Quarterly Review of the John Paul II Institute
POWER: ISSUE THREE

Humanum
Issues in Family, Culture & Science

"He Gave Them Power and Authority"

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What authority does the pope have and why should we obey? How is the papacy, which is still a stumbling block for so many, a source of reassurance for the faithful? Or is it? What of the bishop's authority? The priest's? A living thing needs to grow and authority is at the service of that. It makes the Church—–Christ's body—grow (*augere*) in accord with the order established by the one who brought it forth (the *Auctor*). Priestly authority is in the image of the Father's authority who shows it by generating the Son, then by creating the world in Him. Christ who received all authority from the Father handed it to the disciples. To have the "keys" to the Church, then, is to assure and guard the presence of the One who builds and grows it—"the Son of the Living God"—so that He might be with us always, till the end of time.

PAGE

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BOOK REVIEW

Wounds in the Body: A Thoughtful Response to the Abuse Crisis in the Church

SR. ANNIE DEVLIN M.S.C.B.

Dom Dysmas de Lassus, *Abuses in the Religious Life and the Path to Healing* (Sophia Institute Press, 2023).

In 2021 Catholics in France were deeply shaken by the publication of a report revealing the dimensions of abuse within the Catholic Church there: content known at least in part by some, suspected by others, but which had never been documented as such, *en masse*. In the same period, Dom Dysmas de Lassus, Superior General of the Carthusians, emerged from the silence characteristic of his order and published a 446-page book entitled *Risks and Aberrations in the Religious Life*. For Catholics in France at that moment, it was striking that the voice that wanted to address this question was that of the superior of an almost thousand-year-old monastic community, known for its radicality and austerity and one that has never needed to undergo reform. The title, however, was dissuasive, as was the length. The blow of the 2021 revelations had struck hard, and many Catholics were already demoralized about the scandal in the Church at large. Who had the energy to immerse themselves in 446 pages of risks and aberrant behavior? (Not me.)

Happily, in its English translation, the book was renamed, a fact for which we can be grateful. Not primarily because more people might read it (no doubt a good thing), but mainly because the new, more inviting title better indicates what the book is actually about. It isn't a forensic review of abuse cases, let alone a salacious exposé of clerical criminality. Rather, it is a clearsighted, thoughtful, and pastoral examination of what either makes for or undermines healthy religious life.

Dom Dysmas asks a twofold question: what patterns allow aberrant behavior and a "leadership" style capable of exploiting people—which he distinguishes from "authority"—to take hold of and damage communities and persons? And what subtly but profoundly distorted version of Christianity has been used to justify such dehumanizing patterns in some religious communities? As he proposes his responses, what emerges with surprising simplicity as a

"path to healing" and counterweight is, paradoxically, the great "Yes" that God has pronounced to man in Christ, the trust that he has in our redeemed human nature, and the beauty with which this redemption can become visible to the world in the communal consecrated life to which he calls certain men and women.

Thus Dom Dysmas moves beyond French religious life. His words are pertinent for the universal Church whose members can be weighed down, here by traces of Jansenism and its nervous mistrust of human nature, there by an unconscious acceptance of modernity's dialectical competition between man and God—thus held in a stranglehold by the twin hands of moralism and spiritualism. These are wounds in the Body as a whole, which can emerge in any Christian community whose nature and vocation is to be a concrete expression of this Body.

> *At his ordination, the priest is not changed from a frog into a prince whose role makes him automatically immune to poor judgment or even to evil. His ordination is a covenant, though, with Christ. If he lives it in truth, his whole person is transformed.*

In fact, Dom Dysmas, begins to address explicit sexual abuse only in chapter 10. The first 162 pages of the book are dedicated to community life, in particular to "different aspects of religious life [that] can be hijacked and diverted from their proper goal, to be put instead at the service of a sickness that has more than a passing resemblance to cancer." The first seven chapters touch on themes such as the inherent radicality in the call to religious life, the relationship between charism and institution, common life, obedience, ascesis, and renunciation. We also find a chapter dedicated to behaviors commonly found when these essential aspects take on distorted forms and end up congealing a community of men or women—who initially seemed perfectly normal—into something like a sect.

While not stated explicitly, the structure and sequence of this book seem to rest on the presupposition that the path to healthy, sanctifying relationships of authority, spiritual guidance, and affection between individual persons in the Church grows only from the good soil of the community in which these are rooted. What is this good soil? Many of the communities that faced serious crises seemed to embrace traditional practices of the Church: emphasis on the unity between members, the embrace of fasting and other sacrifices, carefully prepared liturgies, emphasis on frequent recourse to the sacraments of Eucharist and confession. How is it possible that communities that seemed so faithful to the Church's practices could become places of such profound unfreedom?

As the reader progresses through the thick of Dom Dysmas's analysis, one aspect of this good soil of a Christian community becomes clear: the absolute priority of created and redeemed reality and, in particular, that of *the person*. This includes his being embodied, sexually differentiated, maturing in time; his desire for totality together with his reason and his intuitions of good sense; his duty before God to form his conscience and live according to its voice. This means, above all, that he is irreducible to any other creature and irreplaceable—even by God—who is the very source of his freedom. He stands fundamentally in relation to His mystery and before His mystery, he must constantly remove his sandals.

The Carthusian moves as though through a room of treasures turned topsy-turvy, gently picking each one up and placing it back into its upright position and its original place. Regarding a hyperspiritualized and irrational approach to the world, he says, “Of course, there ought to be a place in our lives for a spiritual interpretation of what happens to us.” But he also warns that:

> faith in the supernatural must not short-circuit our contact with reality. By means of [...] spiritual interpretations, we risk giving significance to events that have none and, conversely, we may legitimize what is going on at the risk of whitewashing even serious errors, until it becomes impossible to differentiate between what is good and what is evil.

Or, in a substantial chapter on obedience: “Obedience … involves the intellect of the one who is obeying. This is characteristic of any human act.” And because obedience concerns precisely an act, “the abbot can ask a monk to bring the chairs back inside because he thinks that it is going to rain tomorrow; he cannot ask him to think it is going to rain tomorrow.” In every case, Dom Dysmas insists: “Obedience is a virtue of a free person. Any kind of subhuman obedience is a counterfeit…If we really are to be obedient, we must be capable of disobeying.” Obedience, lived in a true way, summons the whole of a person’s faculties and spirit and is never against the integrity of the person who obeys.

The Carthusian is firm when he comes across the tendency to place the person in an oppositional relationship with God: “We do not have to make a choice between the human and the divine.” “Humility is not a question of saying ‘I am nothing,’ but of saying ‘I have received everything, without any merit on my part.’ [...] Of ourselves, we are nothing, but by grace we are everything.” God does not need us to disappear in order that He appear, any more than the sun needs the stars to turn themselves off so that it can rise. Likewise, I do not have to deny my positive qualities for fear of pride, as if “everything that is natural has to be replaced by something supernatural.” If I did, Dom Dysmas thoughtfully asks, “How could I ever know that God loves me? It would surely not be ‘me’ that He loves, but rather the thing he so desires (apparently) to put in my place—in other words, Himself.”

He is equally firm regarding that misguided ascesis that imagines that death somehow automatically leads to life. He cites the case of a nun who described herself as having come “little by little to feel like a dead tree, like a tree that had had its branches cut off and… there was only the trunk left.” She relayed her distressing experience to her superiors who celebrated it: “*This is really wonderful, this means that you are really being pruned for Heaven…Look at the wood of the cross. It is a dead tree and yet it is this that gives life.”* Dom Dysmas reflects on the distortion thus: “*It is a wonderful thing; you are dying, but Christ is alive*… Can it really be the case that it is the nun who gives life to Christ by means of her death? This seems a very strange inversion indeed.”

We’re dealing here with a contempt for human nature. It is noteworthy, in fact, that a common feature of communities manifesting sect-like characteristics is the extreme importance given to ascesis regarding food. However, as our author emphasizes, “Anyone who has lived in a religious community knows that there is nothing angelic about it.” Nor need there be, for Christianity reveals that

> everything that makes up the human person is compatible with God … the only exception to this is sin. The humanity of Christ … comprises flesh, our sensible nature, the world of the emotions, imagination, the

> passions—neutral in themselves—pleasure, a complete psychology (the unconscious is no exception)—and all of this not only during his earthly pilgrimage but in his glorified humanity too, to this very day.

Chapters 8–10 treat those insidious relationships of spiritual accompaniment in which the absolute priority not only of God but of the person's free and intimate relationship with the mystery of Christ is trampled underfoot. Persons damaged by such relationships use terms such as the "rape of my inner self," or the "violation of the chastity of the heart." Quoting Dominican Adrian Candiard, Dom Dysmas stresses that in a relationship of spiritual accompaniment "the priority, the only one, is that the person who is confiding in me in some way or other should grow in freedom, that he should love God more freely." Candiard describes how a spiritual guide might be tempted to see his role as that of an efficient "problem-solver" and names the shortcut as the "devil's signature way of working: if you manipulate things a bit, you can attain your goal more quickly."

Dom Dysmas's intention, though, is not to sow seeds of mistrust against spiritual directors. Rather, he wants to preserve two goods that should not in principle be in tension: to safeguard the person's integrity before God *and* the possibility for him to approach the guide in filial trust, precisely because this latter has the utmost respect for his conscience. This idea, of trusting a guide and being accompanied deeply as a fundamental part of a person's good, is refreshing in current cultural-ecclesial discourse and would have been worth treating in greater depth.

Is it valid to identify the cause of the abuses that the Church has suffered with the word clericalism? It's true that clericalism—understood broadly as "sliding away from power *for* the sheep toward power *over* the sheep"—provides the necessary context for abuse to occur. But Dom Dysmas wants to look more closely, for example, at the fact that these cases almost always involve an egocentric mentality and a corruption of spiritual authority. For him the danger area is not an ordained priesthood as such or the fact of close relationships of authority and obedience.

Because those asymmetrical relationships are essential to social and ecclesial life, Dom Dysmas proposes that "moral authority should flow from a consonance with moral values *rather than* from a particular role," that "the sacred dimension of a priest's life is connected with the sacraments; it does not extend to his whole person or his every word" (emphasis mine). He is right: realism is essential. At his ordination, the priest is not changed from a frog into a prince whose role makes him automatically immune to poor judgment or even to evil. His ordination is a covenant, though, with Christ. If he lives it in truth, his whole person is transformed. For him, holiness will not pass alongside his priestly authority nor despite it, but in and through it, as its nature is to unite him to Christ's own filial, self-sacrificing priesthood and thus make of his life an acceptable offering to God.

Facing the abuses in religious life, the question inevitably arises as to the response of the Church *qua* institution. The author has a sober and realistic esteem for the institution of the Church, which he considers the more exterior aspect of any community's "immune system," including the rule, canon law, chapters, visitations, councils. He is realistic, too, regarding the gaps in the Church's juridical capacity to respond, especially to problems in new communities, movements, and associations. Resolving such questions will not be easy, he recognizes directly, and in the meantime, there are people who suffer and don't know where to turn.

It is to these that Dom Dysmas turns our attention. Whether in the denial that sought to protect, or in mediatic accusation and condemnation, we have always seemed to pay more

attention to the abusers than to their victims. Those who have suffered abuse in the name of God or under the camouflage of ecclesiastical practices deserve our listening, and our willingness to believe. For a long time, it was impossible to imagine that such crimes could take place in these ecclesial contexts, and victims who sought help were often met with: *What's not possible doesn't exist—you must be exaggerating or lying*. It is justice, insists Dom Dysmas, that will allow "us to give victims their dignity back, despite their wounds, and to reform perpetrators, despite the judgement against them."

The structure of this book is not linear. The reader moves through a dense smattering of themes more akin to a long late-night conversation between deep-thinking and articulate friends than to an argument laid out according to a single guiding thought. This is also due to the fact that, as the author states in the first sentence of his preface, "[t]his book is not a work written in isolation." It is the fruit of exchanges with other abbots or abbesses with whom the Carthusian collaborated and with Dominican theologians from whom he received substantive contributions. There is though, in the end, something beautiful about this organic, not-perfectly-airtight structure that reflects what it is to live and work in real life, in the flesh, when the soil is good in the Church.

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December 1, 2025

Quarterly Review of the John Paul II Institute

Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

FEATURE ARTICLE

Theology and Power: The Question of Truth

STEPHAN KAMPOWSKI

Doctrine or Doctrinal Policy?

This essay draws inspiration from a curious yet telling expression used by the Italian theologian Massimo Faggioli in his work, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History*.[1] When commenting on the efforts of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to interpret the Second Vatican Council, he refers to their "doctrinal policy" several times.[2] The term "policy" has its natural habitat in the realm of politics. Statesmen implement policies to achieve particular results for the common good entrusted to them. Thus, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "policy" as "a course of action adopted and pursued by a government, party, ruler, statesman, etc.; any course of action adopted as advantageous or expedient." From here, the word also acquired a more general meaning, always in reference to conduct or action: "prudent, expedient, or advantageous procedure; prudent or politic course of action." We may think of the procedures companies have to deal with potentially dissatisfied clients, such as when vendors formulate "return policies." From these examples and definitions, we can conclude that policies can be more or less appropriate for achieving more or less desirable ends. Someone implements a policy in pursuit of a practical goal he wants to advance.

In what follows, I will ask what notion of doctrine is necessary to allow us meaningfully to speak of doctrine as something at the service of a policy. Next, I will consider the repercussions of this idea of doctrine for our understanding of theology. I am not claiming that Faggioli thinks this way about doctrine or theology. I am simply trying to make sense of an expression he uses because I consider it symptomatic of a more general tendency. While I hope to provide a coherent account, I cannot exclude the possibility that his would be different.

Faith Seeking Understanding

The traditional understanding of theology is "faith seeking understanding," as St. Anselm said. We may also emphasize that what motivates this movement is love, as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith clarifies in its Instruction *Donum Veritatis*. The Congregation draws on St. Bonaventure for this point. Love wants to know more about the beloved and endeavors to

understand him better.[3] This striving to know more is an intellectual activity that seeks the truth about the beloved.

Joseph Ratzinger considers theology to be a distinctive feature of the Christian religion. According to him, theology "results from the fusion of biblical faith and Greek rationality on which even the historical Christianity to be found in the New Testament already rests."[4] Christian faith is faith in the Logos, the Eternal Reason through which all things were created. This faith believes in a divinity that decided to reveal itself. While this revelation is not reducible to or deducible from reason, it has something reasonable about it that can be understood and explored more deeply by the human intellect. Indeed, the Church believes that, as she learns from the Gospel of John, in Christ, the Eternal Logos, the Eternal Word or Reason was made flesh. Faith, the human response to this divine initiative, takes two forms. As *fides qua creditur*, it is a personal act of trust in God the Revealer. As *fides quae creditur*, it is a belief in the content of this revelation. The content of divine revelation lends itself to scientific, that is, systematic reflection guided by reason. This is where theology comes in.

For example, the New Testament refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but does not explain their relationship. This sparked the question: Do Christians believe in one God or three? Here reason, motivated by love, strives to understand more deeply what has been revealed. Ultimately, this effort is an ecclesial exercise, and the teaching authority of the Church has elevated some of the results of theological reflection to the level of "doctrine" or "dogma." These are truths about God that are considered "acquired" or established, so theologians cannot go back on them. However, they can try to explore them more deeply. Examples include the trinitarian and the christological dogmas, such as the Hypostatic Union.

> *The Kingdom of God is not ours to build. Though already present among us, it resembles a treasure hidden in a field or a mustard seed that grows by God's own initiative. Nowhere does Scripture tell us to "build" the Kingdom.*

Within this framework, one can discuss whether a proposed teaching is true or false—that is, whether it corresponds to or fails to correspond to what God has really revealed about himself. Questions of politics do not as such enter into the discussion, or, if they do, then only as an *additional* consideration. One could be convinced of a doctrine's truth and still discuss the expediency of its formal definition. For example, St. John Henry Cardinal Newman argued against formally defining the doctrine of papal infallibility not because he thought it was false but because he did not think it was prudent to elevate it to the level of formal dogma at that time.[5]

From Nominalism to Positivism

How did we transition from "doctrine" to "doctrinal policy," shifting the focus from divine truth to political expediency? I would argue that the root of the problem is a new understanding of truth. When in 1882 Friedrich Nietzsche declared the death of God, he had the entire realm of metaphysics in mind.[6] One might say that he diagnosed the endpoint of a

process that had begun with the rise of nominalism in the late Middle Ages.[7] Nominalism is probably best understood as the result of events rather than the outcome of dialectical tensions inherent in the High Medieval synthesis. Events such as the Europeans' discovery of the Americas, the proof of the material homogeneity of the universe, and the Protestant Reformation were each capable of shaking the worldview of medieval Christendom. Additionally, the deleterious effects of the bubonic plague pandemic that ravaged Europe in the mid-fourteenth century must be considered. This pandemic killed more than a third of the population and took a particular toll on the Church's intelligentsia since her priests, as ministers to the sick, were disproportionately exposed to this lethal infection.[8]

According to nominalism, only individuals are real. There are no eternal forms in the Platonic realm of ideas, in the mind of God, or anywhere else. There are no natures and thus no rational standards for what is right or wrong. The commandments are what they are simply because God said so. There is no inherent reason why God, in his absolute power, could not command hatred, stealing, or committing adultery, which would then become meritorious.[9] Without forms, natures, or essences, there is nothing to understand because understanding involves mentally inserting a thing into a larger context, whose existence is now denied. Nominalism marks the beginning of the end of metaphysics, with repercussions for ethics, philosophy, and theology.

How can we say anything "true" about goodness, justice, existence, or God? The truth cannot be the conformity of our minds with these supersensual realities because reality is out of reach when it comes to these matters. So what can we still know? In the early to mid-eighteenth century, Giambattista Vico developed the idea that we can ultimately know only what we have produced ourselves: "*verum et factum reciprocantur*"—the true is convertible with what is made.[10] This is why he assigned a central role to the study of history. However, it was not long before reasonable doubts arose as to the extent to which humans are really the authors of their own history. Considering the unpredictability and randomness of historical events, as well as the fact that human agents, whether acting individually or collectively, rarely achieve their intended outcomes, it seems much more intelligent to look elsewhere for the truth we produce. Enter positivism and its principle of empirical verification. According to this principle, we can only know what can be inserted into an experiment, what is repeatable and quantifiable, or, in sum, what can be the object of the scientific method. Here, Vico's principle is brought to a head. I know a thing if I know how it is made. The *perfect* experiment amounts to reproducing the object under study.

Positivism has become the dominant outlook in academia. As a result, theology and philosophy are denied scientific status. To the extent that theology presupposes the faith it seeks to understand, the scientific method of empirical verification is inapplicable to it. Therefore, strictly speaking, theology cannot be considered a science. However, there is a way to study faith "scientifically." This does not mean trying to gain a deeper understanding of its inherent logic but rather examining the empirically verifiable effects of faith—mostly in terms of the *fides qua*—on individuals, cultures, and societies. For example, one could measure mass attendance and correlate it with other quantifiable phenomena, such as marital stability, family size, or voting patterns. Thus, we have *religious studies*, but not *theology*.

Theology and Power

From the perspective of a post-metaphysical age, what meaning could one see in the endeavors of those who still claim to practice theology today? One can take Vico's *verum quia factum* beyond positivism. At its core, positivism, with its scientific method of verifying or falsifying hypotheses through experiments, shares a common conviction with pragmatism: "true" is

what works. Now pragmatism can also be applied to the political realm. In this sense, for Richard Rorty truth ultimately amounts to solidarity.[11] The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo identifies truth with charity, advocating a so-called "weak reason" that stays clear of metaphysical commitments.[12] When stating that truth is charity, he intends to provide a *formal* definition of truth, while understanding charity solely as love of neighbor. If a doctrine, conviction, or teaching promotes neighborly love, then it is true. Doctrine becomes a matter of desirable goals. If a doctrine's content genuinely promotes these goals, then it is "true." At this point, doctrine becomes doctrinal policy and thus an instrument of power.

From this perspective, Faggioli's approach to doctrine makes sense. For example, at one point he discusses some magisterial interventions regarding ecclesiology, such as the CDF's 1992 Instruction *Communionis Notio* on the Church understood as communion or John Paul II's 1998 Apostolic Constitution *Apostolos Suos* on the theological and juridical nature of episcopal conferences. According to Faggioli, the Holy See at that time promoted these teachings as a "doctrinal policy" to strengthen the power of the central Vatican agencies over individual bishops and bishops' conferences.[13] However, following this logic, one can take things further than Faggioli does. Within this conceptual framework, the definitions of early councils, such as those of Nicaea (325 AD) and Chalcedon (451 AD), can be interpreted in terms of whose power they promoted. For example, the doctrines that Christ is consubstantial with the Father, or that he is true God and true man—one divine person having a human and a divine nature—are then "true" inasmuch as they further particular political goals.

If doctrine amounts to doctrinal policy set forth by ecclesial authority, what is the role of theology? In a post-metaphysical context, the "truths of faith" cannot refer to a relationship between the human mind and the reality of the things of God, which is why the goal of theology cannot be a rational understanding of these "truths." After all, we cannot know anything about such matters. In this context, Christian doctrine and theological engagement with it can at most regard goals concerning human life at the individual and collective levels, as well as the means to achieve them. We should strive for the Kingdom of God, where justice and equality prevail, and neighborly love is the means to this state. Therefore, any doctrine that is perceived as cementing structures of inequality would then be wrong by definition, given that "true" is what promotes equality. It is easy to see why teachings such as the hierarchical constitution of the Church, rooted in the sacrament of orders, would look increasingly suspect.

As doctrines are instruments of power, so is theology, which reflects on them or even produces them. It can then be divided into two fundamental categories. Reactionary theology tends to look backward, offering reasons for doctrines that protect the status quo and ensure that those in power remain there. Progressive theology, on the other hand, provides reasons for doctrines that challenge the status quo and promote a more even distribution of power. In either case, theological argumentation revolves around questions of power, serving doctrinal policies that either promote the status quo or foster change.

Without divine truths in the classical, metaphysical sense—as the mind's correspondence (if only as "in a mirror, dimly") with supersensual realities that cannot be empirically verified or produced by human hands—theology as faith and love seeking understanding cannot exist. Theology will then become pragmatistic: its "truth" will come to reside in the right praxis it produces, so that its full realization will be in liberation theology. What does God want from us if not to build the Kingdom on earth? How can we build the Kingdom of Heaven except by destroying every unjust yoke and breaking every chain? Building the Kingdom means giving a voice to the poor and creating a society of peace and equality, where the lion lies down with the lamb. Under these premises, true theology then invests its intellectual vigor in devising and

promoting (doctrinal) policies that liberate the poor and dispossess the rich. Anything it says about the Trinity, Christ, the Church, or the sacraments is only "true" to the extent that it leads to these objectives.

One of the fundamental fallacies of liberation theology—and indeed of any form of pragmatistic theology—is what Eric Voegelin calls the "immanentization of the eschaton."[14] The Kingdom of God is not ours to build. Though already present among us, it resembles a treasure hidden in a field or a mustard seed that grows by God's own initiative. Nowhere does Scripture tell us to "build" the Kingdom. Seeking to bring about through our own efforts what is, in fact, the gratuitous promise of a future reality—to render the eschaton immanent—is, according to Voegelin, the central error of what he calls "Gnosticism." This approach has never succeeded, nor can it ever succeed, for the simple reason that God is greater than we are.

"In the Beginning Was the Word"

We started by asking what might be meant by "doctrinal policies" and ended with the immanentization of the eschaton. At the center of this trajectory lies the crisis of reason, which began with nominalism and its denial of reason's capacity to touch ultimate realities. Can we meaningfully raise the question of meaning itself? Or is our knowledge limited to what can be fashioned by human hands? Does human nature exist—and with it, a human destiny that we can either fulfill or fail to attain? Can reason say anything about these issues? Is God's revelation on these matters real, or does it just come down to religious leaders trying to motivate us to be nice to one another?

The prologue of the Gospel of John takes a decisive stance on these fundamental questions. It expresses a core conviction of the Christian faith: "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn 1:1)—the Logos, Eternal Reason. As Joseph Ratzinger explains, the Evangelist teaches us that "the foundation of being is itself reason and that reason does not represent an accidental byproduct from the ocean of the irrational from which everything really came."[15] If human reason were merely the result of "chance and necessity," then it would ultimately dissolve into irrationality and negate itself.[16] On such a basis, not even a positivistic theology (=religious studies), focused on measurable expressions of faith, nor a pragmatistic theology (=liberation theology), aimed at effecting social change, could claim to be rational endeavors—regardless of how empirically verifiable or practically effective their outcomes might appear. Either reason is at the origin of all things, or it is an illusion. But if reason truly stands at the beginning—if it constitutes the foundation of being—then it is meaningful for faith to examine its own foundations and content. As Ratzinger puts it, theology properly begins when this reflection "takes place in an organized manner and under commonly recognized and well-founded rules that we describe as its method."[17] Understood in this light, "Christian theology does not just interpret texts"—nor, we may add, is it simply a tool for social transformation. Rather "it asks about truth itself and it sees man (and woman) as capable of truth."[18]

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[1] Massimo Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). I first encountered Faggioli's idea of "doctrinal policy" while reading Michael Hanby's insightful article, "Synodality, Sociologism, and the Judgment of History," in *Communio* 48 (2021), 686–726.

[2] See, for instance Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church*, 1, 3, 6, 19, 21, 22, 28, 49, 79, 81, 88,

198, 225, 259.

[3] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Veritatis. On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian,* May 24, 1990, n. 7.

[4] Joseph Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church's Political Stance," in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics* (Slough, UK: St. Paul Publications, 1988), 152.

[5] See John Henry Newman, Letter to Bishop Ullathorne of January 28,1870, in *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. XXV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 18–20.

[6] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gay Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 120 (aphorism 125).

[7] For an excellent account of how nominalism led to the demise of metaphysics, see: Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2012).

[8] See, for instance, Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co., 1969), chapter 17: "The Effects on the Church and Man's Mind."

[9] See William of Ockham, *Reportatio* II, q. 15, n. 38; reproduced in English in: William of Ockham, *Questions on Virtue, Goodness, and the Will* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 245.

[10] See Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 45. See also the further development of this idea in Vico's later work *The New Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), 85, paragraph 331.

[11] Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in M. Krausz (ed.), *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 169.

[12] Gianni Vattimo and René Girard, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 51.

[13] As he writes, "It seemed that power was being reclaimed by the Church's head in Rome at the expense of the Church's body throughout the world" (*A Council for the Global Church,* 22).

[14] See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952).

[15] Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church's Political Stance," 152.

[16] See *ibid.,* 153–154. When speaking of "chance and necessity," Ratzinger references Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity. An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Knopf, 1971). The argument that a reason not rooted in the divine Logos is reduced to the irrational is a recurring theme in Ratzinger's work. For example, it can also be found in: Joseph Ratzinger, "The Truth of Christianity?" in *Truth and Tolerance* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 181.

[17] Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church's Political Stance," 154.

[18] Ibid.

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November 24, 2025

Quarterly Review of the John Paul II Institute

Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

FEATURE ARTICLE

Reflections on Priestly Power

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This article is an adaptation of the first part of Fr. Antonio López's article, "Friends of the Bridegroom: Reflections on Priestly Fatherhood in Light of Contemporary Challenges," which was published in Communio: International Catholic Review *(no. 45 [Summer 2018]: 250–92). It is published here with permission.*

The current anthropological and theological crisis at the root of the clerical abuse of power and the sexual abuse of minors by ordained ministers bears on at least these three fronts: the nature of power; the meaning of love as gift of self to others; and the bodily extension of God's redemptive love in history. Given that Christ is both man's archetype (Rom 5:14) and the eternal high priest (Heb 7:23–27), these three dimensions of priestly existence find their meaning only in Christ. In him, we discover that they express the filial, nuptial, and paternal dimensions of love. The power a priest enjoys is a participation in the filial dimension of Christ's love. His gift of self for the Church is nuptial because the priest is the friend of the Bridegroom and is called to be "the living image of Jesus Christ, the Spouse of the Church."[1] His love is paternal and merciful insofar as, through the sacrament of ordination, the priest participates in God's merciful, fruitful, and ever-patient fatherhood.

The Call and Authority of the Ordained Priesthood

Christ called the apostles to be with him (Συγκαλεσάμενος, Lk 9:1) and to participate in his own authority (ξουσίαν, Mt 10:1). Between the vocation to the priesthood and the power (δύναμιν, Lk 9:1) it confers, there exists an intrinsic relation that surpasses a legal entrustment of the capacity to perform certain rhetorical, administrative, and charitable tasks. This crucial bond between power and vocation will pass unnoticed if, as is common today, "vocation"—from the Latin *vocare*, to call—is taken simply to mean either "the strong feeling of suitability for a particular occupation" or the "specific trade or profession" for which one has an aptitude or training. Such a subjectivistic perception of vocation yields the belief that one's authority in a certain field depends either on the fact that one's skills surpass those of others or that one's position grants the contractual or political capacity to have others at one's disposal. Power, on this reading, would be nothing but a neutral capacity to order peoples and things, and its goodness would depend on the integrity of its wielder and the nobility of his purpose. This, of

course, presupposes that power is the exercise of a human freedom that is not intrinsically attracted to the good, and that this power designs man's countenance and forges his destiny by enacting available possibilities.[2] Within such a subjective anthropology, both vocation and power begin and end with oneself and concern mostly what one can do.[3] Were we to assume this account, we would understand the priest as someone who felt called to and relatively gifted for the tasks to which holy orders gave him access after he passed muster with those in charge of his priestly formation. The nature of his actions and his gender would have little to do with the calling and authority with which ordination invests him. Christ's calling of the apostles, instead, is a radically different event. It begins not with man and his self-perception but with God's gracious call, which always takes into account the priest's humanity. Rather than a mere starting point, vocation is the permanent source of the form of priestly life and authority. Let us then look at the mystery of this calling and, in its light, discover the true meaning of power.

Christ calls the men he wants (Mk 3:13), and this vocation remains for those chosen a life-long, dramatic relation of love with Christ that encompasses all of their existence. As every priest knows, the reason for Christ's selection is not the capacities the chosen ones may have; nor is it an utterly random divine will. Instead, the calling to the priesthood—as with every other divine vocation—is a participation in the eternal vocation and election of Jesus Christ himself: "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1:4). Christ's own calling is not only to be the one in whom, through whom, and for whom everything is created (Col 1:16). He is also the sent one (Jn 5:36–38) for whom a body was prepared (Hb 10:5) so that through his life and sacrificial love he could witness to the Father's love for mankind: "The Father himself loves (φιλε) you, because you have loved (πεφιλήκατε) me and have believed that I came from the Father" (Jn 16:27).[4] For the human being whose original sin was a profound rejection of God's fatherhood and goodness, nothing is more important or delightful than to learn that the Father, whose countenance no one except Christ has seen, loves him.[5] Through Christ's transfiguring revelation of the Father's love, men's destiny "to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph 1:4–5) is accomplished.

> *It is not that [Christ] simply obeys because he is powerful. More radically, Christ reveals power to be obedience.*

If we grasp that the priestly vocation is a participation in Christ's eternal calling and specific mission in history, then it becomes possible also to see Christ's election as the revelation of God's omnipotence. Rather than the exercise of a random and absolute will, divine power is the communication of God's own being to another person.[6] In fact, because "person is what is most perfect in nature," to fully communicate one's being—inside and outside God—is to posit another person and to share with him all that one is.[7] The Father is God as always having given himself to the Son and the Spirit without either remainder or loss of self. Albeit with infinite difference, there exists a similarity between the Father's eternal begetting of the Son with whom he breathes the Spirit and the creation and redemption of man. God calls man out of nothing; he lets him be and affirms his goodness. He communicates his simple and perfect being to what he is not so that the human person, apex of creation, can participate in his tri-personal life, that is, live in it and respond to God with filial love.[8]

Along with the dimension of divine power just mentioned—the communication of being that posits another person and thus affirms his goodness—there is another important characteristic revealed by Christ's incarnation and obedience to the Father unto death.[9] Divine power is gratuitous. Gratuity here does not mean that God contemplated the possibility of being simply for himself but decided against it. To affirm this would be to project into God the creaturely distinctions between being and nothing, nature and freedom, as well as fallen man's experience of genuine love that teaches him to convert from self-enclosure to fruitful union with the beloved. Gratuity, instead, is the power in which, by nature, one person wants the other two to be, wants to be himself in the other two, and wants the other two to be themselves in him.[10] Gratuity regards utter joy in the divine other's being both other and equal to oneself, in one's own being in and with the other, and in sharing with another one's eternally being loved by the beloved.[11] This gratuity, which makes creation and redemption possible, exists eternally only as paternal, filial, and spirit-ual love. In brief, gratuity is divine love as tri-personal unity that lets the other be and does not grasp. In light of the Trinity, we can understand power as the self-communication that posits another person with whom one shares life and from whom one desires, awaits, and welcomes a gratuitous response.[12]

Precisely because divine power is the affirmation of another to whom one has given all of oneself and who responds with equal love, the Son's revelation of the Father's love within man's sinful history cannot but take the form of obedience unto death (Phil 2:8). It is not that he simply obeys because he is powerful. More radically, Christ reveals power to be obedience.[13] Rather than to violently bend oneself to an extrinsic will or positive law, to obey is to depend lovingly on the Father. This dependence confronts man's rejection of both himself and God with the affirmation of the Father's goodness, which alone fulfills man's existence and is capable of redeeming him. Thus, Christ's power, in the form of obedience and service, is simultaneously the gratuitous, life-giving, and wonder-filled affirmation of the good of the Father, of mankind, and of creation. Every genuine form of human power is a participation in and expression of this filial affirmation.

In order to redeem fallen mankind, Christ had to receive and respond to the Father's love as a human being. In doing so, he rejected every false form of power: At the beginning of his public life, he contested Satan's claim to be the ultimate possessor of the kingdoms and glory and rejected his offer to share them with Christ if he just adored him (Mt 4:8–10). He rejected Peter's all-too-human proposal that he fulfill the Father's plan not through the folly of the Cross but by another more efficacious and less embarrassing strategy (Mt 16:21–22). He tirelessly contested the lie in man so that he may embrace the truth (Jn 6:67; Jn 8:21-59). He offered himself as the sacrificial lamb that meekly endured man's punishment, his disciples' betrayals (Lk 22:48), and, more deeply, the Father's silence (Mt 27:46; Lk 23:46). Having shown himself to be the true servant (Phil 2:7; Is 52:13–53:12), after the Resurrection he receives "all authority (π□σα □ξουσία) in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18) and makes his disciples participants in his mission to redeem mankind.[14] In so doing, he draws them into the power of his very being (□ξ-ουσία): power to judge and thus to bind or set free (Mt 18:18); to consecrate the eucharistic species (Lk 22:19); to preach the word (Mt 28:19); and to govern people, that is, to guide them to the Father.

Lest we think the calling to the priesthood is a mechanical passing on of power, we should recall that Christ entrusted Peter with the responsibility of governing the Church (Mt 16:18; Jn 1:42) only after Peter confessed three times his love for Christ (Jn 21:15–19). By requesting this confession of love and entrusting to Peter the great task of tending his sheep, Christ taught him that to exercise his power is to communicate to them the grace he received, that is, the grace of believing in Christ's love for him. Power is not about what one can do or give but is, as we saw, the communication of God's life-giving love (Acts 3:6). Only the one who truly believes in the

love that Christ is—that is, only the one who entrusts himself to Christ and recognizes him as the very heart of the Father—can be the "good and faithful servant" (Mt 25:23) dwelling in this love and thus living for Christ. Having being confirmed, Peter followed Christ to a death similar to his and thus witnessed to Christ's love to the end.[15]

In light of his dialogue with Peter, we see that Christ's bestowal of his own authority—the power to communicate divine life—requires the priest to enter into Christ's unconditional obedience to the Father and into his love for the Church. The priest is therefore the sacramental representation of Christ—he acts *in persona Christi capitis*—and is called to live this mission within a twofold relation: to Christ, to whom he is ontologically configured and in whom, for whom, and with whom he is; and to the Marian Church, who ordained him and whom he serves. This double referentiality is a permanent reminder to him and to the Church that he is not Christ. His unconditional service to Christ in this twofold relation is what makes priestly existence so beautiful and utterly demanding.

Human sinfulness makes the challenge to live the sacramental representation of Christ very difficult because it obfuscates the fundamental truth that God is a genuine giver and, with the gift of his own being, he invites man to participate in the gift he is by allowing him to give further. God lets man participate in his own power precisely because he wants a free, gratuitous, and creative response from him. This is why man's power is not for him to go about his own little things but to express God's greatness by informing the world in his light and reciprocating his love. Original sin can make one think that being a finite but real origin means also being the ultimate origin of what one gives. From this point of view, power is the most alluring human temptation: its possession and exercise make one believe that one is God, the beginning without beginning, and hence immortal. The greater one's power, the greater the temptation to think oneself its ultimate source and the uglier its corruption. Power to give God and its consequent power over souls, which belong to the ordained ministry, are by far the greatest powers man knows. The priest's sinful forgetfulness that his power is being *given* to him, that it is filial, makes him believe that he is the ultimate origin and destiny of people's lives. Clericalism is in this light the most radical distortion of power, because it is the use of God and his people to affirm oneself. Concerning the way a priest relates to everything, the instantiations of this corruption of priestly power are manifold: restless activism; verbosity in the confessional; the aestheticism of pompous liturgies; self-referential spiritual direction; soulless and mechanical prayers; self-centered preaching; uncertain guidance of people; self-aggrandizing administration; the avoidance and management of human relations through bureaucratic procedures; the use of human weakness and suffering to impose oneself and one's ideas on the faithful; and, most hideously, the abuse of the innocent and the young to exercise through them a denial of God. Men called to the priesthood are called to retrieve the beauty of a life of dependence on and obedience to Christ, finding solace in the fact that Christ, who learned obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8), will enable them to enter into the real nature of his own power. They will then communicate in an ever-truer way the goodness of the Father and of all that he has created, thus helping to lead everything back to him.

One is to be mindful that when dealing with the priesthood the very nature of the Church is also at stake since she is apostolic in nature and it is the mystery of the Eucharist that makes the Church. Following the Protestant Reformation, however, a very different view of the relation between the faithful and apostolic office became current. As Balthasar remarks, for the Christian Churches "the relation between the priest and the faithful is no longer based on apostolic succession and thus on the structure of the apostolic Church, but rather the common priesthood of all believers."[16] In this view, both the Church's sacramentality and the priest's capacity to sacramentally represent Christ vanish; the common priesthood of the faithful absorbs the sacramental priesthood.[17] Just as the Church is no longer seen as the Bride of

Christ but as a congregation of worshipers who freely determine how they wish to live their faith, so the priest becomes a male or female member elected by the congregation with the twofold task of skillfully administering the congregation's affairs and of preaching so as to occasion God's eventful occurrence. Not surprisingly, this ecclesiology is of a piece with the subjective reduction of vocation and power discussed earlier. As such, it places the emphasis on one's own competencies and activity and thus cannot but foster the clericalism one rightly seeks to correct. This is why, regardless of how poorly it may be lived, it is imperative not to lose sight of the sacramental nature of priesthood. Rather than accept an ecclesiology and sacramentality that subjectivize the priestly office—by, for example, disseminating priestly responsibilities through the empowerment of some lay faithful—one must retrieve the nature of the ordained priesthood and educate to genuine priestly fatherhood the men God calls to it.

Priestly fatherhood, if approached christologically, appears then as the permanence in history of God's merciful and nuptial love for his people. God wishes to transfigure creation by affirming its goodness, and he extends this affirmation—his omnipotent power—through those men he calls to be friends of Christ, the Bridegroom. Ordination is a call to live one's loving dependence on Christ and the service of the Church with the awareness of one's own sinfulness and of the ever-greater divine mercy that Christ constantly bestows on his friends, who receive with this mercy also his being and filial authority. Priests' awareness of their own sinfulness and of Christ's mercy for everyone should yield a life lived as entreaty that the vocation they received and accepted may be fulfilled. This vocation, understood as God's love given ever anew, is the light with which God illumines the darkness of man's sin. If genuine, priests' permanent entreaty will deepen a threefold wound in their souls that will spur them to live their mission until the very end, as Peter did (Jn 21:18). They will know and suffer ever more deeply the wound of faith, because people live and die without knowing Christ (Lk 18:8); the wound of hope, because they do not realize the Father's faithful and patient presence; and the wound of charity, because they do not live for him "who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15). Certain of Christ's love for them and of the Father's goodness, they will experience no anxiety to resolve this dramatic condition. They will ask to be able to offer their very existence so that, through them, God may continue to bring more men and women to the fulfillment of the eternal promise for which he has predestined us: to be his sons through Jesus Christ to the praise of his glorious grace.

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[1] John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 22.

[2] See Romano Guardini, "Power and Responsibility: A Course of Action for the New Age," in *End of the Modern World*, trans. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 1998), 117–20; Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, trans. Martha M. Matesich (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 45–69; George Grant, "The Triumph of the Will," in *Collected Works of George Grant*, vol. 4, *1970–1988*, ed. Arthur Davis and Henry Roper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 726–35. David C. Schindler, *Freedom From Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 264–69.

[3] Vocation is thus identified with a choice that has to be made at a certain point and that, once

embraced, needs only to be carried out—unless, of course, a change of circumstances or feelings suggest moving in a different direction. For an alternative view, see, Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness: On Love, Vocation, and Formation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

[4] This, of course, does not mean that creation and redemption are part of God's eternal being—as if God needed to create and be involved in history to make or to perfect himself. The creation and redemption of the world is an expression of God's gratuitous, free and kenotic love that is completely harmonious with his own triune being. See Michael Sharkey (ed.), *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969–1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 211–12.

[5] For an account of original sin as a rejection of God's fatherhood, see my *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 135–47.

[6] Aquinas rightly defines God's power as "the communication of his own likeness to other things" (*De potentia Dei*, q. 1, a. 1, co.). Further down he writes, "We speak of power (*potentia*) in relation to act. . . . Now God is act both pure and primary, wherefore it is most befitting to him to act and communicate (*diffundere*) his likeness (*similitudinem*) to other things: and consequently, active power is most becoming to him: since power is called active forasmuch as it is a principle of action" (*De potentia Dei*, q. 2, a. 1, co.). God's power is to extend his being, what is most proper to him, both in himself and to what he is not. This communication of his being regards therefore both his generative power and his creative power.

[7]Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 29, a. 3, co. As Richard of St. Victor put it, in God's supreme simplicity "being is identical to loving," and therefore "their persons will be identical to their love" (*De Trinitate* 5.20).

[8] Thus, the definition of omnipotence is not the simple application of the classic axiom *bonum est diffusivum sui* to God. The self-diffusiveness of the good (*bonum*) does not suffice to account for the goodness of otherness because, as Greek thought has shown, the self-diffusiveness of the first principle not onlyrequires that what comes from the source be less than it in order to preserve the source's perfection; it also understands union with the origin as the absorption of the many in the one. See, for example, Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.14–15 and 5.4.1–2. If the communication of being were just self-diffusiveness, then it would only be good for the divine being to be. Nevertheless, the perception of divine power as the communication of self in another—the Father in the Son and both in the Spirit; and God in what he is not, the created human being—is also the wonderful fulfillment and sublation of the goodness of God perceived by the Greek philosophers, since it confirms the goodness of otherness by securing the incommunicability of the source through its total sharing.

[9] St. Paul hinted at this mystery when he described the spirit of Christ to be such that he "did not count equality with God (□σα θε□) a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself (□αυτ□ν □κένωσεν), taking the form of a servant (μορφ□ν δούλου λαβών)" (Phil 2:6–7).

[10] As Augustine wrote about the trinitarian persons: "Both are in each, and all in each, and each in all, and all in all, and all are one" (*De Trinitate* 6.10.12). See, Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 37, a. 1, ad. 3.

[11] For a more detailed account of gratuity, see my *Gift and the Unity of Being*, 241–58.

[12] To affirm this is not to presume that God's unity is moral. Ratzinger clarifies, "The Father and the Son do not become one in such a way that they dissolve into each other. They remain

distinct from each other, since love has its basis in a 'vis-à-vis' that is not abolished. If each remains his own self, and they do not abrogate each other's existence, then . . . their unity must be in the fruitfulness in which each one gives himself and in which each one is himself. They are one in virtue of the fact that their love is fruitful, that it goes beyond them. In the third Person in whom they give themselves to each other, in the Gift, they are themselves, and they are one." Joseph Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 35. Unity in God is the eternal and perichoretic communion of persons. Thus, it is not the case that the Father first possesses the divine being and then begets the Son—as Arius thought. God is his eternal begetting. Nor is it that the eternal existence of the other two persons makes the two processions spurious—as Sabellius contended. The Father is always already with the other two persons.

[13] Undoubtedly, this does not suggest that the trinitarian relations are to be thought in terms of obedience, since this would require that there be several wills in God. Rather, we mean that the relation of love among the divine persons is one in which a dialogue takes place: the Father speaks the Word and breathes it in the Spirit; the Word says God, himself, and all of creation in it; and the Spirit witnesses to its depth and searches it. See Michael Waldstein, "The Analogy of Mission and Obedience: A Central Point in the Relation Between *Theologia* and *Oikonomia* in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Commentary on John*," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 92–112.

[14] It is after the Resurrection and the reception of the Holy Spirit that it becomes clear that Christ "is the splendor of (the Father's) glory and the expression of his being" and that he "bears everything (τ πάντα) by the power of his word" (Heb 1:3). Christ's power is divine: he commands and what he says exists (Ps 33:9; Gn 1:3, 6, 9ff). Albert Vanhoye, *A Different Priest: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Leo Arnold (Miami, FL: Convivium Press, 2011), 59–69.

[15] For the martyriological dimension of the Petrine ministry, see Joseph Ratzinger, "The Primacy of the Pope and the Unity of the People of God," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 41 (Spring 2014): 112–28.

[16] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "How Weighty Is the Argument From 'Uninterrupted Tradition' to Justify the Male Priesthood?," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (Spring 1996): 185–98, at 188.

[17] Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 1; Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 84–160.

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November 17, 2025

Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

RE-SOURCE: CLASSIC TEXT

The Fatherhood of God, the Fatherhood of the Priest

BISHOP MASSIMO CAMISASCA

The following excerpts are drawn from the chapter entitled "The Challenge of Fatherhood" in Massimo Camisasca's The Challenge of Fatherhood: Thoughts on the Priesthood, *trans. Adrian Walker (Fraternity of St. Charles, 2003): 101–109, 112–113. It is reprinted with permission.*

A Look at the Present Day

The drama of human existence is relationship with the father. This has clearly been the case in every period of history, but it is especially so today.

The desire for privacy, for escape into one's past, the withdrawal into oneself, or into one's family home, and the disinterest in the *polis* that characterize many people's lives today derive from, among other things, a field experience of the father. When God first thought of the Church, that is, of a guided company, he thought of man's constitutive need for a father and a mother. He wanted us always to have fathers and mothers to accompany us.

The experience of the absence or abscondence of the father manifests itself in insecurity, lack of resolve, and resistance to being loved and guided. The experience of being loved and fostered by the mother is disproportionately important, even as the energy communicated through this relationship can find no outlets for creative self-expression. A fatherless young man is unable to take responsibility for his everyday choices, he feels that reality is hostile or is the arena of a challenge that costs too much psychic, spiritual, and effective energy. If you don't have a father, your life is populated with enemies.

More recently, especially since the 1970s, there has been a progressive attack on fatherhood. The stated goal of the revolutions of 1968 was precisely the destruction of the role of the father and of every authority. The figure of the father was frequently identified with that of the paternalistic master; analogously, the same period brought forth theories of the death of God. A certain one-sided feminism has further contributed to the depreciation of the father in his maleness. The result has been a general crisis of the family, centered on the separation between sexuality and generation, between sexuality and education: sex understood purely as

play.

> *This is the raison d'être for the existence of the Church and every vocational company: to accompany our personal drama, so that the original perception of being loved may become a habitual awareness in us.*

The daily news shows that the crisis now affects not just the experience of paternity and maternity, but the very possibility of giving these names a meaning. Think about heterologous insemination, which makes it impossible to know who one's father and mother are; think of appalling things like "renting" wombs or the cloning of human beings. Does being a father still have any meaning?

Everyone can understand that a "genetic" mutation has occurred, and is still occurring, in man's conception of himself and what a source of unhappiness and violence it is. The ultimate root of unhappiness and violence is precisely the absence of the experience of sonship. Sonship and paternity are strictly correlative. If one does not recognize that one is a son, if one does not recognize one's own father, one is unfruitful, because one is incapable of penetrating into reality, of plowing the soil of the world. The experience of sonship, by contrast, turns into an ability to generate and to create; one is able to face reality, to express oneself, to communicate intense affections. Having gotten to know so many young men, I can say that even priestly vocation can be connected with the search for the father. No one should be scandalized by this: the experience of becoming a father in the priesthood can turn out to be a path to discovering a sonship that has been absent in one's life. The vocation can thus open itself to the search for the origin of oneself and to the recognition of what is other than oneself, of others, and of the Other.

Today's crisis of fatherhood goes hand-in-hand with the crisis of belonging, which is perhaps the acutest form of the crisis of contemporary Catholicism. The world has dismissed belonging as an expression of sectarianism, thus radically undermining faith's ability to be the form shaping the whole of life. The weakening of the experience of paternity makes the figure of God as father ethereal and thins out the affective and creative density of faith's presence in history.

God calls us to be fathers and mothers today. We cannot forget the present, the context in which this call is addressed to us, in which this possibility is offered to us.

What are we to do? In guiding the young men who come to me and whose superior I become when they join the Fraternity of St. Charles, the main thing I tend to emphasize is that there is no getting around one's own carnal father: the point is not to censor him, forget him, or neglect him, but accept him, love him, and perhaps rediscover him. One mustn't sublimate the fatherhood-sonship relations, censoring one's historically and carnally given father. One must rather rediscover it and relive it within a new relationship.

Young people need to be educated to live out in relation to themselves and to things (even before they live it out in relation to other persons!) the paternity that they have experienced in

a weak or problematic way. This education demands of them acceptance of reality and of their own freedom. Acceptance of reality: my being is dependence and belonging because I did not originate myself; the fact that my birth lies some distance in the past does not cancel this dependence and belonging, but rather clarifies and deepens it. Acceptance of freedom: to live is to take up creatively the challenge of a task that has been assigned, a task that involves work, trials, and difficulties, but also rewards, joys, and gratifications, and a task that defines one's place in the history of men and of God with men.

What Sort of Fatherhood?

God is Father. Jesus Christ has revealed this definitive word about man and about history. God therefore places his seal on man by instituting in man a fatherhood similar to his own. How does God reveal his paternity to us? Through the paternity of human beings. If there are times when fathers disappoint, it is because, as Jesus says, "only one is Father" (Mt 23:9).

In chapters five and seven of the Gospel of St. John, we find a particularly suggestive expression of Christ's experience of his relationship with the Father. He gives voice to his feeling of being urgently called upon by the Father to work without rest: "My Father is always at work, and I, too, am always at work" (Jn 5:17). Fatherhood is tireless activity: its task is to welcome, preserve, correct, and foster growth. This is the task that Saint Joseph had with respect to Jesus: to protect him and bring him up.

Every father is an educator. To educate a person means to guide him to the knowledge of the path on which he is to realize the eternal plan for his life in time. An example of paternity that has always struck me occurs in Dante's *Inferno*. The poet meets a fellow-citizen who has been ill-treated and exiled as he was: Bruno Latini, a man of learning, a profound philosopher, and an authority on the stars. Dante regards him as the model of the man capable of guiding others to make their lives a sign of the divine in time; he therefore feels him to be a father. The poet then addresses him in the following words: "In my mind is fixed, and it warms my heart to recall / the dear paternal image / of you who led me step by step / to learn how man becomes immortal." Dante meets Brunetto among the sodomites, but, notwithstanding the moral judgment he makes on Brunetto, what concerns him is to throw into relief the place that Brunetto has had in his life. Brunetto was able to show him the path towards self-realization. Since Brunetto was an astrologer, Dante makes use of the metaphor of the star to indicate the sign of the eternal in time, by following which one cannot "fail to reach the glorious port."

Dante thus seems to delineate a certain antinomy: on the one hand, the goal of education is to bring the person to autonomy, to the ability to face reality and to plan freely his own future; on the other hand, the person's maturity involves the awareness of his own ineliminable dependence. Aren't these two claims contradictory? For the contemporary mentality, they are: autonomy means not depending on another, but on oneself. Here we touch on what is the crucial question of the history of humanity and of each man's existence.

The Christian experiences that he daily becomes more and more himself, with an identity of his own, by adhering to a Presence. As he journeys forward, he does not deny his own origin; on the contrary, he is born ever more profoundly from it—and just so becomes ever more profoundly himself.

Modern civilization has asserted from its very beginnings that the high-point of education is the severing of all bonds (think of Makarenko's *Pedagogy for Schools* or of Rousseau's *Emile*). Let us instead go to a different source: the Mystery of the Trinity. The Son's absolute relativity or belonging to the Father was manifested in his cry of "my God, my God, why have you

forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34), which is at one and the same time the moment of the greatest distance and the greatest proximity. The central chapters of John's Gospel show us Christ as the one sent by the Father. The Son has manifested himself in the full power of his mission for the whole of human history precisely through this absolute and free unity with the Father: "What I see him do, I always do," "What pleases him, I do" (cf. Jn 4:34; 5:19; 7:16; 8:28, etc.).

God's Spirit also evacuates the antinomy between freedom and belonging for us who thus share analogously in what Christ himself lived. He thereby enables us to experience that the greatest freedom lies in the greatest belonging. This experience is one that we live even before being able to describe it: nature itself plainly teaches that the constructive energy with which a person throws himself into history increases with his awareness of being loved.

The thought of God's fatherhood is always with me and is for me a source of continual wonderment, of a gratitude that is a matrix of rebirth for me. God has made me from nothing, because once I did not exist, and now I do. This experience is the beginning of freedom, for freedom is self-possession, full self-realization, and the first realization of oneself is the very fact of existing. Every fatherhood that would imitate God's is one that creates and accompanies, that calls forth, enhances, and preserves the freedom of the other. This is the raison d'être for the existence of the Church and every vocational company: to accompany our personal drama, so that the original perception of being loved may become a habitual awareness in us.

The other experience with which I identify God's fatherhood in my life is liberation from fear. St. Paul contrasts the slave and the son, and says: "all those who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons of God. And you have not received the spirit of slavery to lead you back in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoptive sonship through which we cry 'Father'" (Rom 8: 14–15). The slave's relation to the master is one of fear, because the master commands. The son's relationship with the father is one of freedom, because the father guides him. Because he belongs to the Father through the Spirit, the Christian recognizes that he is a son and experiences liberation from fear. St. Paul describes the Christian as a slave who has been set free and adopted as a son: "you are no longer a slave, but a freeman" (Gal 4:7). For St. Paul, liberation was his personal experience of passing from Hebraism to Christianity; for us it is emancipation from the laws of the world. The world has its laws, and whenever it speaks of liberation, what it is really talking about are new laws that beget new forms of slavery.

St. John has recorded for us these words of Jesus: "I no longer call you servants, but friends." These words set up a contrast between the servant and the friend that parallels the Pauline contrast between the slave and the son. Jesus goes on to explain "because I have told you everything" (see Jn 15:15). The servant lives in fear because he does not know: he knows only what he has to do from morning till evening, but he does not know the meaning that what he does has in the master's plan for his household. We, by contrast, are free because we know the truth (see Jn 8:32). We know that we have been saved at the cost of Christ's blood (see Rom 5: 6–10). This certainty removes fear from our lives. It takes away the fear that our limits and our sins are the final word about us. This is why Jesus identifies the essence of the Father with mercy.

What is it about us that keeps us prisoners? The past, when we do not believe that the Spirit of Christ is able to wipe away our evil; the present, when we imagine that our relationship with Christ is measured by our ability to respond, rather than by his continuous initiative in coming to us; the future, when we do not have enough faith to be able to hope.

"In love there is no fear" (1 Jn 4:18). I am reminded of the Psalms and the Prophets that speak

of God as a father who bends over his child, gathers him up, and holds him in his arms. “Even if your father and mother should abandon you, I will never abandon you” (see Ps 27:10; Is 49:15). The Prophets are given the task of tirelessly reminding Israel that God’s fatherhood is inexorable, tender, and not at all generic. In Jesus’ last hours (see Jn 12–17), he talks several times about the elimination of fear. On leaving the Apostles, Jesus gives them the Spirit, who will make Jesus’ presence in their lives actual and concrete. Just as Jesus is the one on whom the Spirit descends and remains, the Christian is the one who in the Spirit experiences God permanently accompanying his life (see Jn 1:33; 3:34). The Spirit is like fresh and clear water that continually bubbles up from the depths of our being (see Jn 4:14) and enables us to recognize the outward and historical signs of Jesus’ presence.

The Foundation of All Paternity

St. Paul states that God the Father is the source from which “every paternity is named in heaven and on earth” (Eph 3:15). When we talk about fatherhood, then, we are talking in the first instance about the mystery of the person of God the Father, of the one from whom all being takes its origin—“the source of being is in You,” as a hymn from the liturgy of the hours has it—and from whom each one of us, who at one time did not exist, but then began to exist, comes into being. This means that we have been wanted, loved by a Freedom, by a Person who has made us be and continues to do so.

[…]

Called to be Fathers in the Church

God’s design comes to pass in history through a continual rebirth of his people, which is made possible by the presence of a “holy seed” (Is 6:13). This is still true of the Church today.

The world hates the Church, it perceives the Church as an intrusive and bothersome presence. Why? Because the Church recalls men to the truth, reminding them that no form of power can adequately answer their deepest needs. As T.S. Eliot once powerfully put it, the Church exists to remind man that lust, money, and war are incapable of quenching his heart’s thirst. This is not the only function of the Church, of course, but when human beings do not participate in its life and do not discover it as bearing a possibility of fullness, they see it merely as a source of intolerable claims, admonitions, and prohibitions.

Why is the Church important for man? It is the place of true paternity and maternity, which express the maturity and fullness of the human. Although paternity and maternity are physiologically and psychologically different, on a basic level they have the same value, because they share the same task of begetting and educating. They represent the highest form of participation in the end for which we exist.

God is the one who begets and does not forsake, who admits to being and educates us in it. The first task of spiritual fatherhood is therefore to educate. Christ has left this task above all to holy Mother Church: she generates her children in the baptismal font, she feeds them, raises them, and sustains them through the sacraments, catechesis, and mutual belonging. Priests are the servants of the fatherhood of God and the motherhood of the Church.

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November 10, 2025

Quarterly Review of the John Paul II Institute

Humanum

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WITNESS

Raising Spiritual Fathers

FR. CARTER GRIFFIN

One by one, the kneeling seminarians got up and walked out into the evening twilight. They went in pairs into the neighborhood, striking up conversations and asking those they met for prayer intentions. As they left the church, the previous shift of seminarians returned, kneeling to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, luminous in its monstrance among a blaze of candles on the altar.

Every few months at St. John Paul II Seminary, we engage in "street evangelization" in one of the neighborhoods in or around Washington, DC. That particular time was a cool, autumn evening in Bethesda, Maryland. In the hushed silence of the church, I watched this "changing of the guard" with a feeling of deep pride in those gifted and courageous young men, full of youth and ability, sent out on a campaign for souls, inviting people into the Church and the peace of God's True Presence. That evening has become an iconic image in my mind of the quality of our future priests and the gift that it is, for me personally, to work in seminary formation.

If you had asked me on my ordination day how I would spend the first 20 years of my priesthood, I would never have guessed that I'd spend 15 of them teaching at a seminary. For one thing, I am a convert to the faith and before I was in formation, seminaries were as opaque to me as they might be to you right now. What little I had heard about seminaries, moreover, was not very flattering.

When I started my formation in 1998, most of the priests on faculty had attended the seminaries of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. I heard story after story about their seminary experiences, some of them good, many of them dreadful. Now in 2025, having exercised most of my priesthood in formation work, and having visited and spoken at many seminaries over the years, my first- and second-hand knowledge of seminary life spans the country and five or six decades.

At its best, priestly fatherhood powerfully reveals the love of God the

Father. That is a constant point of examination for me: am I, in fact, revealing the Father's love to these generous young men who are discerning a priestly calling?

Without a doubt, from where I sit it is evident that American diocesan seminaries are stronger and healthier than at any point since the Second Vatican Council, and perhaps even the decades prior. They are certainly not perfect, and seminary reform is a never-ending effort, but they are a far cry from the decadence that plagued many seminaries in the past—a decadence responsible, I believe, for much of the horrific clergy sexual abuse over the years.

Before the seminary, I was a naval officer. One aspect of shipboard life that I appreciated most was a strong sense of being united with others in a common mission. Everyone on that vessel was moving in the same direction, both literally and figuratively. We had the same goals, confronted the same challenges, and enjoyed the same achievements.

That feeling of solidarity is surpassed, in my experience, only in the seminary. It is honestly more a family than an institution, a community where each member desires to grow in virtue, holiness, and in the discernment of God's will, wherever it leads. The depth of these common aspirations is especially manifest when the rare seminarian comes along who does not share them. Thankfully, he is usually gone within a few months.

The outlook and goals that we share as a community foster an environment that is joyful, wholesome, and affectionate. Seminarians pray together, eat together, study together, and enjoy sports and excursions and movies and hikes together. They celebrate each other's birthdays, meet each other's families, and care for those who are ill. One seminarian who came down with an illness a few years ago, reflecting on the attentiveness of his brothers, told me that the seminary is "a great place to get sick."

Once I was at lunch in the seminary and a young man accidentally dropped his plate of food. He was mortified, as you can imagine. At virtually any other gathering of young, competitive men, there would be cheering, guffaws, and perhaps some snide remarks. What happened at the seminary was this: one guy jumped up and helped him pick up the food and the broken pieces of plate, another went into the kitchen to fetch a broom to sweep up the debris, another made a place for him at their table, and when he sat down (with a new plate of food) they made light of it and welcomed him into their conversation. The seminary is not only a great place to get sick; it's a great place to drop your plate of food.

Now I do not want to overstate things. The seminarians (and their formators) are in the same vale of tears as everyone else and subject to the same weaknesses, faults, and sinful inclinations. Squabbles happen, friendships wax and wane, tensions run high on the sports field, guys leave dishes for others to clean, and practical jokes go amiss.

Moreover, men entering seminary life breathe the same cultural miasma as the rest of their generation. Like other young people they are often addicted to their screens and struggle with the same anxieties and self-absorption as their contemporaries. They often need help working through wounds inflicted on them at home or at school. They sometimes have patterns of sin that must be addressed. But despite it all, the earnestness, honesty, and openness to formation of these young men is beyond question.

It is not just the quality of the men coming into formation, however, that makes this such an auspicious moment for seminary formation. In 1992 St. John Paul II published a document entitled *Pastores Dabo Vobis*—"I Will Give You Shepherds"—that set Catholic seminaries on a new course, the fruits of which (at least in our country) are now in full blossom. In that document Pope John Paul II focused especially on the importance of a seminarian's human integration as the cornerstone for his spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation.

One upshot of that document, published over 30 years ago, is that virtually all priests teaching at seminaries today were themselves formed according to the late Pope's approach to priestly formation. In addition, priests and seminarians alike share a common love for the Church and the Catholic faith to which they are staunchly committed. As a result, the generational divides that plagued seminaries in the past are today almost nonexistent.

That sense of common outlook and mission among priests, faculty, and seminarians, coupled with the fact that young people today tend to be more radically open and transparent, contributes to an environment in which men can truly be formed well. That is the environment in which I am privileged to work.

It is a different kind of priesthood than I had envisioned when I was ordained, but what it lacks in breadth—my "parishioners" this year number around 60—it makes up for in intensity and depth. I do not serve 2,000 families in a suburban parish, but I do live next door to my parishioners 24/7 and accompany them on all the ups and downs of their life and their vocational journey. It is a profoundly paternal experience of priesthood to both guide them as a spiritual father and foster in them a fatherly heart that they will carry into their own priestly ministry.

At its best, priestly fatherhood powerfully reveals the love of God the Father. That is a constant point of examination for me: am I, in fact, revealing the Father's love to these generous young men who are discerning a priestly calling? Am I promoting their joy and virtue? Am I attentive and patient? Do I care for them well, listen to them carefully, correct them lovingly, encourage them regularly, and protect them courageously?

Part of a father's job is to prepare his children for a world that can be challenging, even dangerous. I am keenly aware that the seminary is not the priesthood, and that the warm family environment fostered within these walls will not always be their experience in the field. Many parish priests are overwhelmed with work, struggle with anxiety and burnout, are distant from priest friends, and live under a pall of suspicion and the threat of false accusations. Many feel little support from their bishop, their brother priests, or even their parishioners.

There are, to be sure, wholesome and effective responses to each of those challenges that are being lived right now by innumerable men—the vast majority of priests, in fact—who enjoy thriving and joyful lives. But however deliberately we strive to instill those lessons in the seminary, they do not sidestep the need of a priest to correspond to grace and make good choices. The fact is, we are sending these young men into a long, hard battle, and the risk of casualties is high. As I look upon the bright and eager faces of our young seminarians, I know that they are volunteering for a war that will take its toll and leave its scars.

A father can only ask his child to embrace danger if he truly believes it is worth doing. I do. I can honestly say that, purely by God's grace and mercy, my love for the priesthood surpasses even the love I felt on the day of my ordination. I am more convinced than ever that living instruments of Jesus' priestly heart are desperately needed today.

In the radical availability of their celibacy, ordered to a fruitful spiritual paternity, these men will make a difference in the lives of many thousands of people. In their preaching, in extending God's mercy in the sacrament of confession, in teaching the young, in assisting the dying on their way to heaven, and above all in making Jesus present to his people in the Eucharist, they will change the world. And if they remain faithful, with all the challenges and risks they will face, they will experience an unquenchable joy that nothing in the world can take from them.

If preparing seminarians for priestly ministry and fatherhood is the greatest privilege of being in seminary formation, the most difficult part is serving as a "gatekeeper" to the priesthood. For the most part, we can effectively vet incoming men with extensive interviews, references, background checks, and psychological examinations.

Nevertheless, even after they are accepted it sometimes becomes clear that an individual's temperament is not suited for priestly ministry, or that he has interior wounds that are best addressed outside the seminary, or that his maturity is insufficient to continue in formation. In most of these cases we can help a man realize the wisdom of leaving seminary formation and he usually does so willingly, even joyfully and gratefully.

Occasionally we learn that a man was not honest in his application or that he behaves in a way incompatible with being a seminarian or priest. In these rare cases he must be dismissed. To be honest, while it is always difficult to dismiss someone, it is far less difficult in the wake of the devastating sexual abuse crisis—much of which was preventable, to speak frankly, if the "gatekeepers" of previous decades had done their job. It must be done for the sake of the Church and of our people who have suffered enough at the hands of unworthy shepherds.

It must be done if it is uncomfortable or even risky for the formators themselves. For a disgruntled ex-seminarian can say just about anything, however unfounded, knowing that many are ready to believe the worst about a priest, and that the seminary can seldom make public the reasons for a dismissal. This risk is amplified especially today because difficult questions must be asked in formation to ensure that a man can live chaste celibacy well, which includes questions about sinful habits, past behavior, or disordered sexual inclinations such as same-sex attractions. These are delicate matters, but the Church has every right to ask these questions of men who wish to be her future priests.

Sifting out unsuitable candidates is the unpleasant part of this work. But it must be done, even if it means fewer priests. As St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "God never so abandons His Church that apt ministers are not to be found sufficient for the needs of the people, *if the worthy be promoted and the unworthy set aside* . . . it were better to have few good ministers than many bad ones."[1]

Those cases, as I say, are happily very rare. Most of my life and work in raising up spiritual fathers is filled with joy. I had the great blessing of growing up with a good, loving, and strong father. My pastoral work in the seminary is, in many ways, simply a transposing of that experience of natural fatherhood into the key of seminary and priestly life.

It is as much tone as anything. My father could be both very serious and tremendously fun. I knew that he worked hard, was respected at work, and had many responsibilities, but he also had a great sense of humor and loved to laugh. Sometimes after telling a joke or remembering a funny story around the dinner table he laughed until he cried. He coached sports teams for my brothers and me. He set high standards but knew when and how to relax them. He was there when we needed him. He was kind and forgiving but also expected and demanded much. He was the head of the household, but he was never dominating. My Dad loved and

honored my mother. I, too, felt respected and loved. He was paternal but never paternalistic.

St. John Paul II had his own experience of paternity from his father that planted the first seeds of a priestly vocation in his heart. “After my mother’s death,” he wrote on the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination in *Gift and Mystery*,

> [my father’s] life became one of constant prayer. Sometimes I would wake up during the night and find my father on his knees, just as I would always see him kneeling in the parish church. We never spoke about a vocation to the priesthood, *but his example was in a way my first seminary*, a kind of domestic seminary.

Priests carry their parents, and I would say especially their fathers, into priestly ministry. And while every father, like every priest, is imperfect, we nonetheless try to transmit the strengths of our fathers into our pastoral work.

As in all things, however, the real model, including the model of priestly paternity, is the Lord himself. This is especially true of seminary formation. Jesus spent most of his ministry forming his future priests. Experts say that around 100 days of his life are recorded in the Gospels; that leaves many hundreds of days when he was simply with his apostles, walking from one village to the next and spending days in prayer and quiet conversation together.

My earnest hope is that I am able to reflect that paternal love of Jesus for the seminarians in my care. I know that I have not always gotten it right, but that is the goal. Once an elderly priest, in a talk to us faculty members, said that the Church “has entrusted to you her most cherished treasure: her seminarians.” I have never forgotten that, and I take that charge seriously. I know that for these years of my priesthood, I shall be judged on how worthily I carry out this trust.

I will end with a memory that provokes in me both gratitude and a sensation of the fearful responsibility borne by us priests in seminary formation. A few years ago, at the end of his first Mass as a priest, one of our alumni gave his mother a gift that newly ordained priests have given their mothers for centuries. It is the cloth (called a *maniturgium*) that newly ordained priests use to wipe the sacred chrism from their hands during the ordination rite. The mother is presented with this beautiful gift and it is traditionally buried with her when she goes to the Lord, to whom she can present the cloth as a “reminder” that she mothered a priest. In more recent times another custom has sprung up. The new priest also presents his father with a gift, namely the stole that he wore when he heard his first confession.

So, after the closing prayer, this newly ordained priest gave the *maniturgium* to his mother. It was a beautiful moment as the mother and son embraced. There was not, I think, a dry eye in the house. Then, holding up the stole with which he heard his first confession, he said to the congregation, “my father left when I was very young and has not been a part of my life. So I would like to give this stole to someone who has been a father in his place.” And then he gave it to me.

I was speechless, surprised, grateful, and humbled. It is probably the most precious gift I have ever received. It is also a reminder to me that the work done in seminary formation has a deep impact on the lives of our men and the lives of those they will one day serve as priests. It is a reminder that I am called, with all my faults, to reveal the merciful face of the Father to the young men entrusted to my care. It is above all a reminder of the unspeakable privilege we have of raising spiritual fathers who, striding out into the evening twilight to invite souls into

the warmth of God's love, will themselves echo that love in their priestly lives and ministry to countless souls and for many years to come.

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[1] *Summa Theologiae* Supplement, q. 36, art. 4, ad 1, italics added.

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October 31, 2025
