

JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER

## Keynote Address

# SOME PERSPECTIVES ON PRIESTLY FORMATION TODAY

In his first Holy Thursday letter to the bishops of the Church, our present Holy Father wrote: "The full reconstitution of the life of the seminaries throughout the Church will be the best proof of the achievement of the renewal to which the Council directed the Church." I was happy to learn that on October 3, 1979, His Holiness repeated those same words in this very chapel of St. Charles Seminary, on the occasion of his first pastoral visit to the United States. I feel confident, then, that my theme, "Some Perspectives on Priestly Formation Today", is an appropriate subject to discuss. You know that it is the theme of the next synod of bishops.

When Archbishop Bevilacqua invited me to come to Philadelphia and to speak at the opening of this symposium, "The Catholic Priest as Moral Teacher and Guide", I could think of no better beginning for such a meeting than to discuss priestly formation. Likewise I was sure that it was a fitting topic because I know of Cardinal Krol's own great interest in the seminary and in the education of his priests. May I also offer him my best wishes as the new chair in moral theology is founded in his honor.

## TO BE BUILT UP INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE: BEING FORMED INTO GOD'S FAMILY

When I was appointed archbishop of Munich and Freising in 1977, I saw that I had been placed in a situation of crisis and ferment. Those preparing for the priesthood in the archdiocese had become few; they were housed in the seminary of the Georgianum that Duke George, called the "Rich", had founded in 1494 to be the Bavarian regional seminary at the University of Ingolstadt, later moved to Munich. It was clear to me from the start that it was my pressing duty to give the diocese its own seminary for the training of priests again, even if many were doubtful whether such a project would still be meaningful given the changes in the Church. Shortly before I was called upon to leave my home diocese once again to take up my present responsibilities, on November 20, 1981, the feast of Saint Korbinian, the diocesan Patron, a day threatening with rain, it was my joy to lay the cornerstone for a seminary building that, with its lines reaching upward, was already impressive. Thus, a beginning at least had been made from which there was no turning back; it had to go forward. When I thought about what words should be inscribed on the cornerstone, I was struck by the wonderful verse from the first letter of Peter wherein Israel's titles of honor were applied to those made a people by baptism: "As living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God through Jesus Christ" (1 P 2:5). These words probably formed part of a New Testament catechetical instruction on baptism. They apply to the new community of Jesus Christ, the theology of the Covenant and of the Election, with which the Sinai event in the Old Testament was interpreted. Thus we have a simple description of what it means to be one of the baptized and how the Church, God's living house, grows in the world. But what could really take place in a seminary that would be nobler or better than that young men in the power of their baptism grow in discipleship, than that they indeed become

parts of the living Church? It seemed to me, then, that the words of Saint Peter to the baptized said all that was necessary as far as a seminary was concerned, that they could rightly be looked upon as a mission statement, as the cornerstone for such a house.

Why should we have a seminary? How should the formation of priests proceed today? In our Scripture text, we find first of all a reference to the building of a spiritual house out of living stones. *House* in the biblical sense of the term denotes not so much a building of stones but kith and kin, the family. This usage continues among us even today when we speak about a noble house—the house of Wittelsbach or Habsburg, et cetera.<sup>1</sup> The baptized who are originally strangers to one another are to become one family, God's family. This is a process that ought to find concrete application in the seminary so that the future priest develops the ability in his parish, or wherever he may be, to bring people together into the family, into the community of God's house. To be sure, there is still the qualification—a *spiritual* house. This does not mean, as our feeling for language might suggest, a house in a merely figurative and thus unreal and imaginary sense. Here the word *spiritual* is derived from the Holy Spirit and from his creative power, without which nothing is real at all. A spiritual house built by the Holy Spirit is first and foremost the truly real house. The belonging to one another that stems from the Holy Spirit reaches deeper and is stronger and more lively than the simple kinship of blood. All those who have been touched by the Holy Spirit are brought together, stand in closer solidarity than any other kind of relationship could establish. John's Gospel speaks in this context about those who believe in the name of the Logos and who thus receive a new origin: "born not by blood, nor by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man but from God" (Jn 1:13). Here the connection is made with the very One who was conceived, not by the will of the flesh, but by the power of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. O. Michel, *OEKOS KTd*, ThWNT, V, 122–61, esp. 113f.; H. A. Hoffner, "hajt" in *Theol. Wörterbuch zum AT*, I, 629–38; M. Wodke, "Oikos in der Septuaginta. Erste Grundlagen", in *Hebraica*, ed. O. Rossler (Berlin, 1977), 59–140, esp. 60ff.

the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ. We are the "spiritual house" if we are the house and the members of the family of Jesus Christ. This brings an inner harmony, a new seal and a new foundation for life that is stronger than all differences and permits new, interior kinship to mature. The seminary, like the Church and like every family, is in continual development. This is the only way in which it fully comes about, namely, that men allow themselves to be built up into a living house by Jesus Christ.

And so we might now say quite simply that the essential task of the seminary is to offer a space wherein this spiritual building-up can take place over and over again. Its task is to be a place for meeting Jesus Christ, an encounter that so unites men with him that they can become his voice in the present for others and for the world of today. This basic statement becomes more concrete if we return once again to our text. The end is the house; what goes before it are the stones—living stones that go into a living house. Now it should be noted that the reference to building in our passage appears in the passive: as living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house. In accordance with our urge to be doing something, we completely transpose these words into the active: to build the kingdom of God, to build the Church, to build a new society, et cetera. The New Testament views our role in another way. The builder is God himself or the Holy Spirit. We are the stones; the building, as far as we are concerned, is a "being built". The traditional hymn for the liturgy of the consecration of a church describes this in a forceful way when it speaks of the healing marks of the chisel, the manifold works wrought by the Master's hammer and the decorous assembly, by which the blocks of stone are finally brought together to grow into the great building of the new Jerusalem. Something quite important is touched on here: *building* means "being built". If we want to be the house, each one of us has to take upon himself the destiny of being well prepared. In order to be of use for the house, we have to let ourselves be properly formed for the place where we are needed. The one who wishes to be part of the whole vast array and become a stone set in it has to allow himself to be united to

the whole. He can no longer simply do or act as the thought occurs to him and it seems the thing to do. He can no longer simply go where he wants. He has to accept the fact that it is another who girds him and leads him where he would not go (cf. Jn 21:18). In John's Gospel, we find still another figure: the vine that has to produce fruit must be pruned; it has to allow itself to be clipped. The process of bearing greater fruit is experienced only by accepting the pain of being pruned, purified (Jn 15:2).

In consequence, we can be sure that the formation of priests has to offer more than a professional training: an education in proper living as a human being. Furthermore, it has first and foremost to provide for the acquiring of those fundamental virtues without which no family can long remain united. This is so important for the priest because not only must he be ready to live together with the family of his presbyterate, his local Church and the Church universal, but his task, over and above this, is to bring and hold together in the community of faith those who are strangers to one another by reason of origin, education, temperament and the circumstances of life. He has to lead people to reconciliation, to be able to forgive and to forget, to forbearance and magnanimity. He has to help each bear with the other in his otherness, to have patience with the other and to exhibit in proper balance trust and prudence, discretion and openness, and much more besides. He must be ready before all else to stand by people in their tribulations—both in physical sufferings and in the disappointments, adversities and worries of which no one is spared. How should he do all this if he himself has not learned it first of all? To be able to accept and endure suffering is one of the basic requirements for human happiness; when this is not learned, life is bound to fail. Being provoked with everyone and everything dries up the soil of the soul, so to speak, and makes it a wasteland. Formerly we used to speak of the mastery of pain in connection with asceticism. This word is no longer used today; we come nearer to its meaning when we translate it from the Greek into English: "training". Everyone knows that there can be no success without training and its corresponding mastery of the self. For every possible art today

people train themselves with zeal and concentration, and thus peaks of achievement are attainable in many areas that in former times would have been unthinkable. But why does it seem so farfetched to be in training for real, genuine living? To practice the art of renunciation, of self mastery, of inner freedom from our addictions?

### THE PASSION FOR TRUTH

Among the many things that might be said here, I would like to raise one point in particular: to educate in the truth. The truth often makes people uncomfortable; it is probably the strictest of teachers in the process of learning unselfishness and real freedom. Let us take the example of Pilate. He knows for a fact that the accused Jesus is innocent and that, according to justice, he should acquit him. He even wants to do so. But then this truth begins to conflict with his position; it threatens him with inconvenience, even with the loss of his post. Public disturbances could arise; he may be made to appear in an unfavorable light with Caesar. These and similar fears arise. And so he prefers to sacrifice the truth, which neither cries out nor defends itself, even if its betrayal leaves behind in his soul the dull ache of failure. This situation constantly recurs in history: we need only call to mind a further example that is the reverse of the preceding one—Thomas More. How natural it seemed that the king should be accorded supremacy over the Church. There was no formulation of dogma that clearly excluded it. All the bishops had accepted it; why should he, a layman, put his life at risk and plunge his family into ruin? If he would no longer think of himself, in weighing the values ought he not at least give priority to his dear ones over this obstinate insistence upon following his conscience? Cases like these portray in large dimensions, if you will, only what our own lives witness again and again in smaller ways. I can extract myself from some difficulty if I make a small concession to dishonesty. Or to put it the

other way: accepting the consequences of the truth will not necessarily lessen the difficulties in which I find myself. How often does this happen? And how often do we fail! The situation in which Thomas More found himself when it is translated into daily experience goes like this: lots of people say this is all right; why not me too? Why should I upset the harmony of the group? Why make myself the object of ridicule? Does not society's peace take precedence over my own rights? In this way, group conformity leads to tyranny over the truth. Georges Bernanos, whose life was not spared the mystery of the priestly vocation and the tragedy of its failure, dramatically portrayed the perils involved in the figure of Bishop Espelette. This well-liked bishop had been a professor; he is knowledgeable and amiable; he always knows what to say, just what the situation calls for and what the educated world expects from a bishop in his position.

The courage of this clever priest, however, deceives no one but himself. His intellectual cowardice is huge. . . . No one is less worthy of love than one who lives only for the sake of being loved. Souls of this kind, so deft that they change themselves according to each man's taste, are only mirrors.

Bernanos pursues his analysis of this failure all the way to its core:

"I am a man of my time", he keeps repeating with the look of a man who doesn't toot his own horn. . . . But he never paid any attention to the fact that each time he would say this he was disowning the eternal character with which he had been sealed.<sup>2</sup>

I am not standing up to be counted among those who decry the great sickness of our time as the scarcity of truth. In effect, events have gone beyond this everywhere. What remains evident is the disavowal of the truth and the flight into group conformity as the way to peace. A community like this is built on sand. The pain associated with the truth is a prerequisite for real community. It has to be accepted day after day. It is only with truth's little acts

<sup>2</sup> Georges Bernanos, *L'imposture* (Bibliothèque de la Pleiade, 1961), 387-88.

of patience that we ripen from within and become free from ourselves, free for God.

Here is the place where our image of the living stones emerges once again. Peter illustrates the interior call that this image raises with a passage from Psalms 118:22, which has long since been understood as one of the basic christological texts: "The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone." We are not interested here in following in detail the theology of death and Resurrection that lies hidden in this verse. But its association with the idea of the living stone has already brought us to recognize that building involves a being built, that without this passive attitude the passion of purification cannot take place. Bernanos regarded pain as of the essence of the Divine Heart, and thus he considered most precious all the bodily and spiritual sufferings that the Lord sends us.<sup>3</sup> The rejected stone is a figure for him who took upon himself the mortal pain of radical love and thus opened up a place for all of us, becoming the cornerstone that founds a living house, a new family out of fractured humanity. In the seminary, when it comes to the training of priests, we do not form just *any* kind of group. If we did, there would be the danger that the pain of becoming a part of it would go only to the point of conformity whereby we sacrifice the truth. We do not build according to a self-set standard. We allow ourselves to be made a part of the building by him who is our model and ideal, by the second Adam whom Paul calls a life-giving Spirit (1 Co 15:45). This building plan justifies the hardships of purification and gives us a guarantee that it is purification and not destruction. A person grows into this building when he seeks to acquire "everything that is true, noble, good, pure, worthy of love and honorable, everything virtuous and worthy of praise" (Ph 4:8). A person becomes right for the building when he becomes true.

When this goal is achieved, the seminary becomes a home. Without this common path it would be no more than a collection of student rooms whose occupants ultimately remain each on his

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

own. Being prepared to be purified even guarantees that such a house will have its share of humor and cheerfulness. Without it the atmosphere becomes chiefly one of griping and complaints against everyone, including oneself. In such an atmosphere, the days are gray and joy cannot grow because it does not have the sunshine it needs to ripen.

### HOUSE AND TEMPLE: SERVING THE INCARNATE WORD

These considerations open our way to a second reflection, in which we can now speak about training for the priestly vocation beyond the essential formation of the human being and the Christian. Our passage on the spiritual house built of living stones once again provides us with a starting point. This is the house that God builds for himself in the world and that we at the same time build for him—"God's house". The whole theology of the Temple is taken up in this term. The Temple is first of all the place of God's dwelling, the space of his presence in the world. It is therefore the place of the assembly within which the Covenant is renewed over and over again. It is the place where God meets his people and where they also find themselves. It is the place from which God's Word proceeds, the spot where the standard of his wisdom is raised and from which it becomes visible. It is ultimately, then, the place of God's glory. It shines forth in the inviolable purity of his Word. It shines forth, too, in the festive beauty of the liturgical act. Glory manifests itself in the act of glorifying, which is the response to the call of his Word—a response that concentrates and anticipates, which then has to be continued in the active language of all of one's life, which should be the reflection of his glory. The rending of the curtain of the Temple at the moment of Jesus' death on the Cross signified that this building had ceased to be the place where God and man meet in this world. From the moment of Jesus' death, his body given for us is the new and true

Temple; the subsequent destruction of the temple of stone in the year 70 only makes visible to the eyes of all history what had already occurred in the death of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Now is the verse of the psalm completely fulfilled: "Sacrifice and oblations you wished not, but a body you have prepared for me" (Ps 40:6; Heb 10:5). Worship has now acquired a new and definitive meaning: we glorify God when we become one body with Christ; that means a new, spiritual existence in which he embraces us totally, body and life (cf. I Co 6:17). We glorify God when we allow ourselves to be drawn into that act of love that he accomplished on the Cross. Glorification and Covenant, worship and life become inseparably one. The hour of Jesus, which lasts now until the end of days, consists in this: that from the Cross he draws us to himself (Jn 12:32) so that we can become "one" with him (Ga 3:28).

In this new worship, which occurs in the Easter Passover from ourselves to the place of Christ's body, the essential elements that determined the cult of the Old Testament continue to hold good; only now, for the first time, do they attain their full meaning. *Temple*, as we said, is first of all the place of God's Word. Thus, the priesthood that stands at the service of the Incarnate Word has to make God's Word present in its unadulterated purity and its everlasting reality. It is essential that the priest of the New Covenant not present just any personal philosophy of life that he thinks good or has read about, but the Word that has been entrusted to our faithful hands and that we may not tamper with, as Paul states forcefully and clearly in the second letter to the Corinthians (2:17). Here we find ourselves before the challenging responsibility to which the priest must set himself; behind it the breadth and depth of what priestly formation and training mean become clear. As a priest, I may not present my personal ideas for I am sent by Another, and that alone gives importance to my message. "We are ambassadors for Christ, and God it is who is appealing through us. We beg you in Christ's name: be reconciled with God!" (2 Co

<sup>4</sup> Cf. W. Trilling, *Christusverkündigung in den synoptischen Evangelien* (Munich, 1968), 201; J. Gnlika, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, pt. II (Freiburg, 1988), 476.

5:20). It is this statement of Paul that remains the true definition of what is the fundamental form and mission of priestly existence in the Church of the New Covenant. I have to deliver the Word of Another and that means first of all: I have to come to know it; I have to have understood it; it must become my own.

This proclamation, however, requires much more than the attitude of a messenger with a telegram who faithfully delivers strange words that mean nothing to him. I have to hand on the Word of Another in the first person, in a quite personal way and so appropriate it to myself that it becomes my own word. For this message does not require a telegrapher but a witness. While a person usually forms his thought and then looks for the right word, the reverse is true here: the Word goes before him. He puts himself at its disposal and gives himself to the Word. In this process of coming to know, to understand, to enter into and to become familiar with the Word, we find the essence of all training for the priesthood. In his book of exercises, Father Kolvenbach calls this subordination of one's learning to the teaching of the Church a *sacrificium intellectus* and then goes on to say:

This sacrifice stamps upon one's spiritual effort . . . the mark of an offering in the true sense of the word and thus of a priestly seal upon . . . the ability . . . to preach; it does not depend . . . primarily upon knowledge but upon the immersion of his understanding in the vaster wisdom of God's Word. Just as for the Levites, the prophets, and the apostles, there is for the preachers of God's Word a process of learning—one which never ends. In it one gives first place to the honor of God. . . . A priest has to dedicate himself unreservedly to the Word of God.<sup>5</sup>

Father Kolvenbach here explains the mysterious phrase of Saint Paul, that we have to "put on Christ": the putting on of Christ consists in the process of our identification with the Word of faith, having an interior familiarity with this Word, in order that it becomes our very own because we have become its own.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Kolvenbach, *Der osterliche Weg: Exerzitien zur Lebenserneuerung* (Freiburg, 1989), 24.

Practically speaking, this means that in the study of theology the intellectual and the spiritual dimensions are inseparable from each other. That God's Word might be accessible to us in this world, that God has said something to us and is speaking still, is truly the most exciting news I can think of; but by habit we are so blasé that we advert only to the extraordinary in such revelation. Recently, I became acquainted with a little story that Helmut Thielicke relates in his memoirs. Two philology students, who had never had any kind of religious instruction, attended a sermon he preached in Hamburg's Church of St. Michael. What impressed them most of all was the common recitation at the end of the Our Father, whose words they had never learned. Because everyone seemed to know it, they didn't venture to ask about it but set themselves to researching the matter. Their effort to find it in the public library failed. Even in the library of the theology faculty they couldn't locate the text. The matter became ever more perplexing for them until finally, during a Sunday broadcast of a morning religious service, they were able to write down the Our Father as it was prayed in common over the air. "So at last we had the Our Father in hand", they both concluded in relating to Thielicke their long and arduous search to find the Lord's Prayer, which ultimately ended in their conversion to the Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup> Right in our present time we have a repetition of what the Lord had to observe in the gentiles' coming to faith: "I have not found such faith in Israel" (Mt 8:10). The adventure of coming to recognize the closeness of God's word in all its exciting beauty and of entering into it with all one's powers belongs to the essence of the priestly vocation. For this reason, no effort to come to know God's word can be too much. If it is worth the trouble to learn Italian in order to appreciate Dante in the original, how much more obvious it should be for us to learn to read the Scriptures in their original languages. Every care for historical study obviously accompanies our expedition into God's Word. A

<sup>6</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Zu Gast auf einem schonen Stern. Erinnerungen* (Hamburg, 1984), 307ff.

rational education, training in methodical work, is an indispensable element on the path to the priesthood. One who loves wants to learn. He can never know enough about the one he loves. Concern for learning is thus an inner demand of love. A methodical education, by the way, one that constantly affords a person the chance to discard his pet theories for the sake of obedience, is an indispensable means of training in the truth and in truthfulness, an essential ingredient for the objectivity of any witness who does not proclaim himself but places himself wholly at the service of One who is greater. A piety that tries to evade this ends up with just feeling. Building without the truth is a kind of spiritual self-abuse to which we may not succumb.

A careful and educated effort to understand Holy Scripture is the foundation for training in the priesthood. But it should be obvious that a merely historical reading of Scripture is not enough. We do not read it as a word of men from the past; we read it as God's Word, which he, through the men of a bygone age, permits to be addressed to all ages as his ever new and present Word. To let the Word dwell merely in the past is to deny that the Bible is the Bible. The kind of historical interpretation that merely dwells on what was brings in its consequence the denial of the canon and, to that extent, a refusal to accept the Bible as the Bible. To accept the canon of Scripture already means in itself to take the Word beyond its simple historical moment; it means the recognition of God's people as the continual bearer of the Word and the Author among the authors. Since, however, no people is God's people on its own, the acceptance of this Agent means at the same time a recognition that it is God who is at work in and through them as the genuine inspirator of their ways and of their memory set to writing. Exegesis becomes biblical exegesis and theology when it operates from this perspective; theology arises from the fact that there is this common Agent, the Church; without this Agent there is no theology.<sup>7</sup> When the Church is left out, theology

<sup>7</sup> See Joseph Ratzinger, *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit* (Freiburg, 1989), esp. 7-44; on the question of the Church as "subject" of theology I would make reference to my essay, "Theology and Church" in *Internat. Kath. Zeitschr.* 15 (1986), 515-33.

becomes the philosophy of religion: the scientific pursuit of theology disintegrates into a variety of concurrent disciplines—historical, philosophical and practical—in the same way that the canon disintegrates when there is no continual Agent who alone can justify it as the canon. When the interior presence of this Church-Agent weakens in souls, the process of disintegration is at work: the dissolution of the canon and theology as theology are ineluctably part of a series of disciplines barely connected to one another. This is the great temptation of our day when the understanding of the Church-Mystery is almost completely extinguished and the universal Church is regarded generally as just an organizational carrier that can coordinate things of religious importance but that does not enter into religion itself. Religion takes place only in the midst of community. For this reason, the experience of and the acceptance of the Church are an essential component of priestly formation. If the Church does not “awaken in souls” at this time, then everything remains subjective. Faith becomes a personal choice regarding what seems possible for me; the process of self-renunciation and absorption in the Word of Another does not occur. The Word ultimately remains my word. I do not yield myself to the Body of Christ but stay all to myself.

This means that an obvious necessity for the priesthood is an academic formation that is both comprehensive and versatile. The religion of the Logos is by its nature a rational religion. It likewise has its philosophical and historical dimensions for it is immersed in the concrete; all this, however, can come together only if there is a truly theological center that cannot exist without the reality of the Church. Today, in this age of growing specialization, the search for the interior unity of theology and concentration upon its center seem to me to have become an urgent priority. A theologian certainly must develop versatility, but theology itself must be ever capable of shifting ballast and directing its concentration upon the essential. Theology needs to be able to differentiate between specialized knowledge and the fundamentals; above all else it has to mediate an organic vision of the whole in which the essential is integrated. If so-called specialization goes so far that in

the end there is an assortment of unconnected specialized fields, it has missed the mark. Only with a vision of the whole can we recognize those indispensable criteria for the discernment that is so necessary for the spiritual leader and for the preacher's spiritual independence. If he does not learn to judge with a view to the whole, then he is ever consigned as a prey to changing fashions.

I come now to another aspect. It has always given me pause for reflection that in the Roman canon of the Mass when priests pray for themselves, we find they are called by the name "sinners": *nobis quoque peccatoribus*. This official self-designation on the part of the clergy in the sight of God has nothing to do with worthiness; it goes right to the heart: we are "sinful servants".<sup>8</sup> I don't believe that we can attribute this simply to some empty show of humility. Here is expressed the selfsame consciousness that Isaiah exclaimed in the presence of God's vision: "Woe is me; I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips . . . and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (6:5); the selfsame consciousness that made Peter fall to his knees when he saw the miraculous catch of fish and say, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Lk 5:8); the selfsame consciousness that found expression in the old ordination liturgy when the bishop instructed the candidates: "With great fear should one ascend to such a grade". It is dangerous to bring oneself close to the everlasting presence of the Holy, which can easily become routine for me and ordinary and then burdensome. The hard words of Jesus to the pharisees and the priests touch upon a basic psychological and sociological phenomenon that constantly occurs: routine makes dull. We may think again, for example, of our two students on their search for the Our Father, in which we saw the desire of the gentiles and our own blindness. Because of this, the Church in the past constantly emphasized that you cannot study theology simply as a profession like any other, for then we would be dealing with God's Word as though it were a thing that belongs to us. But that is not the case.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. A. Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia*, II (Freiburg, 1952), 311; T. Schnitzler, *Die Messe in der Betrachtung*, I (Freiburg, 1955), 104f.

Moses had to take off his shoes before the burning bush. We also might say: whoever exposes himself to the radioactive ray of God's Word—indeed, whoever handles it as his vocation—must be prepared to live close to such a presence else he will be burned. One can see how real this danger is, for it is probable that all the great crises in the Church were essentially connected to a decline in the clergy, for whom intercourse with the Holy had ceased to be the fascinating and perilous mystery it is, of coming close to the burning presence of the All-Holy One, and had become instead a comfortable craft by which to secure one's daily needs. The venture of being called close to the mystery of God requires a preparation like that of Moses, who heard words that still hold true: one must take off one's shoes. Shoes made of leather, from the skins of dead animals, were a symbol of the dead, of that from which we must free ourselves in order to be able to live in the presence of the One who is life. The dead—this is first of all the excess of dead things, possessions, with which a man surrounds himself. The dead also refers to those behaviors that oppose the paschal way of life: only the one who loses himself finds himself. The priesthood demands a departure from bourgeois existence; it has to incorporate within itself in a methodical way this losing of one's self. The Church's joining of celibacy and the priesthood brings out these considerations: celibacy stands in starkest contradiction to the normal fulfillment of life. When a man accepts it interiorly, he cannot look upon the priesthood as one professional attainment among others. Instead he must somehow assent to the renunciation of his own life's aspirations and allow himself to be girded and led where he really would rather not go. Before entering into such a decision, the Word of the Lord has to be heard and reflected upon: "If one of you intends to build a tower, would he not first sit down and reckon the cost to see if he had means enough to complete it?" (Lk 14:28). No one can choose the priesthood for himself to fulfill his own life. A basic requirement for the priesthood is a careful discernment of whether I am responding to the Lord's call or am only looking for self-fulfillment. The requirement to keep in vital contact with him remains con-

stant all along the path. For if we turn our glance from him, what happened to Peter when he met Jesus walking on the water will surely happen to us. Only the look of the Lord can overpower gravity, but he really can do it. We ever remain sinners. But when he takes hold of us, the waters of the deep lose their power.

In this context, I would like once again to return to the *nobis quoque*, the prayer of the priest in the Roman canon. In behalf of the priest, it calls upon those who have gone before him on the way, the intercessors; at their head is John the Baptist, and following upon him are two groups of seven saints: seven men, all martyrs, and seven holy women and virgins. They cover the diverse geographical areas of the Church, and they embody the various vocations in the Church, all of God's holy people.<sup>9</sup> The priest is directed toward the support given by the saints and the whole living community of the faithful. It strikes me as especially significant that the Roman canon calls upon the names of holy women precisely in its prayer for priests. Priestly celibacy has nothing to do with misogyny. Nor does it mean having no association with women. The process of a priest's interior growth depends quite essentially upon his finding a proper relationship with women; he needs the support given by mothers, virgins, career women, widows, who accept his special calling and accompany him in it with a selfless, pure feminine goodness and concern.

## WORD AND SACRAMENT—THE PLACE OF WORSHIP

Our considerations bring us back once again to the thought that we should be built into the living temple. To the temple belong liturgy and sacrifice—this is what the first letter of Peter tells us. As Christians, we believe in the Word who became man. For this reason priestly service must reach beyond mere sermons, beyond the simple interpretation of the Scripture: what has become mani-

<sup>9</sup> See Schnitzler, *Die Messe in der Betrachtung*, 105.

fest with the Word has passed over into the sacraments, Saint Leo the Great once observed.<sup>10</sup> The word of faith is essentially a sacramental Word. By its nature, training for the priesthood must be a preparation for the service of the sacraments, the Church's sacramental liturgy. I do not intend now to describe at length what this means because all that has been said up to this point has been a quiet reflection of the sacramental perspective. One thing is clear: the daily Eucharist has to be the heart of any formation for the priesthood. The chapel must constitute the center of the seminary, and staying close to the Eucharist has to be continued and deepened by personal prayer in the presence of the Lord. The sacrament of penance must be, so to speak, the burning coal of purification of which the Prophet Isaiah speaks in relating the vision in which he received his vocation (6:6); it has to be this power of reconciliation by which the Lord leads us, over and over again, from all manner of division into unity.

Silence belongs to the liturgy just as much as festivity. When I think back to my own years in the seminary, the moments of morning Mass with their inexhaustible freshness and purity, along with the grand liturgies celebrated with full festive splendor, remain my loveliest memories. The liturgy just by itself is beautiful; we ourselves are not the actors in it. Rather, we enter into that which is greater, that which embraces us and takes us for its own. Still once more I would like to go back to the Roman canon of the Mass: in the *communicantes*, the eucharistic prayer calls upon the names of twenty-four saints, a quiet reflection of the twenty-four elders who in the vision of the Apocalypse surround God's throne in the heavenly liturgy.<sup>11</sup> Every liturgy is cosmic in its dimensions, a stepping out from our poor little groupings into the great community that spans earth and heaven. This is what gives it its breadth, its great vitality. This is what makes every liturgy a feast. It is this that renders our silence precious and, at the same time,

<sup>10</sup> *Sermo*. 2, "De Ascensione", 2 PL 54, 398.

<sup>11</sup> Schnitzler, *Die Messe in der Betrachtung*, 76; on the nature of the liturgy see J. Corbon, *Liturgie aus dem Urquell* (Einsiedeln, 1981).

challenges us to enlist the service of every created thing that may aid our joining in the song of the eternal choir.

Cult has to do with culture—the connection here is obvious. Culture loses its soul without cult; cult without culture mistakes its true worth. If preparation for the priesthood is essentially at its heart a liturgical training, then a seminary needs to be a house wherein a wide-ranging cultural formation is provided. Music, literature, the arts delight in nature—all these have a place here. There are various gifts, and the nice thing about it is that in the seminary many and diverse gifts can be brought together in one. No one can do everything, but no one should resign himself to being uncultured. In the liturgy, we touch the Beautiful itself; we touch eternal life. From the liturgy, joy should radiate through the house; in it the problems of the day can again and again be transformed and overcome. When the liturgy is at the center of our life, the words of the Apostle apply to us: “Rejoice, again I say rejoice . . . the Lord is near” (Ph 4:4). It is only from the heart of the liturgy that we can understand what is meant when the Apostle Paul defines the priest of the New Covenant as “the servant of your joy” (2 Co 1:24).

When I was young, it was customary to think that preparation for the priesthood consisted essentially of learning to “read Mass”. It was no wonder that this took so long, because it was also known that you had to learn Latin and that was no easy thing. With the right understanding it can really be said that in the ultimate analysis, preparation for the priesthood is concerned with learning to celebrate the Eucharist. The reverse, however, can also be said: the Eucharist is here in order to teach us about life. The school of the Eucharist is the school of right living; it leads us in just this way to the teaching of that which alone it can be said, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6). The awesome aspect of the Eucharist lies in the fact that the priest may speak with the *I* of Christ. To become a priest and to be a priest involves a constant movement toward this identification. We are never finished with this, but if we are seeking it, then we are on the right path: on the path to God and man, on the pathway of

love. This is the standard by which every formation for the priesthood must be gauged.

In closing, perhaps I may hazard a few thoughts concerning the application of these reflections to your symposium theme, "The Catholic Priest as Moral Teacher and Guide". I have said that the Eucharist is the center of preparation for the priesthood. Here we might say that Jesus, who is the Way, gives us himself, which is Truth and Life. One teaches truth. What are the implications of attempting to do otherwise? Can one possibly defend the teaching of something other than the truth? Some in our society may have so relativized their understanding of the word *truth* that it means something different for them than it does for us. But how can one defend the *teaching* of the communication of what one says makes sense only to oneself? If it makes sense only to me, I may think that way, but I have no right to teach it, which is to assert that it should mean something clear, something true, not just for oneself but for the other as well. And Jesus is also the Life. What can this mean for the priest, except that he must not merely teach; he must also live, act, behave in such a way that he can say, with the Apostle Paul, "It is now no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me". Here we can see the great contours of the intimate unity between Truth and Life. I suspect this is what is meant when we affirm that the Priest is called to be both teacher and guide: he should teach only what is true, and what he teaches will be seen as a reliable guide for Christian life when the faithful see it lived out in the priest's own life.

JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER

HOMILY AT ST. CHARLES  
BORROMEIO SEMINARY

for the Third Sunday of the Year,  
January 21, 1990

The reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians that we have just heard has a startling pertinence for us. It is true that Paul speaks to the community of Corinth from a time long past and that he admonishes it in conscience concerning all those things found there in opposition to true Christian living. Yet we sense right away that these words concern not just the problems of a Christian community from long ago; they meet us here and now, today. When Paul speaks to the Corinthians, he is speaking to us and pointing at the wounds of our lives in the Church today. We are in danger, just like the Corinthians, of tearing apart the Church with partisan conflicts while each of us develops his own ideas about Christianity. Thus it happens that our rights become more important than God's claim upon us, than our being right or just in his sight. Our own ideas obscure the Word of the living God while the Church recedes behind the development of parties that grow out of our own thinking. The similarity between the situation of the Corinthian Church and our own should not be overlooked. But is not Paul's intention simply to describe a situation; he speaks to us in order to rouse our consciences and to direct us once more toward the true integrity and unity of Christian living. And so we have to ask him: What is really wrong with our way of living? What must we do so that we might be not the party of

Paul or Apollos or Cephas or even the party of Christ but rather the Church of Jesus Christ? What is the difference between being a Christian group or party and being his living Church?

Let us try, first of all, to understand what was truly happening in Corinth and what is constantly threatening to occur anew in history because of the very same human perils. The distinction in question could perhaps be formulated in these words: If I stand up for a party, then it becomes my party. The Church of Jesus Christ, however, is never my Church; it is always his Church. The essence of conversion consists in the fact that I no longer seek for myself a party looking after my interests and corresponding to my likes, but that I place myself in his hands and become his, a member of his Body, the Church. Let us try to look at this a little more closely. The Corinthians perceived in Christianity an interesting religious theory that was in keeping with their hopes and expectations. They chose what suited them, and they chose it in a form in accord with their own likes. When one's own desires and wishes are decisive, however, divisions will have already set in, for those to be pleased are many and opposed one to the other. From such ideological options a club or a circle of friends or a party may arise, but not a Church that overcomes the differences between people and unites them in the peace of God. Personal preference is the principle upon which a club is formed; however, the principle upon which the Church is based is obedience to the Lord's call, as we see in today's Gospel: "He called them and at once, leaving the boat and their father, they followed Him" (Mt 4:21f.).

And so we have come to the decisive point: Faith is not the choice of whatever program appeals to me; nor is it the joining of some fraternal club where I feel I am understood. Faith means conversion that transforms me and my preferences or at least allows my desires and wishes to become secondary. Faith reaches down to a much greater depth than a decision binding me to some party. Its power to transform goes so far that Scripture calls it a new birth (cf. I P 1:3, 23). Here we come to an important insight that we will have to consider in greater depth, for this is where the heart of the problems concerning us today in the Church lies

hidden. It is difficult for us to conceive of the Church in any way other than the model of a self-governing society that applies the mechanisms of majority and minority in such a fashion as to assume a form agreeable to all its members. It is difficult for us to understand faith in any way other than a decision for something that pleases us and that we might like to promote. In every case, though, it is always ourselves and only ourselves who are the active parties. We make the Church; we try to improve it and to arrange it like a comfortable house. We hope to offer programs and ideals that are acceptable to as many as possible. We simply no longer take it for granted in the modern world that God himself is active, that he is at work. But it is exactly here that we take the plunge with the Corinthians: we substitute the Church with a party and the faith with a party program. The circle of one's private world opens not at all.

Perhaps now we can understand a little better the turning point that faith implies—the about-face, the conversion lying within it: I recognize that God himself speaks and acts, that there is not just what is ours but what is his. But if that is true, if we are not the only ones who can pick and choose and act, if he speaks and acts too, then everything is different. I have to obey; I must follow him even if he leads me where I do not want to go. (Jn 21:18). And then it makes sense; indeed, it is necessary to let my own preferences go, to renounce my desires and follow him who alone can show the way to true life, for he himself is the Life (Jn 14:6). This following of him, which is marked by the sign of the Cross, is what Paul ultimately had in mind as an answer to the division of the Corinthians into parties when he stated (10:17): "I give up my own desire and submit myself to Him. It is just in this way, though, that I become free for the truest slavery is that of being imprisoned in the circle of our own desires".

All of this has very serious consequences for the priestly ministry. The priest must be attentive and careful that he is not creating his own church. Paul anxiously examines his conscience as to how people could come to the point of making out of Christ's Church a religious party in his name. He assures himself and the Corin-

thians that he has done everything to avoid the establishment of bonds that might obscure communion with Christ. One who was converted by Paul does not become an adherent of Paul but of Christ, a member of the one, common Church that is ever the same "whether now Paul or Apollos or Cephas" (I Co 3:22). Whether this one or that one: "You are Christ's and Christ is God's" (I Co 3:23).

It is worth the effort to look up the text and to reflect carefully upon all that Paul has written on this point, for here the essence of the priestly ministry is presented with a lucidity that tells us in practical terms and beyond all theorizing what we have to do and what we have to let go:

What, after all, is Apollos and what is Paul? They are servants who brought the faith to you. . . . I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave the growth. Neither the planter nor the waterer matters—only God who makes things grow. It is all one who does the planting and who does the watering. . . . we are fellow workers with God; you are God's farm, God's building.

(I Co 3:5-9)

In many Protestant churches of Germany there was and is the custom of announcing the preacher and leader in bulletins for religious services. Behind such names religious parties often conceal themselves: each person may attend the religious service where those of like mind will gather. Unfortunately something similar has begun to occur in Catholic communities too, but this implies that the Church has disappeared behind various parties and that ultimately we are giving attention to human opinions and are no longer listening to the common Word of God, which transcends all of us and whose guarantor is the one Church. Only the unity of the Church's faith and its binding force upon each one assure us that we are not following human opinions and adhering to self-created parties but are uniting ourselves to the Lord in obedience to him. There is great danger today that the Church may disintegrate into religious parties who rally around

individual teachers or preachers. Thus it can be said again: I am of Apollos, I am Paul's, I am Peter's; and thus Christ is turned into a party. The standard for priestly ministry is found in self-sacrifice in submission to the word of Jesus: "My teaching is not from Myself" (Jn 7:16). Only if we can say that in all truthfulness are we the "fellow workers with God" who plant and water and thus become sharers in his own work. If men call upon us to witness and pit our Christianity against that of others, this must ever be an occasion for us to examine our consciences. We do not proclaim ourselves but him. This calls for humility on our part, the cross of discipleship. But this is exactly what frees us and renders our service rich and fruitful. For if we proclaim ourselves, we remain shut within our poor and wretched selves and draw others along the same way. If we proclaim him, we become "fellow workers with God" (1 Co 3:9); and what could be more beautiful or liberating than that?

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to recognize anew the joy of this calling. Then will the word of the prophet prove true in our midst, that Word that is ever fulfilled as Christ passes through the nations: "The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light. . . . People delight in its approach, like those who make merry at harvest time, like those who are joyful when prizes are shared" (Is 9:1-3; cf. Mt 4:15). Amen.