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THE SAINT PAUL SEMINARY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Benedict XVI's Thought Concerning the Identity of the Priest in Connection with the
Eucharist

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Divinity

Of the University of St. Thomas

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts in Theology

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Introduction

Much has been written by many important theologians concerning the identity of the priest, and Benedict XVI is no exception. In the thought of Benedict XVI the identity of the priesthood is centered on the Eucharist. Through the exploration of Benedict's writings and homilies most concerned with the priesthood in connection with the Eucharist, this thesis will demonstrate how the identity of the priest is informed by the Eucharist. It will demonstrate how the priest's close relationship to the Eucharist calls for a unique and radical configuration to Christ and how celibacy, humility, and obedience aid in such a configuration.

This thesis consists of four chapters and a conclusion that will examine Benedict XVI's understanding of the identity of the priest in connection to Eucharist, and it will also include some of his thoughts before he became pope. The first chapter will be concerned with the post-synodal exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, and will expound upon Benedict's more magisterial thought on the Eucharist and the priesthood. The second chapter will be concerned with Benedict's essay on the "The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse," and will present his thought concerning the greatest blight on the priesthood in modern times. The third chapter will be concerned with Benedict's chapter "The Catholic Priesthood" from the book *From the Depths of Our Hearts* published, and will focus on the identity of the priest in comparison to the Old Testament Priesthood and in relation to the Eucharist. The fourth chapter will be concerned with Benedict's treatment of the priesthood and Eucharist as touched upon in his homilies, and it will thematically treat of how the priest's identity is informed by the Eucharist. The conclusion will synthesize Benedict's thought on the identity of the priest and proffer an area for further study concerning priest's ontology.

Chapter I: A Magisterial Take on the Eucharist and the Priesthood in Benedict's *Sacramentum Caritatis*

The post-synodal exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* is of first importance for understanding Benedict XVI's thought on priesthood in connection to the Eucharist not only because the subject matter of the entire exhortation is concerned with the Eucharist, but also because of its authority.¹ This chapter of the thesis will begin by first examining paragraphs 23-26 of *Sacramentum Caritatis*, which specifically address the Eucharist in connection to the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In these paragraphs, Benedict XVI scripturally supports how the priest can only offer the Eucharist in the very person of Christ, and thus the connection of the priest to the Eucharist is most explicitly seen in the celebration of the Mass; he gives four indicators of how a priest can live up to his identity as servant in the celebration of the Mass; he emphasizes the importance of celibacy for the priest in configuring himself to Christ; and he speaks to his hope that more men will be inspired to priesthood through the example of priests who closely configure themselves to Christ. Next, this chapter will examine paragraphs 38-42 of the post-synodal exhortation. In these paragraphs, Benedict explains how the priest can better practice the *ars celebrandi* of the Eucharist. Finally, this chapter will examine paragraph 80, which treats of the priest's spirituality in connection to the Eucharist.

The most important part of the exhortation for understanding Benedict XVI's thought on the Eucharist and the priesthood is in its first part when he addresses the Eucharist and the sacraments, and specifically when he addresses Eucharist in connection to the Sacrament of Holy Orders (paragraphs 23-26). Benedict begins this section by supporting scripturally the connection

¹ This document carries more authority because, unlike many of Benedict's other writings that touch upon the Eucharist and that will be touched upon in this thesis, this exhortation is written by him in a more formal teaching role as the Roman Pontiff and is addressed to a large audience: bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful. For these reasons it carries more Authority.

between the Eucharist and Holy Orders, and then he reiterates important points made by past synodal councils concerning this connection, referring to the synodal document on ministerial priesthood titled *Ultimis Temporibus*² and some of Pope John Paul II's words in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.³ The sacrament of Holy Orders arises from the very institution of the Eucharist when Jesus in the upper room offers his body and blood and tells his apostles to do likewise: "Do this in memory of me" (22:19). Benedict comments how Christ is "priest, victim and altar: the mediator between God the Father and his people,"⁴ and thus no one can offer the Eucharist unless he offers himself in the very person of Christ, as "the one high priest of the new and eternal Covenant (cf. *Heb* 8-9)."⁵ Thus, that which past synodal councils concluded, Benedict here reiterates, stating, "the connection between *Holy Orders and the Eucharist* is seen most clearly at Mass, when the Bishop or priest presides *in the person of Christ the Head*."⁶

Referencing *Lumen Gentium* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Benedict XVI first states the necessity of the priest to be ordained before he can validly celebrate the Eucharist.⁷ Because of the priest's ontological configuration to Christ by means of Holy Orders, Christ as head is able to be made present at the sacrifice of the Mass to his whole Church.⁸ The implication of this is that the ordained minister acts "in the name of the whole Church" every time he celebrates the Mass. And priests should understand from this that they can "never put themselves or their personal opinions" first, but only Christ. Christ must be the center of their life

² Cf. Synod of Bishops, Second General Assembly, Document on the Ministerial Priesthood *Ultimis Temporibus* (30 November 1971): AAS 63 (1971), 898-942.

³ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 42-69: AAS 84 (1992), 729-778.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* (22 February 2007), §23.

⁵ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §23.

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §23.

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §23.

⁸ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §23.

and their liturgical action because of their special configuration to Christ by means of Holy Orders. Thus, the priest's identity is intimately tied up in his configuration to Christ, most especially during the celebration of the Eucharist. Priests are called, in a special way, to be "signposts" that point to Christ, and they are to be "docile instruments" because, like Christ, they are the servant of all.⁹

Benedict then gives four indicators, in the context of the Mass, of the priest who lives up to his identity as a signpost and docile instrument. The priest who lives up to his identity as servant is humble in leading the assembly in the liturgy; he is obedient to the rite; he unites himself, mind and heart, to the sacrifice of the Mass; and he does not do anything that would be perceived as placing too much emphasis on his own personality.¹⁰ Concerning the fourth indicator, it is important to note the nuance of what Benedict is saying. Not only is he saying that the priest should not do anything that might emphasize his own personality, but that he should even avoid doing anything that might give the appearance of an undue emphasis to his own personality. In this post-synodal exhortation, Benedict does not expound upon these four indicators of the priest as servant here but he does make some considerations on them later on in the exhortation, at least indirectly, when he speaks of *ars celebrandi* (paragraphs 38-42). He also speaks of their importance in some of his other writings. For example, concerning the second and third indicator, Benedict touches upon the importance of obedience to the rite of Mass and the importance of the configuration of the priest to Christ in the offering of Mass in *From the Depths of Our Hearts*, which will be touched upon in the third chapter; and he often emphasizes the importance of the configuration of the priest to Christ in his homilies, which will be touched upon in the fourth chapter.

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §23.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §23.

In paragraph 24 of this post-synodal exhortation, in concordance with the synodal fathers, Benedict XVI emphasizes that Holy Orders calls for a complete configuration of the priest to Christ and he speaks of the importance of priestly celibacy as an important part of this complete configuration to Christ. Before going into the importance of celibacy for the priest and his configuration to Christ, Benedict acknowledges that although celibacy is not a requirement in the Eastern Churches for priesthood, as it is in the Western Church, it is nonetheless seen just as much of a treasure as it is in the Western Church. That only celibate men can be ordained Bishops in the Eastern Churches attests to this fact. By means of celibacy the priest makes of himself an exclusive offering to the Kingdom of Heaven.¹¹ Benedict goes on to explain that such an offering is not made only for pragmatic purposes—availability to respond to the needs of his flock, an availability that a married man cannot offer—but more importantly it is made in order to conform oneself to the life of Christ, who lived out his mission in a state of virginity (the essential reference for the Latin Church’s tradition of a celibate priesthood).¹² The choice of celibacy, Benedict then goes on to say, has nuptial meaning because it identifies the priest with the heart of Christ as a Bridegroom who pours himself out for his Bride, the Church.¹³ Benedict concludes this paragraph by reemphasizing what a blessing the priest’s life of celibacy is for the Church, in that it is a sign of his “total and exclusive devotion to Christ, to the Church and the Kingdom of God”;¹⁴ and for this reason he confirms the continuance of the Latin Church’s tradition of obligatory celibacy for its priests.

In paragraph 25 on the Eucharist and Holy Orders, Benedict XVI speaks to the lack of priestly vocations, and presents what the Church’s response to such a vocational crisis should

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §24.

¹² Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §24.

¹³ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §24.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §24.

look like in light of the synod’s discussions.¹⁵ Then, in the following paragraph, paragraph 26, the last paragraph of this subsection, Benedict speaks to the hope that God will provide his Church with more priests and speaks to his gratitude for the Church’s current priests who pour themselves out in conformity with Christ for love of his Church. Benedict encourages the people of God not to lose hope, ensuring them that God will continue to “inspire men to leave everything behind and to dedicate themselves totally” to their three-fold office as priest, prophet, and king.¹⁶ The current example of priests who give of themselves completely, who make a sacrifice of their lives for love of Christ, will give a witness that will hopefully inspire other young men to make of their own lives a sacrifice for others in priestly service, and in doing so discover true life.¹⁷

As mentioned earlier when discussing the indicators of the priest as a humble servant during the celebration of Mass, there are later paragraphs in this exhortation where Benedict XVI touches upon the identity of the priest in connection to the Eucharist. In paragraphs 38-42, Benedict speaks about the *ars celebrandi*, by which he means quietly literally the art of celebrating the Mass, which is not in opposition to others participation in it—the *actuosa participatio* of the faithful. The *ars celebrandi* and *actuosa participatio* are not meant to be antithetical to each other, but rather the *ars celebrandi* of the priest ought to aid the faithful in their *actuosa participatio*; and Benedict argues that this is best done when the priest properly celebrates the rite itself.¹⁸ When he does so, the priest is obedient to the rite, the first indicator of the priest acting out his identity as a humble servant. Celebrating the liturgy is the principal duty

¹⁵ But since this paragraph deals more with a practical response to a certain problem instead of contributing much to an understanding of the priest’s identity, it will not be expounded upon here in this paper.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §26.

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §26.

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §38.

of those who have received Holy Orders, and Benedict argues in paragraph 39 that it is the bishop's responsibility to respect the *ars celebrandi* and set the example for the rest of the diocese in his own liturgy.¹⁹ In paragraph 40, Benedict speaks to how humble obedience to the liturgical rite includes making known the richness of the liturgical texts and norms and also the importance of "an attentiveness to the various kinds of language that the liturgy employs," that is, the "words and music, gestures and silence, movement, the liturgical colours of the vestments."²⁰ Benedict concludes that a humble following of all this without contrived additions, which usually consist in the priest placing too much emphasis on his own personality (the violation of the fourth indicator of the identity of the priest as humble servant), speaks to the very nature of Eucharist as a gift. Thus, the priest's humble reception of the norms of the liturgy speaks to the docility of the priest in receiving Eucharist as gift.²¹

The last paragraph of this post synodal exhortation pertinent to Benedict's XVI thought on the priesthood in connection to the Eucharist is paragraph 80, which is concerned with the Eucharist and priestly spirituality. It begins by asserting how the priest lives out in a special way the mystery of the Eucharist in his own life, given that, as stated in the beginning of this third section of the exhortation, all Christians who partake in the Eucharist are mysteriously transformed by it.²² Benedict states that the priest's spirituality is "intrinsically Eucharist," and this understanding of it is vocalized by the bishop during a priest's ordination when he lays his hands on the candidate and says, "receive the oblation of the holy people to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §39.

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §40.

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §40.

²² Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §70.

Lord's Cross."²³ These words are a direct call for the priest at his ordination to imitate the mystery of Eucharist, that is, to better configure himself to Christ. From these words of the bishop we can understand the extreme importance of the priest's spiritual life; the deeper it is, the more it will allow him to enter into greater communion with Christ, allowing him to "be possessed by God's love, bearing witness to that love at all times."²⁴ Thus, Benedict joins the synodal fathers in exhorting priests to offer Mass every day, not only because of the "objectively infinite value of every celebration of the Eucharist" but also because offering the Mass helps configure priests more closely to Christ, when celebrated faithfully, and thus helps fortify their vocation.²⁵ And so, it would seem that not only is it important for the priest to have a deep spirituality in order to be in deeper communion with Christ but also that this deeper communion comes about through his reception and celebration of the Eucharist, by his diving deeper into its very mystery.

In conclusion, from the very beginning the priesthood is intertwined with the Eucharist. The very origin of Holy Orders emerges in the last supper—the institution of the Eucharist itself—in which the apostles are told by Christ to continue the celebration of the Eucharist in imitation of him. The means necessary for carrying out this Eucharistic ministry emerges from Holy Orders in which the priest is ontologically configured to Christ. From this configuration to Christ and the very celebration of the Mass, the identity of the priest starts to take shape. And so, because priests act *in persona Christi capitis*, they act for the whole church and thus their lives must point to Christ and they must themselves fall to the background. The way this is practically achieved occurs in the embracing of the virtues of humility and obedience, especially

²³ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §80.

²⁴ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §80.

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §80.

in the celebration of the Mass, and in the configuring of oneself completely to Christ. Something that Benedict deems essential for the priest's configuration to Christ is celibacy because it speaks in a most powerful way to the priest's life and ministry as gift. The priest's gift of himself helps to inspire others to make gifts of their own lives, and thus, in turn, helps to inspire more priestly vocations. And, toward the end of the exhortation, Benedict makes explicit how the priest's spiritual life is intrinsically Eucharistic and thus calls for deep interiority to that which he celebrates and receives in the Eucharist—Jesus.

Chapter II: The Priesthood in *The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse*

Benedict XVI's essay *The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse* consists of three sections.²⁶ The first section gives the wider social context of the origin of the scandal of sexual abuse scandal currently experienced by the Church, explaining how normative standards have shifted in the aftermath of the sexual revolution of the 60s. The second section, and the main focus of this chapter, gets at the effects caused by this shift in normative standards “on the formation of priests and on the lives of priests.”²⁷ And the third section gives some of Benedict's ideas for a right response by the Church to the current upheaval caused by the scandal of priestly sexual abuse.

In section I part I, Benedict XVI speaks to the effects of the sexual revolution of '68 on young people. The revolution called for an “all-out sexual freedom, one which no longer conceded norms.”²⁸ This new freedom even found pedophilia permissive. It was a difficult time for young people, especially those young people who approached the priesthood, and many others. Benedict wonders how young people even considered the priesthood given that it was a vocation that imposed many restrictions, many of which ran contrary to the “freedoms” called for by the times. He also attributes the great collapse of the priesthood that would follow with the “next generation of priests” to the effects of the sexual revolution of '68.²⁹

In section I part II, Benedict XVI describes another disaster that was concurrent and independent of the sexual revolution of '68—the collapse of moral theology. Its collapse,

²⁶ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse,” at Catholic News Agency (10 April 2019), at www.catholicnewsagency.com; because of the lack of pagination, I have included the articles own divisions of sections and parts (the former with Latin numerals and the latter with Arabic numerals) for easier access of cited information

²⁷ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” introduction.

²⁸ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” I-1.

²⁹ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” I-1.

unfortunately, happened at a time when good moral theology might have been able to offer the Church a good defense against the cultural upheaval. The collapse began, Benedict explains, with a movement away from the basis of moral law in natural law to a basis solely in Scripture.³⁰ Soon, however, it was discovered that the basis of moral law solely on Scripture was untenable; but instead of a return by these moral theologians to the basis of moral law in natural law, the preferred system of moral theology that now became most popular no longer found its basis in natural law or on the Scriptures but rather in circumstances. Benedict says that the new system that was commonly adopted was a more nuanced version of “the ends justify the means,” and that it claimed that there was no absolute good but only “the relatively better.”³¹ John Paul II, aware of this current of thought and an increase in open opposition to the Magisterium of the Church, published in response his encyclical letter *Veritatis splendor* that held clearly that there were absolute goods that are “never subject to trade-offs.”³²

Benedict XVI then discusses another question in moral theology that was being discussed at the time. The question was concerned with whether the Magisterium could have infallibility in questions not only of faith but also of morals. A popular belief of the time was that the Magisterium should not rule infallibly on morals. Benedict responds to this popular belief by stating that there is, however, “a minimum set of morals which is indissolubly linked to the foundational principle of faith and which must be defended if faith is not to be reduced to a theory but rather to be recognized in its claim to concrete life.”³³ Also, independently, others were claiming that the Church could not have her own specific morality. The falsity of this claim, however, arises from the fact that, although parallels might be found between the

³⁰ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” I-2.

³¹ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” I-2.

³² Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” I-2.

³³ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” I-2.

Church's morality and other religions in their specifics, the whole of Christianity's morality is unique and "different from its individual parts."³⁴ Its uniqueness is found in the image of God given to us in Jesus. This image of God cannot be separated from morality, and together they effect the Christian's attitude toward the world and life. Benedict concludes here that, like the catechumenate, the Christian's unique way of life in faith and morality needs to be protected "from the common way of life," from "an increasingly demoralized culture."³⁵

In the second section, titled "Initial Ecclesial Reaction," Benedict XVI dives into how the social upheaval of the times and the collapse of moral theology effected the priesthood. Benedict, in particular, spends a lot of time discussing the effects of the upheaval on seminaries and the formation of priests. Firstly, in many of the seminaries, "homosexual cliques" were created, and these cliques had a significant influence on the culture of seminaries and the formation of seminarians.³⁶ Benedict also cites an example of how in some seminaries, seminarians and laymen lived together and had a common life, and gives an example of how seminarians would often eat together with the other laymen and their spouses, children, and girlfriends, something he states as not giving seminarians the proper formation they need.³⁷ Benedict implies that such close interaction with the laity when they are trying to understand their own identity as clergy and priests was harmful. Though the Holy See was not necessarily privy to all the details of the situation in all the seminaries, it knew enough to find it prudent to investigate and look into the formation done by seminaries through the creation of an Apostolic Visitation of seminaries in the United States.³⁸

³⁴ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," I-2.

³⁵ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," I-2.

³⁶ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-1.

³⁷ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-1.

³⁸ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-1.

Another change that affected seminaries, and thus the formation of priests, which Benedict XVI mentions, was the change of criteria for the appointment of Bishops that occurred after Vatican II.³⁹ The biggest change in criterion was a new emphasis on a candidate's "conciliarity," the exact meaning of conciliarity being subject to varied interpretations. Benedict points out, however, that it meant that were at least critical, if not negative towards pre-Vatican II tradition. He then gives an example of a candidate found to be "conciliarity" who had once been a rector of a seminary and had shown his seminarians pornographic films with the intention of fortifying them against "behavior contrary to the faith."⁴⁰ Benedict also cites the examples of other bishops who aimed to create a more modern "Catholicism," one in which the books of Benedict himself could not be read openly at the seminary.⁴¹

The Apostolic Visitation did not, however, achieve what it had set out to do. It was unsuccessful in uncovering what was really going on in the seminaries, a multitude of possible reasons accounting for this. One that Benedict hints at was that it was due to a more concerted concealment by individuals in positions of authority.⁴² Regardless of the reasons, a second Apostolic Visitation was arranged, one that did not necessarily uncover the abuses that were taking place, though it had some effect on seminarian formation. The results of these visitations, Benedict concludes, is that there has been a general improvement of the situation of the formation of priests since the 70s. Yet, he makes one interesting caveat to this; he points out that there have only been "isolated cases of a new strengthening of priestly vocations."⁴³ What

³⁹ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-1.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-1.

⁴¹ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-1.

⁴² Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-1.

⁴³ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-1.

Benedict is drawing attention to here is that improvement in the seminaries was not that great in general but only visible in a few places, hinting that not much actually changed.

Section II part II explores the problem of pedophilia, and how such a problem called for an adjustment in the law of the Church that would not only take into account the rights of the accused but that would also recognize faith as a legal entity worthy of protection. Benedict XVI first describes how pedophilia became a public issue in the early 80s just when the new Code of Canon Law was published. The new Code of Canon Law's "deliberately loosely constructed criminal law" could not effectively deal with the problem present by pedophilia because of its looseness, and thus needed better formed to deal with it.⁴⁴ Firstly, priestly suspension, accorded by the law to such criminal acts, allowed for these suspended priests to still be associated with their bishops. Benedict does not directly explain why this is a failure of the law to address pedophilia, but it might be inferred that it forced bishops to assume undesired liability for suspended priests. The undesirable liability being that, though these priests were suspended, any of their future actions were often connected to their bishops regardless. Secondly, "guarantorism" was a legal protectionism in vogue at the time and thought of as "conciliar."⁴⁵ What is meant by guarantorism is a procedural protectionism that guaranteed the rights of the accused so much so that convictions were nearly impossible.⁴⁶ Thus, it was very difficult to convict pedophile priests.

Benedict XVI then turns to Scripture in order to undermine the inadequacy of this understanding of guarantorism, citing Mark 9:42: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and

⁴⁴ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-2.

⁴⁵ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-2.

⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," II-2.

he were thrown into the sea.” The point of the citation is to show that such an extreme protection of the accused is contrary to Christ’s teaching. Benedict divines “these little ones” to mean the average believers who can be taken advantage of, and he understands that the threat of such great punishment is Jesus’s way of offering protection for the deposit of faith.⁴⁷ The import of this, Benedict holds, is that not only must the rights of the accused be protected (this being a good as long as such rights remain reasonable, that is, for example, they do not make conviction near to impossible) but also other great goods must be protected, especially the faith. Therefore, Benedict holds that canon law must have a double guarantee: it must protect the accused, and “the good at stake.”⁴⁸ Most people can understand this, especially when they think of other goods like those of the accuser, and yet they often have a harder time accepting the faith as some legal entity worth protection. Benedict, however, encourages pastors to seek to understand this misconception of many and exhorts them to address it at the end of this second part.

Next, Benedict XVI discusses how the Congregation of Faith, as canon law developed, began to take on some of the cases concerned with pedophilia. He points out that the Congregation of Clergy is usually responsible for dealing out punishment for the crimes of priests, but how Pope John Paul II found it appropriate to assign cases concerned with pedophilia over to Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, because such cases fell under the title *declicta majora contra fidem*.⁴⁹ This change of congregations allowed for the maximum punishment to be given to the priest, expulsion from the priesthood, something that could not be done by the Congregation of Clergy under the normal legal provisions. Benedict here emphasizes this shift in the congregation dealing with the cases not to emphasize that the max punishment could now be

⁴⁷ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” II-2.

⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” II-2.

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” II-2.

given, though this is certainly part of it, but to show that such conduct by priests is not only damaging to the victims but also the faith.⁵⁰ He then follows up with the following sage line speaking to the state of the guilty, “only where faith no longer determines the actions of man are such possible.”⁵¹ Benedict does not expand upon this idea much, but the implication is that the priest who is able to commit heinous acts of pedophilia does not really have faith in the first place. The acts he commits are so contrary to his identity as a priest, that he must almost be without faith to commit them.

This section is then quickly concluded by Benedict’s comments on how the maximum penalty can only be given when there is “clear proof of the offense,” and this ensures a more proper guarantorism.⁵² Thus, a genuine criminal process must occur in order for the maximum punishment to be enforced. Because of the nature of these cases, things often got clogged up in the Congregation of the Faith, but the presence of this Congregation guaranteed the rights of the faith. An appeal was later set-up by the FERIA IV, and now Pope Francis is currently undertaking reform to speed up the process.⁵³

The third section begins with Benedict XVI offering a facetious solution to the problem: the creation of another church. But since such an option is obviously not tenable in his estimation, he suggests that a proper way forward, a path towards human redemption, is to learn to love God because such love is a countermeasure to evil.⁵⁴ From the gift of faith, one gains the fundamental gift that God exists. A world without God, Benedict goes on to say, is one without meaning, where power is the only principle and truth is of no use. And this is the case because

⁵⁰ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” II-2.
⁵¹ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” II-2.
⁵² Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” II-2.
⁵³ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” II-2.
⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-1.

only a good God who desires the good brings meaning to life. God the creator is a “primordial need.”⁵⁵ God came to make himself better known in the flesh, to remind mankind that he is more than understanding, he is love. Thus, a society without him, is one “that loses his measure,” one that also, in effect, loses freedom because it has lost its purpose.⁵⁶ In such a society, due to the loss of its proper purpose, its proper direction and the measure of humanity is also increasingly lost and destructive evil, in some points, “becomes a matter of course.”⁵⁷ One of these points, Benedict holds, is that of pedophilia. Pedophilia, theorized as legitimate, continues to spread until its great harm is clearly seen. What is most disturbing about its spread, is that it had spread in the Church and its priests. The ultimate reason that Benedict gives for this situation is the absence of God. Over the last have century, Benedict says, God has been reduced to “the private affair of a minority.”⁵⁸ And so, the solution Benedict gives is that God must come back to the forefront; he needs to be the foundation of the life of the Church and the world. Benedict holds that God “is often taken for granted as a matter of course, but concretely one does not deal with Him.”⁵⁹ And this taking for granted can make God seem so far removed from the real. God cannot remain in the background but must come to the forefront and should be recognized in all we do.⁶⁰

In section III part II, Benedict XVI further specifies the central issue of the sexual abuse crisis: the problem is a moving away from the Eucharist. Although the Second Vatican Council brought a focus to the return of the sacrament of the Eucharist as “the center of Christian life and

⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-1.

⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-1.

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-1.

⁵⁸ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-1.

⁵⁹ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-1.

⁶⁰ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-1.

the very existence of the Church,” a different attitude prevailed, however.⁶¹ Less reverence was given to the Eucharist after the council, the decline of participation in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist being proof of this. The Eucharist became more or less something ceremonial to people, something done as a family on special occasions. And Benedict states that in the Eucharist also lies the solution, and not in the creation of another church as he had facetiously put forth earlier. He calls for a renewed fervor for the Eucharist, one that greatly emphasizes the real presence in the Eucharist.⁶² Such renewed fervor would also call the Church to better protect the Eucharist from abuse; the abuse it has already received from the evils of pedophilia must be prevented from ever happening again. Abuse such as the case, which Benedict relates, of a young woman altar server who had received sexual abuse from a priest, in which the words of the consecration were used during her abuse. He relates this case to express the great extremes of the harm that can be done when the Eucharist is not respected and protected, a harm in which the victim now finds the consecration of the Eucharist—the source of healing—a triggering event.⁶³

In the final part of this section, Benedict XVI relates the words of Guardini that spoke to a subjective renewal of the members of the Church over 100 years ago, stating as follows: “An event of incalculable importance has begun; the Church is awakening in souls.” Benedict feels a century later after these words more of the reverse, that, “the Church is dying in souls.”⁶⁴ And this is because the Church is beginning to be seen as something more exterior, as a something that can almost be conceived in political terms. The abuse by priests has helped to bring about this understanding, making the Church as something untenable and as something that needs to be

⁶¹ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-2.

⁶² Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-2.

⁶³ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-2.

⁶⁴ Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal,” III-3.

redesigned, like you might reconstruct a political party. But such a Church made in our own image, Benedict argues, could never bring hope.⁶⁵

Benedict XVI then starts to describe how the Church is like a net cast out that catches both the good and the bad, before he goes into a deeper analysis of Job.⁶⁶ Without stating much about the Book of Revelation, Benedict states that it takes up the framing narrative of the book of Job, that is, the devil's desire to prove that there are no righteous people. Job is tested by the devil when all his possessions are taken away. The test is to show that Job's righteousness is solely exterior, but he passes this test. Next, the devil is granted permission to test Job by attacking the flesh, which fails. Benedict shows Job to be the example for all mankind, the type of Christ. He uses Job to show what the devil is up to in the world today: the devil is trying to prove to the world that "God himself is not good," and for this reason mankind should turn away from God.⁶⁷ He does this by attacking mankind and creation that is supposedly good. By leading man to depraved acts, he incites disgust for mankind and creation, and leads man to blame God and turn from him.⁶⁸

The devil's accusation against God then spills over into "characterizing his Church as entirely bad, and thus dissuading us from it."⁶⁹ The solution that the devil proposes to the members of the Church is that they should create their own church; he incites them to neglect all that is good in the Church and its saving reality, to reject God's instrument by which he saves his people. Benedict then encourages his readers to stand up and oppose the lies of the devil, and counter them with the truth—the truth that, although there is sin and evil in the Church, the

⁶⁵ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," III-3.

⁶⁶ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," III-3.

⁶⁷ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," III-3.

⁶⁸ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," III-3.

⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," III-3.

Church is indestructible and that, even today, it contains good and holy people through whose love and suffering and witness God makes himself present.⁷⁰

Benedict XVI then concludes with the idea of the martyr, a witness. Christ is the exemplar whom Christians are to imitate. He believes that just as in the Church's founding, today the Church is a "Church of Martyrs," one that gives witness to God.⁷¹ These witnesses are not simply the extraordinary ones who undergo gruesome deaths but those of ordinary people who stand up for God against the onslaughts of the devil. And to the task in evangelization is the establishment of "habitats of faith." Benedict then writes about the house he lives in and its witness to the faith, and how its witness strengthens and brings joy in the faith to all who live in it.

In conclusion, Benedict points to the sexual revolution of 68' as a key factor for the diminution of the priesthood both in number and quality. With the collapse of normative sexual norms, also came the collapse of moral theology. Moral law moved away from a basis in natural law and moved towards a morality of circumstances, and this led to the undermining of the infallibility of certain morals and the questioning of a uniquely Christian morality. An unhealthy culture also arose in seminaries as a result, but investigations by the Holy See were unable to find anything, and so abuses continued. The law also was inadequate in responding to the abuse. It gave too much protection to the accused and it did not see the faith as an entity in great need of protection by the law. Yet, the Congregation of Faith was able offer some protection as it took more responsibility in dealing with such cases of priestly sexual abuse. The reason why such evil was able to take root in the Church was because of the cultural absence of God, which occurred in the Church with the moving away from the Eucharist. Fervor in the Eucharist must be

⁷⁰ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," III-3.

⁷¹ Benedict XVI, "The Church and the Scandal," III-3.

renewed, Benedict argues, if there is hope for healing. And so, the solution to the sexual abuse crisis is not some exterior renewal with the creation of a new church. The solution is an interior renewal, one that embraces the faith and the Eucharist.

Chapter III: Identity of the New Covenant Priesthood in Light of the Eucharist in *From the Depths of Our Hearts*

In the first chapter *From the Depths of Our Hearts*, Benedict XVI hopes to get at “the deep roots of the problem”⁷² of the crisis of the priesthood. His theological reflection is two-fold in approach. First, Benedict goes into a proper Christological interpretation of the Old Testament in order to correct deficient, contemporary theologies that reject “an authentically cultic priesthood in the New Testament.”⁷³ Next, he applies this hermeneutic to three texts, one liturgical and two biblical, in order to show that the cultic act of the New Covenant calls for a complete conformity of the priest to Christ. This chapter, gleaned from Benedict’s chapter on the priesthood and also supplementing it with his insights from his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *sacramentum caritatis*, will treat in a more systematic way the identity of the New Covenant priesthood in opposition with the Old Covenant priesthood and the priest’s identity in connection to the Eucharist. First, it will demonstrate how the cultic priesthood was not done away with the destruction of the temple. Then, it will examine three ways in which the identity of the New Covenant priesthood is informed by the Eucharist: the celibacy of the priest called for by the daily offering of the Eucharist, the priest’s inheritance of eternity found in his offering of the precious Blood, and the priest’s role to stand and to serve at the altar.

Firstly, it is important to emphasize that the destruction of the Temple did not lead to a destruction of worship and the cultic priesthood, though it did change it. Benedict points to the confusion that holds that Jesus’s “movement” intended to do away with the priesthood and hierarchy completely.⁷⁴ This view is often tied up in a protestant exegesis, first championed by

⁷² Pope Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” in *From the Depths of Our Hearts*, Pope Benedict XVI and Robert Cardinal Sarah (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2020), 25.

⁷³ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 25.

⁷⁴ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 29.

Luther, that struggles with allegory and intimately connects the cultic priesthood with the law, and thus prevents it from being a path to God.⁷⁵ There is no doubt that Jesus was critical of certain aspects of the cultic priesthood and the worship carried out by it, and this is most evident in his reiterating and approving of the prophets' criticisms of temple worship.⁷⁶ For example, Jesus clearly speaks, in the Gospel of John, to the destruction of the temple and how he will replace it with his own body. No doubt Jesus clearly considered "the destruction of the Temple as the consequence of the erroneous attitude of the highest authorities of the priestly hierarchy."⁷⁷ And yet, the destruction of the temple opens the way for Christ to express a greater love and to provide a means of healing. It leads to the Last Supper, in which Christ gives his people a new priesthood and his body and blood in the Eucharist.⁷⁸

So how was worship and the priesthood changed? First and foremost, worship is no longer restricted to the confines of the physical temple walls nor is it done away with by the destruction of the temple's physical confines; instead, by means of the cross, the body of Christ becomes the new temple after the resurrection.⁷⁹ Therefore, the critique of worship by the prophets definitely reaches its goal and fulfillment in Christ. The Old Testament offices are "annulled" in the service of love (and, concomitantly, the adoration of God) and the new worship and adoration becomes centered on the love of Christ in the Eucharist. And it is this new worship and adoration that bears significantly upon the identity of the New Covenant priesthood and helps instill an understanding of its new role in worship and adoration.

⁷⁵ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 37.

⁷⁶ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 30.

⁷⁷ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 31.

⁷⁸ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 32.

⁷⁹ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 36.

The most drastic change that the new form of worship in the Eucharist calls for is celibacy. Celibacy was not part of the Old Covenant priesthood, though it was not completely foreign to it—at least conceptually. For example, when Levitical priests were performing duties at the temple, they had to abstain from sexual activity. Their service at the temple, however, was infrequent and fell upon them by lot—for example, Zechariah’s service at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke—and so, such abstinence would also be infrequent. Thus, marriage would not be much undermined or impeded by such infrequent bouts of abstinence, and thus celibacy was by no means requisite of the Old Covenant priesthood. The New Covenant priesthood, on the other hand, requires daily contact with the divine mystery that takes place on the altar. Benedict notes how the Church’s “supersubstantial” bread became “daily bread” early on in the early church,⁸⁰ that is, how there was a movement for more frequent communion early on. And since abstinence was required on the part of celebrant and because communion became more frequent, an almost daily abstinence became the lot of the priest, a reality less compatible with marriage but more compatible with a life of celibacy: “the sexual abstinence that was functional was transformed automatically into an ontological abstinence.”⁸¹ Thus, celibacy plays an ontological role in the New Covenant priesthood, attributing to a deeper and more interior part of the priest’s identity.

In order to better understand the impact of celibacy on the identity of the New Covenant priesthood, it is fruitful to understand what celibacy is not for the New Covenant priesthood. The New Covenant priesthood’s promotion of celibacy does not come from the early Church’s disdain for sexuality and corporeality, as has been argued by some contemporary scholars.⁸² The evidence given for such an argument is often based on the more Manichaean conception of the

⁸⁰ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 40.

⁸¹ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 41; This also helped rule out the priesthood as being a vocation that comes from membership in particular family, as it was in the Old Testament.

⁸² Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 42.

world that was combatted and rejected by the early Church fathers. Such a Manichaeian disdain of corporeality was never adopted by the Church because she had always more often viewed marriage as a gift and a vocation with great requirements—a vocation requiring the totality of man.⁸³ The Church has also always seen priesthood as a gift, “a priceless treasure,”⁸⁴ and has always been aware of its great requirements—a vocation requiring the totality of man, also. The historical proof of this is multiple. Firstly, married men, for example, could not receive the sacrament of priesthood unless they pledged sexual abstinence, that is, embraced a Josephite marriage.⁸⁵ Secondly, the Eastern Church has always chosen its bishops from the ranks of the celibate and thus has always greatly esteemed those who chose celibacy.⁸⁶ Therefore, it is clear that the tradition of the requirement of celibacy of priests arises not from a disparaging view of marriage but arises out of a great respect for marriage and for the priesthood, understanding that the totality of man is required in both. Thus, it might also be said that celibacy of the priesthood arises, in a certain sense, from the impossibility of living two vocations.

Another way that the new form of worship in the Eucharist impacts the identity of the New Covenant priesthood is in regards to inheritance. The Levitical priesthood did not have an inheritance in the promised land like the other tribes of Israel, and instead received its subsistence from its service in the temple—from the sacrificial offerings that Israel set aside for God. This difference of inheritance between the Levites and the other tribes is important because it speaks to the great sacrifice they make. What they forego, a possession of part of the promised land, is more than simply foregoing a physical piece of land. In the story of Naboth in 1 Kings

⁸³ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 42.

⁸⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* (22 February 2007), §24.

⁸⁵ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 42.

⁸⁶ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, §24.

21:1-29, Naboth's unwillingness to give up his vineyards for any price helps demonstrate that his portion of the promised land has an enormous immaterial value that no earthly gold can amount to; Naboth and the other Israelites perceived their portion as their share in God's promise to Israel—the covenant itself.⁸⁷ And therefore, the land they had inherited was something that no Israelite would easily part with because it was tied up in God's covenant.

The New Covenant priesthood, uniquely, on the other hand, shares in both aspects of inheritance had by the Levitical priesthood and the other tribes—and to a much greater extent. Firstly, the New Covenant priesthood's inheritance resembles the Levite's in that it involves the forgoing of physical land, more or less, and instead receiving its subsistence through its work for the Church. The forgoing of a land inheritance speaks to how the New Covenant priest must live only by and for God, and how he makes great sacrifice to this end.⁸⁸ Whereas the Levitical priest only renounces land, the New Covenant priest renounces not only land but also marriage and family in order to radically conform himself to Christ; since, as Benedict puts it, there can be no priesthood without forsaking everything and following Christ.⁸⁹ Celibacy's significance in forgoing of a future earthly home, of choosing where one dwells, finds its stability in God who remains as the center of his life. Therefore, the New Covenant priesthood's forgoing of a land inheritance is much more radical than the Levite's.

Secondly, although the New Covenant priesthood forgoes more things than the Levitical priesthood, it, however, also receives much more in its inheritance—much more than the other tribes' inheritance of a portion of the promised land. The New Covenant priesthood finds its real inheritance in the cup of Christ's blood. This understanding comes from Benedict's

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 44-45.

⁸⁸ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 45.

⁸⁹ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 46.

Christological interpretation of Psalm 16:5 that speaks of “my cup.” He interprets this cup as the Lord sharing himself with the priest, giving his life, his grace in the Eucharistic chalice. Thus, Christ becomes the priest’s “land,” his inheritance.⁹⁰ Benedict gives a personal reflection of what the priest gives and what he receives when he talks of his reception of tonsure, namely, when he became a part of the clergy for the first time. He relates how Christ wants all of the priest and that Christ gives himself entirely to him.⁹¹ This is more radical than the other tribes’ inheritance in that they only received a promise of eternity in the land they received, whereas the New Covenant priest can actually taste eternity in the Eucharistic cup—his participation in eternity and the sustaining principle of such a participation.

The third way in which the new form of worship in the Eucharist impacts the New Covenant priesthood—as expressed in the second canon prayer, which restates the words of Deuteronomy 10:8 and 18:5-8—is the manner in which the priest is to “stand before God and serve him.” The two words of focus in this prayer are “stand” and “serve,” and they help to define the essence of the New Covenant priesthood.

In regards to “stand,” Benedict attempts to get at the essence of this word in a homily he gave at Saint Peter’s on Holy Thursday, 28 March 2008. He relates that the forgoing of a land inheritance and the work of the Levitical priest in attending to the work of the temple and not attending to ordinary work is what allows them to be present to the Lord. The conclusion of this is that standing speaks to a life lived in God’s presence and a ministry lived for others.⁹² The fact that the words of this canon are said immediately after the consecration of the gifts helps one to

⁹⁰ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 47.

⁹¹ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 48.

⁹² Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 51.

understand that the New Covenant priest's life is lived in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, that is, the Eucharist stands at the center of the priest's life.⁹³

Another aspect of "stand" is vigilance. The priest is called to keep watch and be on his guard against the powers of evil:⁹⁴ "He must keep the world awake for God."⁹⁵ And the meaning of this is that by remaining in Christ he must resist "the trends of time" and stick close to the truth.⁹⁶ This vigilance also speaks of the priest's responsibility for others. That he brings the burdens of others before the Lord, that he needs to be willing to endure all forms of insult for their sake, and that he must be constant in his proclamation of the truth; he must be, in essence, the compass that points to true north—God—in the howling storm of this present world.⁹⁷

In regards to "service," when understood from its context in the Levitical priesthood, it refers to the priest's ceremonial duties, namely, the ritualistic duties that were thought of as acts of service.⁹⁸ The New Covenant priesthood serves both God and man at the Eucharistic feast, and his service consists in entering into the sacrifice made by Christ to the Father on behalf of all humanity.⁹⁹ On one level, this speaks to a correct celebration of the liturgy of the Mass and all the sacraments. And this correct celebration, the *ars celebrandi*, follows from obedience, which is an important aspect of service that will be examined in further detail later on. Yet, this service is much more than outward action but is primarily interior. It is an interior service that is cultivated through a familiarity acquired through its daily practice, and it is further cultivated through prayer, that is, as Benedict puts it, "to be learned ever anew and ever more deeply at the

⁹³ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 52.

⁹⁴ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 52.

⁹⁵ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 52.

⁹⁶ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 52.

⁹⁷ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 52.

⁹⁸ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 53.

⁹⁹ Benedict XVI, "The Catholic Priesthood," 53.

school of Christ and the saints of all ages.”¹⁰⁰ This service also calls for a cultivation in the Word, a growing in knowledge of the Lord in his Word. The priest must be nourished by the Word so that, in turn, he can proclaim it to others.¹⁰¹

Another aspect of “service” is the closeness that is gained from familiarity with the Eucharist. A pitfall of such closeness can be that the act of offering the Eucharist becomes habitual in such a way that the extraordinary becomes ordinary. When this happens, there can occur an extinguishing of a reverential fear that comes from contact with the sacred.¹⁰² When this flame goes out, it becomes difficult to “perceive the great, new and surprising fact that he [Christ] himself is present, speaks to us, gives himself to us.”¹⁰³ Therefore, the New Covenant priesthood must constantly fight the temptation to gradual slip into an indifference of heart that can easily happen if the priest fails to recognize his own insufficiency each time he offers the Eucharist, and thus his need for grace every time he offers it.¹⁰⁴

The last aspect of service in the New Covenant priesthood outlined by Benedict is obedience. Obedience is a submission to the will of God and it is also being in conformity with Christ who pleads in the Garden of Olives: “not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk 22:42).¹⁰⁵ Since the primordial sin of Adam, of placing his will before God’s, man has been led astray by the desire for total autonomy, which is, more or less, separation from the will of God. The error of this desire is the belief that submission exclusively to one’s own will is the means to unlimited freedom. Yet, such a submission pits one “against the truth.”¹⁰⁶ It forgets the communitive aspect

¹⁰⁰ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 54.

¹⁰¹ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 54.

¹⁰² Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 54.

¹⁰³ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 55.

¹⁰⁴ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 55.

¹⁰⁵ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 55.

¹⁰⁶ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 55.

of man, that he cannot “be merely for and by himself.”¹⁰⁷ This becomes most apparent in the priest’s identity. The priest is not in service of himself but of God, because he does not preach himself but Christ crucified.¹⁰⁸ The priest’s obedience is a believing, thinking, and speaking with the Church and serving the Church; and it plays out in the priest’s freedom to go and be guided where his own ideas and plans would never take him.¹⁰⁹ In this obedience and freedom, the priest experiences “something new—the wealth of God’s love.”¹¹⁰

In conclusion, the destruction of the temple did not lead to the destruction of worship and the cultic priesthood but rather transformed it, making Christ in the Eucharist its center. From the daily consecration of the Eucharist, an ontological abstinence is seen in the New Covenant priesthood. The fittingness of celibacy does not come from a bleak conception of human sexuality, but the understanding that the New Covenant priesthood calls for the totality of man. From the Eucharistic cup, we understand that, although the priest forgoes land, family, and children, he receives his eternal inheritance in the blood of Christ. From the priest’s role to “stand before God and serve him,” especially in the Eucharist, he is understood simply to remain in God’s presence and serve others. The priest must give of himself, defend the truth, celebrate the sacraments correctly, develop an interiority of service, renew a reverential awe in the service daily preformed, and maintain obedience. Through viewing the priesthood in the light of the Eucharist, the identity of the New Covenant priesthood, in contrast to the Old Covenant priesthood, is more clearly understood.

¹⁰⁷ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 55.

¹⁰⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:23

¹⁰⁹ This obedience is further reinforced by Benedict’s exhortation to Bishops, in *Sacramentum caritatis*, that they encourage their clergy to be open to serving wherever there is a need (*Sacramentum caritatis*, §25).

¹¹⁰ Benedict XVI, “The Catholic Priesthood,” 56.

Chapter IV: Priesthood and Eucharist in the Homilies of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI

This chapter will treat of Benedict XVI's thoughts concerning the priesthood in light of the Eucharist in his homilies, and it will focus mostly on those homilies given on the occasion of priestly ordinations and anniversaries and on those homilies directed toward seminarians.¹¹¹ This chapter will break up his thought in his homilies thematically, treating of three main categories in relation to the priest and the Eucharist: identity, interiority, and unity. The first category pertains to the priest's identity and will cover how the Eucharist is the center of his identity; how the Eucharist calls for the total self-gift of the priest, and thus how his priesthood becomes a gift for others; and the importance of the Eucharist in regards to the priest's prayer. The second category deals with the priest's interior life in light of the Eucharist. It will cover how the Eucharist calls for the priest's interior configuration to Christ, how belief is important for such configuration, how celibacy goes hand in hand with such configuration, integrity's part in such configuration, the role of the Holy Spirit in such configuration, how the configured priest is one who is recollected, and the importance of suffering for such configuration. The third category deals with the important impact the priest and the Eucharist have on unity, and it will cover the importance of priestly fraternity, unity with the laity, and vocations. But the former only speaks to how the Eucharist penetrates the entirety of the priesthood and the latter helps place emphasis on those points Benedict thought most worth emphasizing. It should also be noted that there is naturally a lack of depth in some of the insights Benedict makes between the priest and the Eucharist in his homilies, and this arises out of the very nature of the homily's form. Homilies are not the best means for exploring ideas in great depth, unlike a treatise, academic paper, or other more

¹¹¹ If the homilies were written before his papacy, the use of his surname will help clarify this fact. The majority of this homilies can be found in two collections: *Teaching and Learning the Love of God* and *Called to Holiness*.

scholarly forms of writing. A deeper treatment of his ideas will be made in the conclusion of this thesis.

Identity

Firstly, the celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the priest's identity, and his celebration of it is necessary for the feeding of God's people. In his homily for the Chrism Mass in Liebfrauentom, Munich on 11 April 1979, Ratzinger relates a story that illustrates how the priest cannot be separated from the Eucharist, that is, the necessity of the priest for the celebration of the Eucharist. The story he tells relates how there are some people behind the iron curtain who will go to the grave of a priest, place a stole on his tombstone, and "pray together the prayers of the Holy Eucharist."¹¹² When they reach the consecration, "a deep silence ensues, which is sometimes interrupted by weeping."¹¹³ Ratzinger tells this story in order to give the priests present at the Chrism Mass something concrete for them to reflect upon whenever they have doubts about their vocation—doubts that their vocation is either socially unproductive or useless.¹¹⁴ Ratzinger captures with this story the yearning of many for those words that can only come from the priest's lips—a deep yearning of the people for the Eucharist that only the priest can bring about in his instrumentality. And this desire and the priest's ability to fulfill this desire with his celebration of the Eucharist gives witness "to what the priesthood means."¹¹⁵ The priest is able to assist in feeding the deep desire of the people. Without these words of consecration from the priest, "the daily bread goes stale and social achievement becomes empty."¹¹⁶

¹¹² Joseph Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today*, ed. Pierluca Azzaro and Carlos Grandados, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 39.

¹¹³ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 39.

¹¹⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 40.

¹¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 40.

Ratzinger points out that this humble action of the people also shows how the theologian's recommendation for a Eucharist of desire comes up short, that is, how the making of a Eucharist desire often does not satiate the people in the deep way they desire. Making a Eucharist of desire is certainly better than nothing, but it can never replace the actual reception of the Eucharist. He then expounds upon this by launching into a discourse on how the words of consecration might be pronounced by anyone—how anyone might make a Eucharist of desire—but how these words will fall infinitely short of those pronounced by the priest acting *in persona Christi*. Ratzinger states that man lacks the authority to say “this is my body” or say “this is my blood”; that man cannot make the “I” of Christ his own without blaspheming.¹¹⁷ That rather “the most profound” and “the most exciting” gift of the priest—a gift that can only be received—is the priest's ability “not only to relate his words as words of the past, but to speak here and now with his “I,” to act *in persona Christi*, as the liturgy expresses it.”¹¹⁸ And from this, Ratzinger says we can derive “the whole nature of priestly activity and the commission of priestly life.”¹¹⁹ That is, from the priest's identity in his configuration to Christ *in persona Christi capitis*, follows his activity. The priest is someone who makes Christ most present in the Eucharist.

In his homily for a priestly ordination at St. Mary's Cathedral, Freising on 25 June 1977, Ratzinger states how the Church's life is centered around the priest and his Eucharistic ministry. That, if the priest's ministry moves away from Eucharist, the local Church suffers, and thus, presumably, the universal Church, too. Ratzinger begins by bluntly stating that the Eucharist decides the fate of the Diocese: “For if the Eucharist were no longer the living center of the local Church, then everything else in her would slowly and inevitably dry up, too.”¹²⁰ The reason for

¹¹⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 40.

¹¹⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 40

¹¹⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 40

¹²⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 75.

this is that the Church receives her “vital force” from the priest’s work at the altar, a vital force that is the soil in which the proclamation of the Word is rooted.¹²¹ And so, when priestly ministry suffers, the whole church suffers. Ratzinger also relates how this problem is exacerbated when younger men fail to enter into the priestly service, explaining how when there are fewer younger priests, in turn, fewer younger people will be reached, and this in turn will place a greater burden on other priest’s shoulders.¹²²

In an address to the priests, seminarians, and students of the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Sardinia on 7 September 2008, Benedict XVI speaks to the need for the priest to deepen in the awareness of his identity—as someone who makes Jesus present but not by his own power—that he must become aware of himself as “a humble but real sign of the one, eternal Priest who is Jesus.”¹²³ This happens when he identifies himself with the triple *munera* that he has received, especially in the office of sanctification as expound in an earlier homily of his for a priestly ordination at St. Mary’s Cathedral. In this homily Ratzinger also makes mention of the importance of the three offices of the priest—teaching, sanctifying, and shepherding—outlined in the Second Vatican Council in regards to the priest’s identity. He emphasizes that these three offices make visible the full meaning of the priestly ministry,¹²⁴ and that the office of sanctification—the ministry of signs and the sacraments—is centered on the Eucharist.¹²⁵ In speaking about the priest’s office of sanctification in connection with the Eucharist, Ratzinger emphasizes that the priest’s work in the Eucharist is not based on his own “I” but rather that of Jesus and the words that only come from the lips of Jesus Christ himself. These are the words he

¹²¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 76.

¹²² Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 76.

¹²³ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness: On Love, Vocation, and Formation*, ed. Pietro Rossotti (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 208.

¹²⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 76.

¹²⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 77.

says *in persona Christi capitis*, and only by Christ’s authority can the priest say the words of “salvation and consecration” and act in what is commonly describe as *in persona Christi*.¹²⁶

Ratzinger also emphasizes here in such action the importance of priest’s interior conformation to this role as Christ, and that it is the receiving and giving over of oneself by which he is conformed.¹²⁷

In his homily for a priestly ordination at St. Mary’s Cathedral, Freising on 27 June 1981, Ratzinger speaks to how the priest moves away from his Eucharistic center when he thinks his task is about changing the world materially. The world constantly emphasizes the importance of more measurable change that world holds up in the fields of social services and politics. But the priest must “resist the temptation to transform the priesthood, too, into social service and political action, so as finally to give something tangible, something ‘real,’ so to speak.”¹²⁸ The people are not hungry for the bread and money the priest can give, but, on a deeper level, they hunger for Jesus that is given to them in the Eucharist. The priest has “something to give for which man does not ask and about which he often does not know and that, yet, is his real need,” and it is something infinitely more than all he is or has—since it is the Body of Christ.¹²⁹ And so, the congregation sometimes does not show how necessary priests are.¹³⁰ The people need priests, but not all people know of this need: “We need a priest! We are waiting for him! Indeed, they themselves experience in the leaden monotony of your times the fact that the alternative, the light of the Resurrection, which alone can bring festive joy of this world, is truly a vital necessity.”¹³¹

¹²⁶ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 77.

¹²⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 77; this theme of interiority will be touched upon in greater depth in the next category of this chapter.

¹²⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 99.

¹²⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 100.

¹³⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 91.

¹³¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 97.

Their need for the priest arises because the priest alone can give them the “living” bread they need in the Eucharist.

As Ratzinger says in his Homily “Giving the Answer of Life” in 1979, the very essence of the priest is to make the Body of Christ present—the resurrection present.¹³² And the priest makes the resurrection most present when he celebrates the Eucharist. This same idea is picked up in his homily on the occasion of Franz Niedermayer’s ordination, in which he states that the most sublime duty of the priest is celebrating the Eucharist.¹³³ And so the priest’s “daily high point” is found in “the sacrament of the altar.”¹³⁴ Here, God gives himself regardless of how retched the life of the individual might be who offers it. Here, God breaks through the routine, and, in doing so, the celebration of the Eucharist is worth more than all the priest’s free time, “which becomes empty when the celebration that we ourselves cannot make no longer exists.”¹³⁵ And nor is it simply a duty, as he explains when taking questions from seminarians from the Roman Major Seminary in 2007. Because, he says that “a day without the Eucharist is incomplete,” and that the need the priest feels for the Eucharist should not simply be felt as a “professional obligation” but more as a “interiorly felt duty.”¹³⁶

Secondly, the priest’s identity is rooted in gift: how his priesthood is a gift, something he simply receives and how he must become a gift for others. In his Farwell meeting with priests and deacons in 1982, Ratzinger speaks to the identity of the priest as gift, and begins by telling a story of a priest who, burdened by questions of the necessity of the work of the Church and his own celibacy, left priestly ministry to counsel people as a social worker.¹³⁷ Ratzinger relates how

¹³² Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 94-95.

¹³³ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 202.

¹³⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 213.

¹³⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 213.

¹³⁶ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 199.

¹³⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 56-57.

this individual, after leaving the priesthood and taking on secular work, felt severely limited in that “now he could only try with his feelings, with his common sense and his private experiences, with certain statistically average values of psychology and sociology, to point out paths in a profoundly impenetrable darkness.”¹³⁸ And Ratzinger relates how this experience eventually brought this individual back to priestly ministry because of the realization that the priest is not simply limited to the sharing of his own wretchedness, but can give that which he has received in a special way through his ordination, Christ, the Lord of all life—that by which all truly live by.¹³⁹ Priestly ministry doesn’t offer this or that, but what the people live by.¹⁴⁰ These words, again, highlight the aspect of the priest’s ministry as gift, his ability to offer that which he has received by ordination. The priest gives to others what he lives by, “the meaning that supports us, the hope that sustains us, the certainty, with which we can truly live and die.”¹⁴¹ And so by the very act of the priest giving himself, he finds himself—he discovers his identity.¹⁴²

In Ratzinger’s homily “Becoming an Offering with Christ for the Salvation of Mankind” in 1978, Ratzinger then speaks to how the priest’s role in the Eucharist is not something he makes but something he receives, stating, “the greatness of the Eucharist, which surpasses all other events in the world, consists not in all of our planning, however interesting it may be, but in what precedes our planning.”¹⁴³ This is what he refers to as the “non-arbitrary character of the Eucharist”: that it is not something that we can invent but it is something we simply receive. And the important thing for the priest is to receive it and become servants to God’s greater plan, for

¹³⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 58.

¹³⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 58.

¹⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 58.

¹⁴¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 59.

¹⁴² Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 59.

¹⁴³ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 86.

the priest to “learn to go beyond [themselves] and to bear the gift that none of [them] could ever invent,” but that for which all knowingly or unknowingly long for.¹⁴⁴

Ratzinger speaks in similar terms about the how the priest’s priesthood is something received and how this leads him to humility, in his homily for a priestly ordination at St. Mary’s Cathedral, Freising on 27 June 1981. Ratzinger states how the priest’s offering of the Eucharist *in persona Christi* is a gift he receives. “No one can speak in the name of Jesus on his own. He alone can empower us to do so.”¹⁴⁵ Meaning, the priest is empowered by Christ, and so the power he possesses does not come from within himself. With this knowledge, the priest understands that he does not need to invent the Church, nor is it dependent on his proficiency, piety, or anything else.¹⁴⁶ Though his priesthood is something received, it does not mean he remains absolutely passive but that he must actively interiorize what he celebrates.¹⁴⁷ The meaning of what he says in the sacraments “is fulfilled only if we ourselves, too, really begin to think his thought and thus to speak along in his words.”¹⁴⁸ The fact that the Eucharist and the other sacraments are still valid without him helps to keep the priest humble in his celebration of them.¹⁴⁹

Such humility of gift is also touched upon in Benedict XVI’s message for the 46th World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Here he speaks to the gift *par excellence* of the Eucharist that Jesus has given to the Church, quoting John Paul II’s remarks on how it is both the gift of Christ himself and his saving work.¹⁵⁰ He then speaks to the priest’s role in the perpetuation of the

¹⁴⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 87.

¹⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 101.

¹⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 102.

¹⁴⁷ Though the priest’s interiority is touched upon a bit here, it will be touched upon in greater detail in the next category.

¹⁴⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 102.

¹⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 102.

¹⁵⁰ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 49.

salvific mystery of the Eucharist. Benedict then speaks to how the priest can contemplate in the Eucharistic Christ “the eminent model of a ‘vocational dialogue’ between the free initiative of the Father and the faithful response of Christ.”¹⁵¹ Christ is the one acting through his priests, and he supports them in such a way that their response to him in his call can grow into a trust and gratitude free of fear, even when they become conscious of their great weakness or encounter misunderstanding or persecution.¹⁵² Thus, the more a priest is aware of the saving love of Christ that he celebrates and receives in the Eucharist, the more he is brought to “a trusting self-abandonment to Christ who gave his life for us.”¹⁵³ And one called to be a priest begins this process of self-abandonment to Christ when he freely leaves behind all and submits himself to a life of service in Christ. The dialogue only grows when the priest is continually called to love and responds in love.¹⁵⁴

In his letter to Seminarians, October 18, 2010, Benedict XVI speaks to how God gives himself to the priest not only in Word, but also how he gives himself through the physical realities of the sacraments.¹⁵⁵ The heart, Benedict adds, of the important personal relationship between the priest and God and his way of life is the Eucharist: “Celebrating it devoutly, and thus encountering Christ personally, should be the center of all [his] days.”¹⁵⁶ The daily bread spoken of in the Our Father is the giving of the risen Lord in the Eucharist—bread that opens the life of the priest to radiate the divine love he receives.

In “Entering into the Mystery of the Grain of Wheat” homily of 1992, Ratzinger speaks to the gift of priesthood, that the candidate is robbed, a passive verb, and this speaks to God as

¹⁵¹ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 49.

¹⁵² Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 49.

¹⁵³ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 49.

¹⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 50.

¹⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 3.

¹⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 3.

the active agent who takes his priests to himself. The priest allows himself to be taken into Christ.¹⁵⁷ And so he finds himself in relationship, in self-giving, in the gesture of the dying grain of wheat.¹⁵⁸ In an address to seminarians on August 19, 2005, he speaks to this passive reception of the priest in terms of “falling in love.”¹⁵⁹ The priest might ask “why me?” but Benedict goes on to write that “love knows no ‘why’”; but that it is a free gift of which the only fitting response is the priests complete surrender—the complete gift of himself.¹⁶⁰

And Ratzinger speaks of the thanksgiving that comes with the gift of the priesthood when discussing Eucharist Prayer II in his homily on Father Martin Bialas 25th priestly jubilee, which states, “We give you thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you.” He speaks of it as a thanks to God for the gift of the priesthood he gave to his Church and thanksgiving for “the most profound core of the priesthood:” the privilege of offering the Eucharist. That through this ministry Jesus is able to give himself to the priest and his people and raise them continually.¹⁶¹

Thirdly, prayer centered around Eucharist allows the priest to persevere in his Eucharistic identity. In Benedict XVI’s address on Wednesday, 12 May 2010 to priests, religious, deacons, and seminarians, he speaks to the priest’s great concern for fidelity in his ministry at the altar and loyalty to his own vocation.¹⁶² Perseverance in a “consistent, true, and profound love for Christ the Priest” will help to prevent mediocrity.¹⁶³ Priestly fidelity is grounded in fidelity to Christ, a fidelity that speaks to an intimacy with Christ by means of his prayer, and this is because only in

¹⁵⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 115.

¹⁵⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 116.

¹⁵⁹ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 92.

¹⁶⁰ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 92.

¹⁶¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 305.

¹⁶² Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 63.

¹⁶³ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 63.

deep prayer does the priest most experiences Christ's love, an "exclusive and spousal" love.¹⁶⁴ And thus, the Eucharist, "which is the center of Christian life and the school of humility and service," must be the priest's first love.¹⁶⁵ Benedict adds that the seminarians practice of "adoration, piety, and care" for the Eucharist will aid them by allowing them to celebrate in the future the Eucharist "in an edifying and devout manner."¹⁶⁶ When fielding questions from seminarians from the Roman Major Seminary in 2007, He also speaks to the importance of meditation on the readings for Sunday in advance in order for a more "mature homily" and also in order that the priest's heart might be more deeply penetrated by the Word, and thus better able to enter into the mystery of the Eucharist.¹⁶⁷

Interior Life

Firstly, the Eucharist calls for the priest's interior configuration to Christ. In Ratzinger's homily for five Jesuits on their ordination day in 1977, he gives in greater detail what it means for the priest to give himself as gift—how the interiority spills into his exteriority. Ratzinger begins by boldly claiming that the Church would not exist today if it were not for the Eucharist and the other sacraments and the proclamation of the Word by priests who give themselves completely over to their priestly ministry and thus make themselves completely available for such work.¹⁶⁸ He again emphasizes that a good prayer life is essential for such work because it "supports and strengthens him [the priest]."¹⁶⁹ A little bit later in the homily he writes that the priest's Eucharist ministry calls not simply for an interior conformity to his Eucharist ministry

¹⁶⁴ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 64.

¹⁶⁵ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 67.

¹⁶⁶ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 67.

¹⁶⁷ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 200.

¹⁶⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 79. The theme of gift also makes its appearance here, but more in regards to the importance of the priest's interior life.

¹⁶⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 80.

but that it calls for all that the priest is, even his senses. The Church's liturgy, especially that of the Eucharist, in turn informs the essence of the priesthood.¹⁷⁰ Even with all its gestures there is something incomprehensible about it, and thus something inexhaustible. The understanding of man alone cannot capture it, but it must be grasped with the heart and all the senses. And Ratzinger extends this insight to his understanding of the priest's prayer, and says that it is not simply a function of the heart, but must extend to his whole body. The way the priest expresses himself exteriorly marks his interiority.¹⁷¹ And this interiority again makes it way outward in the hands of the priest who blesses and celebrates the Eucharist.¹⁷²

In Ratzinger's homily "Becoming an Offering with Christ for the Salvation of Mankind" in 1978, he states that the Eucharistic commission is the center of priestly existence,¹⁷³ saying, "the priest exists in order to celebrate the Eucharist, to celebrate God's banquet among men, to be as it were, the official who invites people to God's wedding to give his joy in this world."¹⁷⁴ But Ratzinger focuses on how this includes the priest's conforming himself to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in order that he might become more like that which he re-presents on the altar. The sacrifice of the priest is something only a creature can give him anew: such sacrifice being the greatest act of love.¹⁷⁵ And so, for the priest, doing is not demanded but being."¹⁷⁶ Thus, his emphasis is place more on the priest's interior life.

In his homily "Giving the Answer of Life" in 1979, Ratzinger speaks to how celebrating the Eucharist is more than just performing a ritual, and that it rather calls for imitation of Christ

¹⁷⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 81.

¹⁷¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 81.

¹⁷² Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 83.

¹⁷³ As touched upon in the Eucharist being the center of his identity.

¹⁷⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 86.

¹⁷⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 89.

¹⁷⁶ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 86.

by the priest, for his interior conformity to the mysteries he celebrates. The priest has to live *in* the resurrection and *on* the resurrection; he must have a real encounter with the risen Lord.¹⁷⁷ And any other Jesus he seeks apart from communion is a self-made Jesus; but the Jesus the priest seeks only lives in the Church.¹⁷⁸ And so, when it comes to making Jesus's resurrection known, the liturgy he performs is not preserved "as though in a glass display case," but is the continual carrying of love out into the world.¹⁷⁹

Secondly, the priest's Eucharist belief is important for his interior configuration to Christ. In his homily for the Chrism Mass in Liebfrauentom, Munich on 11 April 1979, Ratzinger makes it clear that the power of the words of consecration come not from the man's ego, but Christ's "I." What this means is that even if the priest's life contradicts these words, they can still be effective. However, it is not desirable that his life should contradict these words, because these words make demands upon him to conform himself to Jesus Christ. They demand an interior correspondence to what he says.¹⁸⁰ That is, the priest must believe what he says when he celebrates the Eucharist: "The priest must first and foremost be a *man who believes*."¹⁸¹ Otherwise, his work for the Church just becomes something superfluous, something that is almost a "leisure time association," when the people rather expect him to have a deep faith and prayer life and live according to the beatitudes.¹⁸² "The people are waiting for someone to believe before they do," especially in a world where such a life is contrary to the standards of the western world.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 95.

¹⁷⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 96.

¹⁷⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 96.

¹⁸⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 41.

¹⁸¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 41.

¹⁸² Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 41.

¹⁸³ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 41.

Thirdly, the priest's interior configuration to Christ, informed by the Eucharist, calls for celibacy. In Ratzinger's homily on the occasion of a diaconate ordination in Munich on 19 February 1978, he states how "clerical ministry is not a job in which you can remain personally aloof."¹⁸⁴ Meaning, the priest's promise of celibacy is a part of interior configuration to Christ and the mysteries he participates in, since it is a willingness to stake everything rather than being something simply pragmatic.¹⁸⁵ Ratzinger speaks to the difficulty that the people of his times have with celibacy, saying, "it remains a thorn in the flesh of this era that there are men who believe so much in the Gospel that they do for it something that in earthly terms is irrational and that they stand up for it with their whole lives, body, and soul, and thus verify it; for without interior commitment to the Gospel, such fidelity is not possible"¹⁸⁶ And then on the occasion of another diaconal ordination Ratzinger speaks about how celibacy must not be an expression of contempt or disdain.¹⁸⁷ Namely, as he puts it in a homily at St. Mary's Cathedral, Freising on 30 June 1979, the priest's celibacy can never be based on a no or on skepticism, rather it must be a wholehearted encouragement to fidelity and have a view to eternity always in mind.¹⁸⁸ For celibacy to be lived out fruitfully the priest must say, "yes, Lord, you need me, you take me, so that by your power I can testify that you are the strength that supports a life, that the great contagion of life, its newness, and its purity proceed from you."¹⁸⁹ The power comes from Christ and is something that is not simply external but must be interiorized and grasped with the priest's mind and heart.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 135.

¹⁸⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 136.

¹⁸⁶ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 137.

¹⁸⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 147.

¹⁸⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 96.

¹⁸⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 184.

¹⁹⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 185.

In his letter to Seminarians, October 18, 2010, Benedict XVI touches upon the importance of the sexual integration of the priest, although not directly in connection with the Eucharist. He speaks to the great sadness experienced because of certain priests who have sullied their priestly ministry through the sexual abuse of children and minors.¹⁹¹ Such abuse has led to shame and regret that has led to a questioning of the pursuit of the priesthood and whether a life of celibacy is even tenable. But Benedict says that such abuse does not discredit the mission of the priest, “which remains great and pure.”¹⁹² And to support this claim, he puts forth the example of priests who in their life of celibacy have lived fruitful lives and who have attained “an authentic, pure, and mature humanity in this state.”¹⁹³ In his letter Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th anniversary of the *dies natalis* of the Curé of Ars, Pope Benedict XVI gives such a model of the fruitfulness of celibacy in the example of the St. John Vianney. In speaking of the counsels, he speaks to how St. John Vianney “radiated chastity” and the appropriateness of it for one in contact with the Eucharist daily. His embracement of a life of celibacy allowed him to contemplate Eucharist blissfully and thus contemplate over it blissfully to the people when he said Mass.¹⁹⁴

Fourthly, integrity is an important aspect of the priest’s internal configuration to Christ. In his homily for the Chrism Mass in Liebfrauentempel, Munich on 11 April 1979, Ratzinger says that the priest who lives a life of beatitude in our modern times is a man of integrity, and a priest with integrity is incredibly attractive to all people, even those who do not believe. That to have integrity is to be true to one’s interior configuration to Christ. The temptation faced by many of Ratzinger’s contemporary brother priests is to shy away from standing out as a man of beatitude,

¹⁹¹ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 7.

¹⁹² Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 7.

¹⁹³ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 8.

¹⁹⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 366.

to shy away from standing up for their own particularity, and instead fall in with the commonality of the times. This is a temptation that Ratzinger labels as the priest's embracement of "anti-clericalism," which involves more than simply shunning the clothes that identify him as a cleric but, mistakenly, it is a shunning of those important, good interior qualities of a cleric, too. The priest cannot, however, embrace such anti-clericalism because, as Ratzinger argues, the Gospel calls the priest to be "himself" and stand up for what he is: "what I am, I must show; it must be expressed."¹⁹⁵ Ratzinger says that the priest must have the courage to have integrity: "to stand up for the alternative that he is, and to profess it."¹⁹⁶ And this all again helps to express that the priest must have an interior conformation to the celebration of the Eucharist, and that this interior attitude cannot be hidden and remain merely interior but needs to be expressed and seen. How else can a fire be kindled? One who hides such belief leads others to the assumption that the priest questions whether what he does is worth spending his life for.¹⁹⁷ He then sets forth the examples of saints, like John Vianney and Vincent de Paul, who did not hide their belief, but lived out the Gospel in an outward fashion; their faith was on display to all who came into contact with them.¹⁹⁸ They did not hide the Gospel and discern stratagems for sharing it but "made an original response" to it.¹⁹⁹ And so, the priesthood cannot be something built up alongside the lives of priests like some hobby or avocation.²⁰⁰ But it is an interior configuration to Christ manifested outwardly.

For the sake of integrity and interior configuration, not only can the priesthood not be a hobby or avocation, but also his priesthood does not allow him to be a specialist. In Ratzinger's

¹⁹⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 42.

¹⁹⁶ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 42.

¹⁹⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 42-43.

¹⁹⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 43.

¹⁹⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 43.

²⁰⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 43.

homily “Becoming an Offering with Christ for the Salvation of Mankind” in 1978, he speaks to the world’s current obsession with specializing, something that the priest must resist because, “in a world that has unraveled into specializations and consequently is ailing, suffering, and crumbling,” the priest “remains a man of the whole, who holds human existence together from within.”²⁰¹ Specialization often prevents people from living the fulness of life, and so the “priest is not one of many specialists but rather the servant of creatureliness, of humanness who leads us together beyond the compartmentalization of life into the merciful love of God, into the unity of Christ’s Body.”²⁰² In another later homily he speaks again about this specialization saying,

“Being a priest is the best job: there is no finer profession than being there with the people for what is essential to their humanity, not just having to do something or other and afterward living your human existence, but being there for the essential thing, for humanity itself, and thereby being close to the people, and again, not as a specialist, but for the whole spectrum of life... Being privileged to encounter the whole wealth of human life and being able to stand by people at the crossroads of human life and to give them more than we ourselves could ever give.”²⁰³

The priest, instead, leads people into the body of the Church, into the deeper mystery of Christ, not as a specialist but in the service of humanity itself, and in doing so is not at odds with his interior configuration to Christ.

Fifthly, the Holy Spirit plays an important part in the priest’s interior configuration to Christ. In his homily for a Chrism Mass in Liebfrauentempel, Munich on 15 April 1981, Ratzinger explains how the priest must be transformed by the Eucharist he celebrates by means of the Holy Spirit. He describes the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ as the “transformation that changes us.”²⁰⁴ New creation takes place with the Eucharist and “conversion

²⁰¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 90.

²⁰² Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 91.

²⁰³ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 252.

²⁰⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 51-52.

is correspondence to transformation in the Eucharist.”²⁰⁵ He says, citing Ignatius of Antioch, how all must become what they receive, that they must become the crushed wheat that becomes pure bread. Such imagery speaks to a certain purification, which he refers a little later on as “accepting the oven,” meaning, enduring the afflictions inherent in everyday life.²⁰⁶ Here again Ratzinger is again emphasizing the importance of interior transformation and renewal, and that such transformation is directed toward others: “Only someone who himself is burning can kindle.”²⁰⁷ Thus, interior transformation allows the priest to burn with a fire of the Holy Spirit that lights others, and it is a transformation that arises out of the priest’s celebration and reception of the Eucharist.

Sixthly, the priest who is interiorly configured to Christ is a recollected man. In his homily for a Chrism Mass in Liebfrauentempel, Munich on 15 April 1981, Ratzinger explains the role of the priest in bringing unity to the Church, but he spends more time explaining the interior character of recollection that brings this about. He begins by explaining the priest’s role in bringing unity to the Church: “Faith that comes from the Holy Spirit is always gathering; unification that binds together again what has been scattered. And so priestly ministry is above all a ministry of unification, a ministry of gathering.”²⁰⁸ He then goes on to give the characteristics that help the priest to bring about this unity in the Church, stating that the priest needs to be a recollected man, someone who radiates “inner peace and inner unity which in turn re-collects and unifies.”²⁰⁹ Ratzinger then explains what he means by recollection, saying, “recollection means emerging from distractions, seeking the laborious path leading to the

²⁰⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 52.

²⁰⁶ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 52.

²⁰⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 53.

²⁰⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 48.

²⁰⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 49.

center.”²¹⁰ Often the distraction of the priest that Ratzinger alludes to is a sort of activism in which the priest’s day is filled with checking off tasks on his list of projects. The priest consumed by activism is more a distracted, torn, superficial man—empty interiorly and unreclected. This state of the priest leads to a hostility towards others—a priest who is less generous with his time. But the priest who is reclected is one who comes back to the center time and time again, and is always seeking reconversion and renewal. To become reclected is not to escape pastoral work, but it is the indispensable center of it.²¹¹ Another aspect of the reclected priest is that he does not get overly invested in his own “private theologies,” knowing that his private faith “is not the standard for the Church.”²¹² Ratzinger then gives the analogy of a healthy faith that is more akin to a home with many rooms than a bunch of individual bunkers.²¹³

Lastly, suffering is an important part of the priest’s interior configuration to Christ. In his homily for a priestly ordination in Mariawald on 15 September 1992, Ratzinger mentions how interior conformity to Christ in offering the Mass is aided by the priest’s own suffering and his uniting himself to Christ through that suffering. And so, suffering is an important part of his ministry.²¹⁴ Ratzinger says a similar thing in his homily on the occasion of Franz Niedermayer’s priestly ordination, when he speaks about how the celebration of the Eucharist is tied up in the sacrifice of Jesus, a sacrifice that benefits from the priest accompanying Jesus through his own sacrifice, toil, and self-renunciation. He describes the sacrifice on the part of the priest as one that will never be fully successful because, as servant, the priest can never be greater than *the* servant.²¹⁵ And since the priest’s sacrifice can never reach that of *the* servant, the priest needs the

²¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 49.

²¹¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 49.

²¹² Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 50.

²¹³ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 51.

²¹⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 110.

²¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 213.

support of other fellow Christians—their prayers and helpful support in the shouldering of his burdens.²¹⁶

Suffering is so important to the priesthood because it is something the priest is still able to offer up interiorly even when he is unable to celebrate the Eucharist. Ratzinger speaks of this in his homily “The Great Venture of Priestly Service.”²¹⁷ He first begins by identifying the priest as being more than an administrator, that when he can no longer be an administrator, he can still administer sacraments. And then he identifies the priest as more than an administrator of the sacraments, saying that even when he is deprived of this ability, “then in his suffering he can still be interiorly the one who leads the congregation in prayer and can still help support it in his prayer.”²¹⁸ Ratzinger goes even further in saying that even if the priest could not offer his suffering in prayer, he would still remain a sign that God watches over us, even when we have no more strength.²¹⁹

Unity

Firstly, unity with brother priests is necessary for the priest’s Eucharistic ministry. In his farewell meeting with priests and deacons in 1982, Ratzinger begins by wittily saying, “the priesthood is a ministry that can be performed only in the first-person plural.”²²⁰ What he means by this is that only by a priest’s fellowship with his brothers in the presbyterate is he able to perform his own ministry “to the whole and for the whole.”²²¹ The fellowship Ratzinger calls for includes priests taking care of each other, especially when one among them gets tired. One way

²¹⁶ This last part speaks more to the importance of unity between the priest and the laity that will be touched in greater depth later on.

²¹⁷ Homily for the sixtieth priestly jubilee of G.R. Vinzenz Irger on 19 June 1983. Found in Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 257-266.

²¹⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 265.

²¹⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 265.

²²⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 60.

²²¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 61.

in which this is done is when priests share their individual charisms with their brother priests. For example, a certain priest might be very good at organization and another priest might not; and the first priest might share his gift of organization with the latter in order to make his ministry easier. When priest share their charisms, ministry is made easier for all. And the diversity of such charisms and the different approaches to ministry is a good thing because it allows priests to serve many different types of people. The fact of these differences cannot, however, he argues, lead to division.²²² The common faith, the common mission unites—the faith is the same house with many rooms. Thus, the priest must stand side-by-side with his brother priests, and together they must constantly approach the Lord at the altar and grow in love of him, allowing themselves also to be interiorly renewed. Doing so will help aid them to grow in unity.²²³

Secondly, unity with the laity is necessary for the priest’s Eucharistic ministry. In his homily on the occasion of Franz Niedermayer’s ordination, Ratzinger relates how the Eucharist calls the priest again and again into a needed mutual existence with other Christians because of the realization of his own weakness.²²⁴ On another occasion Ratzinger puts this in a more theological way when he says that priests are supported by the faith of the Church, and especially those people entrusted to them.²²⁵ Besides realizing his own weakness in the knowledge that his sacrifice will never reach that of Christ’s, the priest realizes he falls short in many other areas when offering the Eucharist. In offering the Eucharist daily, the priest constantly utters “the greatest words in the human language, which we can dare to touch only reluctantly: justice, truth,

²²² Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 61.

²²³ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 61.

²²⁴ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 213.

²²⁵ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 261.

fidelity, purity, love, unselfishness—words that judge and accuse him, too”;²²⁶ and this is because the priest proclaims that which he cannot not give.²²⁷ And so there is something “odd” in the priest having “to say great things all the time about love, about truth, about God, and about the Cross—things that we fall infinitely short of.”²²⁸ But this discrepancy between what the priest says and the reality of his own life speaks to just how monumental his work is. The priest is an instrument that gives people what they need, that which he does not have; and this discrepancy needs to be better recognized by the congregation so that they can accept their priest in his weakness. They need to be able to “support him as the messenger of something greater that does not come from himself.”²²⁹ If they meet him with skepticism, they leave him to a great cause with little assistance. And because of this Ratzinger holds that the laity almost have an obligation to call the priest to be what he is called to be, to aid him in his mission of keeping “the word of God alive in this world.”²³⁰ And through this mutual exchange, this self-giving in service between the priest and the laity, the priest is able to become most himself.²³¹

Thirdly, the Eucharist is needed for the increase of priestly vocations. In a homily during the World Day of Prayer for Vocations April 29, 2007, Benedict XVI speaks to the Eucharist as the source of ecclesial unity.²³² This communion calls for generous responses by some believers, filled with divine love, to dedicate themselves completely to the service of the Church. And thus, there must be a certain attentiveness by the priest of this communion and how it might foster vocations.²³³ Benedict holds that it is easier for one to discern a vocation in the community,

²²⁶ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 219.

²²⁷ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 235.

²²⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 253.

²²⁹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 220.

²³⁰ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 220.

²³¹ Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning*, 222.

²³² Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 97.

²³³ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 97.

especially when the center of the community is the Eucharist. The principle behind this, put forth by Benedict, is that “‘Eucharistic love’ motivates and founds the vocational activity of the whole Church.”²³⁴ And this is because the vocations flourish when Christ is made present through the reading of the Word and especially in the celebration of the Eucharist.

In conclusion, the priest needs the Eucharist and, , the Eucharist needs the priest. The homilies of Benedict XVI that touch upon the identity of the priest show that the Eucharist is the center of his life in a way unique to his vocation. The priest is able to give that which he is not himself because he is able to give that which is infinitely more; he is an instrument of Christ in the Eucharist. When he loses sight of his Eucharistic identity, when he focuses too much on changing the world materially, the Church suffers. The Eucharist and the priesthood are something that the priest receives and which calls him to be a humble gift for others, which is something sustained by prayer.

The homilies that touch upon the interior life of the priest in light of the Eucharist, that speak of his interior configuration to Christ, show that the priest must become more like that which he offers on the altar. Thus, the priest is a man who believes; he is a man whose sexual identity reflects configuration to Christ in a radical way through celibacy; he is a man of integrity whose interior qualities and identity are manifested exteriorly, and so he is a man who does not shy away from what he is—a servant of Christ at the service of humanity; he is man moved by the Holy Spirit and not himself; he is a recollected man who is constantly seeking reconversion and renewal; and he is a man who suffers and unites his suffering to Christ.

And the homilies that touch upon the importance of unity show that the priest cannot carry out his Eucharistic ministry alone. They show the importance of fraternity between priests

²³⁴ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, 99.

and the sharing of charisms, the importance of the priest's realization of his own weakness and need of support from the laity, and the importance of community for fostering vocations.

Conclusion

The priest is many things, as put forth in the writings of Benedict XVI covered in this thesis. The priest is the recollected man constantly seeking reconversion and renewal; the man of integrity, belief, and prayer, who does not shy away from what he is. But there are two prevailing points that color Benedict's understanding of the priest's identity in connection with the Eucharist: The Eucharist's centrality to his priesthood and its call for a radical configuration to Christ. The very origin of the priesthood is at the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and so from the very beginning the priest's identity is intimately connected with the Eucharist. No longer is it centered upon worship at the temple, as it was in the old priesthood, but its new worship and adoration becomes centered on the love of Christ in the Eucharist. In the priest's commissioning, through his ordination, by Christ through his Church, there is an ontological change that allows the priest to celebrate the Eucharist—to act *in persona Christi*. And he is ordained to act on behalf of the whole Church, not himself, and to be a signpost that points to Christ and to be Christ's docile instrument.

The very celebration of the Eucharist calls for a radical configuration to Christ on the part of the priest. Because what he receives—the Eucharist and his priesthood—is a gift, he is called to be a total gift. And it is understood that a certain suffering will be endured, as the priest must die to himself. There are many virtues that allow the priest to more closely configure himself to Christ and thus become a total gift of himself. The most important of these, that constantly resurface throughout Benedict's writings and homilies, are the following: celibacy, humility, and obedience.

A life of celibacy allows the priest to make of himself an exclusive offering to the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not something simply pragmatic. Its nuptial meaning lies in the ability

of the priest to pour himself out for the Church just as Jesus did, and thus unite himself to the same self-giving act. The greatest change in the new priesthood from the old is the call for total celibacy—a movement away from occasional abstinence. Celibacy arises from the priest’s daily celebration of the Eucharist, his deep intimacy with the Lord that constantly calls him to configure himself to Christ. Celibacy comes from the understanding of gift: the Church has also always seen priesthood as a gift, and has always been aware of its great requirements—a vocation requiring the totality of man. And in order to give himself to all, he cannot exclusively give himself to one spouse, and so celibacy is most fitting.

Humility prevents the priest from doing anything that would be perceived as placing too much emphasis on his own personality when he celebrates the Eucharist because his ministry is focused on giving Christ to others and not himself—to preach Christ crucified and not himself. And this humility arises from his very understanding of his Eucharistic ministry as gift. Humility also allows the priest to be obedient to the Eucharistic rite and its correct celebration, the *ars celebrandi*. The priest’s obedience is believing, thinking, and speaking with the Church and serving the Church. But obedience to the Eucharistic rite is so much more than outward expression. It is more concerned with interior conformity to it. And this is cultivated through a familiarity acquired through its daily practice, and it is further cultivated through prayer. The greatest harm that has marked the priesthood and the Church at large has been the scandal of sexual abuse. Benedict cites several causes of the scandal—the cultural upheaval of the revolution of ’68 and the collapse of moral theology, but concludes that when the priest falls away from the Eucharist, when the Eucharist fails to inform his identity, not only do priests stray but they lead the faithful to stray also. Fervor in the Eucharist must be renewed, Benedict argues, if there is hope for healing. And so, the solution to the sexual abuse crisis, he holds, is not some

exterior renewal with the creation of a new church; but rather, the solution is an interior renewal, one that embraces the faith and the Eucharist. In his thought, it can be concluded that with this renewal will follow an increase in priestly vocations.

One area worth further study in regards to Benedict XVI thought on the identity of the priest in connection with the Eucharist would be that of understanding the ontology of the priest and what exactly is received in the sacrament of Holy Orders. Benedict is very good at expounding upon what flows from the priest's ontology but does not necessarily explain his ontology explicitly in the texts considered in this thesis . But it would be possible to work backwards, or at least back from the action of the priest to his ontology, in order to construct Benedict's understanding of the priest's ontology. The very findings of this paper might prove helpful in such a construction. It would also be advantageous to explore Benedict's writings and commentaries on Scripture to get at Benedict's understanding of the priest's ontology.

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