- C. We should not be surprised or embarrassed when we realize there may have been some omissions in our pastoral training. All teachers learn that their own educations had omissions.
1. The best possible priestly formation will always be incomplete. “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now” (quote 11; Jn 16:12).
 2. Again, the example of discouraging frequent communion is revealing: Due to their training, bishops and priests jumped from doctrinal truth to a misguided pastoral conclusion. No formation will ever be so perfect as to eliminate this kind of possibility.
- D. When pastoral ministry gets back to foundations in a spiritual, not just a doctrinal way, your yoke can become easy, and your joy full at seeing the fruits of your labors.

Explanation of the Outline:

Why These Points Are Important for Pastors To Know and for This Retreat to Teach

Section I.

All Catholics need to know that it is their responsibility to cooperate with sacramental grace. At the same time, the Church must teach them how and help them do it. In order for the sacraments to be effective, therefore, pastors must teach Catholics about the dispositions needed for living out the grace of the sacraments; they must motivate them to seek those dispositions; and they must foster environments that encourage those interior attitudes. Pastors also need to know that because of modern social changes the Church has not always adequately prepared Catholics for the challenges of today’s culture. This section of the talk helps pastors understand these points.

In addition, pastors need to know that the pastoral difficulties of modern times are nobody's fault. Section II of this talk will present something of which most pastors are not aware: that typical pastoral practices today were designed for cultural conditions that no longer exist. Rapid technological changes have produced numerous social changes, and pastoral training has not kept pace. Priests may be aware of changing social conditions, but they are less aware of the need for new pastoral practices to meet the challenges of the new situation.

Some will object that the cause of our pastoral problems is not the Church's pastoral ministry but the lack of response of individual Catholics, whether clergy or laity, to sacramental grace. If we do not properly respond to grace, it is our fault. While it is true that grace produces effects independent of the dispositions of the receiver, still the living fruits of grace in the daily life of the receiver depend on his or her personal dispositions.

However, the doctrine of the independent effects of the sacraments (*ex opere operato* effects, as opposed to *ex opere operantis*, or lived, effects) does not stand alone. It is complemented by the doctrine that grace presupposes and perfects nature. Thus, we who are by nature social beings achieve the fullness of life, including the life of holiness, only by helping, and being helped by, one another. For this reason God has put a rich diversity of ministries in the Church:

His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Ep 4:11-16; and see 1 Co 12:28-30. Emphasis here and in other Scripture quotes is, of course, added).

Many priests need to be reminded that sacramental grace is meant to bear fruit through the interactions of the members of the Christian community, and especially through the work of pastoral leaders, both ordained and lay. The lived effects of grace (*ex opere operantis*) mostly come about through pastoral work, which itself is also among these effects of grace.

Pastors do not have to worry about the *ex opere operato* effects of the sacraments; these happen with no additional efforts beyond administering the sacraments. Other pastoral efforts, however, are needed to help people live out the sacramental graces they have received. If this were not true, the Church would not understand Vatican II the way it does – precisely as a pastoral Council, concerned with the renewal of the Church's pastoral approaches.

Recall what St. Paul says: "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Great News" (recommended translation for "gospel"; 1 Co 1:17). That is, Christ did not send him to administer the most important sacrament, baptism, but to lead people to the fundamental dispositions required for the lived effects of sacramental grace. Paul knew that the independent effects of the sacraments take care of themselves; so he also knew that his pastoral ministry must be concerned with what do not take care of themselves, the sacraments' lived effects. He knew that the lived effects of the sacraments do not happen independently of pastoral work. If they did, the pastoral life of the Church wouldn't be necessary; the Church could just be a governing structure and a sacrament delivery system.

The effectiveness of the sacraments, therefore, is indeed the individual's responsibility, but not solely. (Here the speaker should read aloud quote 2, Ezk 3:17-19. See also Ezk 33:1-9).

Deplorably, the Church in Western society often has worse problems than pastoral omissions – namely the teaching of false or distorted doctrines, and sometimes the acceptance of outright sinful behavior. A necessary condition, however, for overcoming such doctrinal dissent and moral failure is the existence of a strong spiritual life in those parts of the Church that continue to embrace the fullness of Catholic doctrine. The pastoral problems we must overcome are prevalent even in those parts of the Church where sound doctrine is usually preached. More than one of the retreat's later talks will repeat that doctrinal understanding is not sufficient for spirituality. Would there be so much theological dissent if, where sound doctrine is taught, the Church was more successfully living up to its doctrine, and Catholics' need for pastoral support was being met?

Vatican II's advice for overcoming atheism applies equally to overcoming theological dissent:

The remedy ... 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. ... This faith needs to prove its fruitfulness by penetrating the believer's entire life (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 22).

Teaching sound doctrine is not enough if the Church does not foster the dispositions needed to release the power of the sacraments. We must never forget what Scripture and history teach about pastoral *fallibility*, beginning with the very first Pope, whom Jesus himself selected and trained. (See Ga 2: 11-14, where St. Paul corrects St. Peter). Despite doctrinal infallibility, culturally conditioned perspectives can lead to pastoral conclusions that appear to be self-evident yet are pastorally inadequate for overcoming the negative influences of today's environments.

The Church has continually adopted new pastoral approaches, some good, some not so good, in response to new conditions of life. Here are some examples:

- Constructing separate church buildings, instead of continuing to meet in homes
- Making Sunday Mass attendance a requirement of law after Constantine
- Embracing the monastic movement
- Sponsoring the Crusades
- Employing the Inquisition (a pastoral strategy endorsed by the Council of Trent)
- Instituting diocesan seminaries in response to the Reformation
- Placing suspect writings on the Index of Forbidden Books
- Founding parochial schools

Vatican II attempted to bring pastoral ministry up-to-date with the modern world. At that very time, however, the world was beginning to experience many dramatic changes that the council fathers could not have foreseen. The modern world was dying and the “post-modern” world was being born. The post-modern world was to become also an increasingly post-Christian world, and thus very different from what the council fathers understood themselves to be addressing. Pastors today have to take note of what the council fathers could not foresee, and understand how the social changes that have followed Vatican II require us to re-order our pastoral priorities. This retreat addresses those priorities.

Section II.

After the Protestant Reformation, pastoral training could assume that almost all of society believed in God and accepted that Jesus spoke for God, even if most people did not live up to those beliefs. The issue was which Christian belief to follow, Catholic or Protestant. The “tipping point” came in the 1960s, when Christian morality and family life were rejected by a “youth culture” that quickly became the new “establishment.” Today, pastoral ministry can no longer rely on the existence of a Christian culture to support the formation it gives.

For centuries, the Church had been able to rely on the family to carry out the foundational evangelizing without which distinctively Catholic catechesis cannot be fully effective. Now technology brings anti-Christian messages into the home itself, messages that work against any evangelizing the family might do. Outside the home, belief in the existence of God, the Trinity, the Incarnation, sin and redemption used to be reinforced by salient sectors of society — educational institutions, the law, political decisions and so forth. Today, the most fundamental Christian truths are under not only subtle but more and more open and constant attack. Pastors need to know that the Church’s post-Reformation strategy succeeded for reasons that can no longer be taken for granted. This section of the talk explains the new challenges we face.

It is also important for this talk to explain that our current pastoral crisis is nobody’s fault, neither the Church’s seminary leaders nor its hierarchy. Since the Church had been able for many centuries in the Christian West to assume that it was not necessary for its pastors to evangelize, seminary education could train pastors for maintaining and nourishing an already existing Church community of faith.

Over that time, however, less and less of society supported belief in the central Christian truths; and secularism was replacing Protestantism as the Church’s main opponent. These social changes happened so quickly because of the unprecedented power of modern technologies and communications. Seminaries did not realize what the implications would be, and continued to train pastors to minister in a no-longer-existing context of faith. Church and seminary leaders are as much innocent victims of historical and cultural changes as the rest of the Church.

Pastoral strategy after the Protestant Reformation had required a stress on “distinctively Catholic” truths – truths about the institutional structure of the Church, the sacramental system, especially the sacraments that require ordination, Mary and the saints, purgatory, etc. But an appreciation of these specifically Catholic truths depends logically, pedagogically and psychologically on an appreciation of more basic truths, such as the doctrines of the Trinity and the Redemptive Incarnation that are shared by other Christian traditions. (At this point, hand out

copies of “Distinctively/Nondistinctively Catholic” quotes II. C. 3. 1 and 2, and read the quotes aloud.)

Effectiveness of our pastoral ministry, therefore, requires that Catholics be firmly rooted in truths that we share with other Christian traditions. The issue here is not ecumenicism; the effectiveness of our pastoral ministry would depend on those more basic truths even if Church unity had never been broken.

It is necessary to see that our understanding of the value of distinctively Catholic truths depends on understanding several more basic truths. To whom does the truth that the pope is Jesus’ vicar mean more: the person who has a conscious personal relation to Jesus as his Lord and Savior, or the person who has given only an abstract, intellectual assent to truths about who Jesus is and what he has done for us?

As long as much of society believed in the more basic truths, or at least did not openly attack them, pastoral training could focus on the distinctively Catholic truths, taking for granted that the more fundamental truths were sufficiently appreciated. That post-Reformation pastoral strategy worked reasonably well for centuries. One could assume that Catholics were sufficiently grounded in the more basic truths, and that focusing on other truths would not diminish the importance of everything that was more basic for Catholics’ response to sacramental grace. Most of society continued to believe the more basic truths, and so to that extent, supported Catholic faith.

Now that secularism has replaced Protestantism as the main opponent to the faith of the Church, pastors are, understandably, not fully prepared to foster the release of the sacraments’ power against it. The problem is not that the pastoral formation given within the Church is bad. On the contrary, where sound doctrine is taught, the Church’s formation of its pastors consists almost entirely of good things. But insufficient attention is given to the truths on which the fruitfulness of the sacraments most depends.

Scripture compares the life of the Church to the construction of a building – in particular, a temple. St. Theresa of Avila compares the Christian life to a “Spiritual Castle”. Using the image of a temple or a castle, we could say that our pastoral ministry is very good at putting up the walls and roof of a building. Priests need to recognize, however, that the walls and roof are now resting on pastoral foundations that often are not strong enough to support them.

Even though 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. Pastors need to know this, and this section of the talk tries to ensure that they do.

Section III.

The situation the Church after the Council of Trent until very recently required that seminaries spend relatively more time on theological training in comparison to relatively less time on pastoral training. Theological training was needed because the main problem facing the Church was the dispute with Protestants over the correct interpretation of Jesus’ teaching, not whether Jesus’ teaching should be believed. Priests, therefore, needed to be able to explain and defend the Church theologically. Yet there is a big difference between such theological

understanding and an appreciation of the significance of doctrines for Catholic spirituality and for pastoral ministry, whose purpose is to foster spirituality.

There can be no better example of this than one of the most needed and significant corrections the Church ever made to its pastoral ministry. Only in the 20th century did the Church begin officially and explicitly recommending frequent, even daily, communion for Catholics. During the previous centuries, frequent communion was discouraged in the Church's normal pastoral life. The hierarchy never officially discouraged frequent reception, yet for centuries the hierarchy knew that frequent communion was being regularly discouraged. During this time, the hierarchy did nothing to change the practice. In her autobiography, e.g., St. Teresa of Avila says, "At that time (when she was a fully professed cloistered nun), I was receiving communion once every two weeks."

The Church in those days did not have a different doctrine about the Eucharist than it has today. It always taught the same doctrine. The difference was that the Church's leaders drew a different pastoral conclusion about the role the Eucharist plays in our spiritual life. And so they drew a different conclusion from that doctrine about what their pastoral ministry should tell Catholics about receiving it. (Subsequent speakers should be able to refer to this example with the understanding that retreatants are familiar with it from this first talk, Session A.)

In this case, as in so many others, understanding a doctrine is one thing, but understanding its relationship to holiness and to the place priests should give it in pastoral ministry, is another. Also, being able to explain a doctrine theologically is one thing, but explaining its spiritual significance and how Catholics should respond to it at the personal level is another.

This does not mean it is no longer necessary to stress sound theology in priestly training. It certainly is. It just means that this way of distributing the scarce resource called "time", like all other ways of distributing it, has some disadvantages as well as some advantages. We can compensate for the disadvantages, but not unless we are aware of them.

The need to spend so much time on theology can also lead to missing the spiritual and pastoral forest because of the immense number of theological trees. Approaching theology scientifically requires a plethora of technical intellectual distinctions. They are unavoidable in dogmatic theology – that is "the nature of the beast".

Even a nontechnical document like *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* has 2,865 entries. Those entries are not all created equal when the question is how to live the Christian life. (Subsequent speakers should be able to allude, if they wish, to the imbalance that mainly theological training can cause in pastoral ministry, and allude to it with the expectation that the retreatants have already been introduced to that idea in this talk.)

Section IV.

This retreat makes use of the Church's teaching on the "Hierarchy of Christian Truths" to clarify what Catholics need to know about living the life of grace. Some doctrines have a higher priority since they are the basis for other doctrines and are needed to illumine them. An understanding of the Hierarchy of Christian Truths can guide us in renewing pastoral ministry,

now that many foundational teachings cannot be taken for granted.

While this does not need to be stated in the talk, the fact is that many priests do not know that “In Catholic doctrine there exists a ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith” (Vatican II, “Decree on Ecumenism,” 11). Many priests will be learning about it for the first time on this retreat. In addition, some priests who know about the priority of certain truths over others did not receive seminary training that helps them apply it in a post-Christian society.

At the same time, pastors need to know more than the fact that this doctrine of the hierarchy of truths exists. They need a basic idea of the relative priority of specific Christian truths, which truths others depend on, and which truths follow from those that are more fundamental. If they don’t gain these basic ideas, their pastoral ministry is not likely to reflect the necessary prioritization. (Here the speaker should hand out printed copies of “Hierarchy of Truth” quotes 6 through 9. He should read aloud the whole of quote 6 and one of quotes 7, 8, or 9.)

The point of calling attention to the relative priority of truths is not that pastors are emphasizing minor teachings at the expense of the major teachings. For example, little in today’s pastoral ministry would promote the rosary at the expense of the Liturgy. The reason pastoral ministry must reflect the priority of truths is that it must focus mostly on the fundamental principles without which the others cannot bear fruit.

The distinction between truths that are higher and lower in the hierarchy is not the same as the distinction between truths that are theologically major and minor. There is absolutely nothing minor about the truth that the Liturgy is the source and summit of the Church’s life. But consider all the pedagogically prior truths about God and creation, the Trinity and Jesus, sin and salvation history, that we must have an appreciation of before we can even begin to appreciate what the Liturgy is. For example, those who don’t appreciate personally what Jesus’ death and resurrection did for them can’t adequately benefit from learning that his death and resurrection are really present in the Liturgy.

Doctrines about the Liturgy are some of those distinctively Catholic (and Orthodox) truths on which post-Reformation pastoral ministry has sometimes put more emphasis than on pedagogically more basic truths. And when post-Reformation pastoral ministry has taught, for example, about what Jesus’ death and resurrection did for us, it has often done so with theological approaches that do not easily help people understand God’s direct personal love for them nor how to personally receive that love.

The relative priority of Christian truths does not mean we can refrain from believing some Magisterial teachings nor that some have no importance for our spiritual lives. It means that some truths are based on others and that an appreciation of the second level of truths depends on an appreciation of the more fundamental truths. All definitive teachings must be believed, and all have some significance for holiness or they would not have been included in the teachings of the Magisterium.

All pastors need to know the relative priority of Christian truths. However, not all Catholics need to know that there is such a thing as a doctrine of the “Hierarchy of Truths.”

What they need is pastoral ministry that reflects that doctrine, so priests do not have to use a technical phrase like “Hierarchy of Truths” in their pastoral ministry. Using it could even be impractical. It may require them to use valuable teaching time to ensure that their congregations did not misunderstand the idea, perhaps even concluding that less fundamental teachings of the Magisterium could be safely ignored. The best way to avoid that problem is to not use the phrase “Hierarchy of Truths” in our pastoral ministry if we do not have to.

One of the effects of modern culture is that it gives us little free time. Thus we must use the time allocated for pastoral endeavors prudently. For example, we shouldn’t stop to discuss the authorship of the pastoral epistles, as intellectually interesting as that question might be, if that leaves insufficient time to explain their meaning. To allocate our time wisely, we must let the relative priority of truths guide us.

This retreat will need to discuss only a very few foundational truths, truths that all pastors already know or should know. Catholics need to understand those few basic truths, and how to apply them, in order to properly relate to all the rest.

Knowing these truths, however, is not the same as appreciating their spiritual, and thus pastoral, significance. This retreat will talk about the significance of those truths for Catholics’ spiritual lives – helping them sincerely want to lead Christian lives, and succeed in doing so in environments that continually attack Christianity.

When the spiritual significance of these few basic truths has been explained, the retreatants should be able to see that they are not emphasized in the normal pastoral life of the Church sufficiently for Catholics to be able to fully lead Christian lives in anti-Christian environments.

Focusing on the most fundamental truths may sound easy, but in any field the most difficult things to communicate can be those that are most fundamental. We rely on the most fundamental things as presuppositions for explaining other things. But what do we rely on when we have to explain the presuppositions? That question is especially difficult since the most fundamental things can seem so obvious to an expert that he doesn’t see they need explanation.

What things are pastorally most fundamental? The Congregation for the Clergy says:

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 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).

In the last (or better, the first) analysis, Christianity’s solution to all human problems is not a set of principles or practices. It is an historical human being, Jesus of Nazareth, and what he has done and what he will do for those who believe. Pastoral ministry must make it lucidly clear that all our Christian acts, moral, spiritual, sacramental and ecclesial, are really things Jesus does in us.

The speaker should read aloud and identify the following quotes from the Congregation for the Clergy:

On all levels catechesis should take account of this hierarchy of the truths of faith. (Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory*, 43). A catechesis that neglects this interrelation and harmony of its content can become entirely useless for achieving its proper end (ibid., 39).

“Useless for achieving its proper end.” What end? Not mere doctrinal adherence to truths but the holiness that pastoral ministry must foster. For about catechesis, John Paul II said:

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).

Thus, the relative priority of Christian truths does not just have theological significance; most importantly it has a spiritual, and so a pastoral, significance. Approached theologically, the priority of some truths over others may appear to be something abstract. Approached spiritually, which is the way pastoral ministry should approach it, the priority of truth is the priority of a concrete person, Jesus, who by his power brings himself and other human persons into a union that shares one life with him, his Father and their Spirit of love.

So this retreat will not be academic, scholarly or catechetical. It will look at Christian truth from the practical viewpoint of what Catholics need to know to live the spiritual life, especially in an anti-Christian society. That’s a pastoral, not a merely theological point of view.

Our question, therefore, is: What do Catholics need to know in order to participate in God’s life and action on a personal level? How do we personally appropriate his grace? How do we dispose ourselves interiorly to God’s work in us? What dispositions are most fundamental and so most necessary, from the interior, psychological point of view, for living in grace? How do we interiorly connect with Jesus so that the power he gives in the sacraments can be released in us?

These are pastoral questions of a psychological and practical kind, rather than theological questions of a scientific kind. This retreat deals with our practical understanding of, and the interior conditions for, sharing God’s life. It will explain our core pastoral approach to helping Catholics live the life of grace.

Some of the retreatants may think that they are already exercising this kind of pastoral ministry, because they do emphasize truths about the Trinity, the need for salvation, and Jesus’ redemptive incarnation. But these things are often dealt with in a doctrinal or theological way that does not explain how Catholics make a connection between them and their interior lives. The relatively greater emphasis seminaries place on theological training can affect the way we pastor in deep and almost unconscious ways.

The kind of practical spiritual knowledge this retreat presents is not just intellectual knowledge of doctrinal truth. What matters is that the realities expressed by the truths that have

the highest priority be given the highest place in our spiritual lives. This means having a personal relation to certain realities: to Jesus, his Father and their Spirit of love. As several recent renewal movements have shown, this requires the personal evangelization of Catholics who have already been catecheticized and sacramentalized.

The Congregation for the Clergy significantly calls personal evangelization “pre-catechesis.” And if “catechesis that neglects this interrelation and harmony of its content can become entirely useless for achieving its proper end,” then pastoral ministry that does not provide and reinforce personal evangelization – which catechesis presupposes – can be even less able to achieve its proper end.

Now that we can no longer take for granted that the family will provide the foundational evangelization that the rest of our pastoral ministry requires, we must re-learn how to evangelize. Personal evangelization concerns basic Christian spirituality, not just basic theology. It concerns personal conversion from sin and acceptance of Jesus’ free gift of salvation. It draws Catholics into a personal relation with Jesus, not just to an institution and a set of doctrines.

For Catholics to cope with their anti-Christian environments, pastoral ministry must not simply lay the foundations once and then take them for granted. We must regularly reinforce the basic realities of Christian spirituality by proclaiming them with the prominence they deserve. The epistles show our first pastors regularly reinforcing Christians’ appreciation of the few basic realities on which we must build the rest of our spiritual lives.

This retreat will help you know how to ensure that the foundations pastoral ministry presupposes are well laid and sufficiently reinforced so that Catholics can withstand today’s spiritual challenges.

Some priests may be taken aback by the suggestion that there could have been omissions in their pastoral education. They probably recall their time in the seminary as a wonderful experience. Like all cultures, however, a seminary culture includes elements that are good and other elements that are not so good. All education has shortcomings. The more a priest enjoyed the experience of his education, the more difficulty he may have in seeing its omissions.

All the formation any priest has ever received was incomplete. We can say that without doubt because even the formation Jesus gave his first pastoral leaders was incomplete. Jesus himself said so at the last supper, “I have much more to tell you; but you cannot bear it now” (Jn 16:12).

At the last supper, the apostles were about to graduate from the greatest possible spiritual and pastoral formation ever given to anyone; but even so, they were going to need to revise their ideas in ways that would have shocked them if Jesus had told them at that time. For example, the book of Acts tells us that at the Ascension the apostles were still expecting a political Messiah. Or again, at the last supper, they would not yet have accepted the idea that gentiles could enter the Kingdom of God without adopting Jewish ritual laws.

Wouldn’t earlier generations be shocked if we tried to tell them they were mistaken in discouraging frequent communion? Wouldn’t they think that although we hold the same dogma about the Eucharist, we no longer appreciate the significance of the holiness of this sacrament

and our unworthiness for it.

Fortunately, we know that they were jumping from doctrinal truth to a mistaken pastoral conclusion. They did that innocently because of their formation. But are we now so sophisticated that we are immune from jumping to other mistaken pastoral conclusions?

No seminary formation is so perfect that the pastoral agendas we take from it will never need revising, even in profound ways. If priests never had to revise their original pastoral ideas, the Church would never have needed to make all the pastoral changes it has. To be so perfect, seminary formation would have to be able to predict the future.

When pastoral ministry gets back to foundations, and in a spiritual, not just a doctrinal, way, your yoke can be easy and your joy full at seeing the fruits of your labors.

Usable Quotes

Cooperating with Grace Is Not Solely the Individual's Responsibility:

1. His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Ep 4:11-16; and see 1 Co 12:28-30).
2. Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall warn them for me. If I say to the wicked man, You shall surely die; and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his wicked conduct so that he may live: that wicked man shall die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death. If, on the other hand, you have warned the wicked man, yet he has not turned away from his evil nor from his wicked conduct, then he shall die for his sin, but you shall save your life (Ezk 3:17-19).
3. If a virtuous man turns from virtue and does wrong when I place a stumbling block before him, he shall die. He shall die for his sin, and his virtuous deeds shall not be remembered; but I will hold you responsible for his death if you did not warn him. When, on the other hand, you have warned a virtuous man not to sin, and he has in fact not sinned, he shall surely live because of the warning, and you shall save your own life. (Ezk 3:20-21, NAB; and see 33:1-9).

Distinctively/Nondistinctively Catholic:

4. "What unites us (Catholic and nonCatholic Christians) is much greater than what divides us." (Pope Bl. John XXIII, quoted by Pope John Paul II, *That They May All Be One*, 20.2.)
5. How little divides them (Catholic and nonCatholic Christians) in comparison to what unites them. Pope John Paul II, *That They May All Be One*, 22.2.

Hierarchy of Christian Truths:

6. 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, 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*, 43).

7. 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).

8. 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).

9. Just as Christ is the center of the history of salvation, so the mystery of God is the center 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).

10. 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).

The Best Priestly Formation Will Be Incomplete:

11. I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now (Jn 16:12).