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— Ralph Bonaccorsi

Office of Conciliation

Chicago, Illinois

Beyond Accompaniment

Guiding a Fractured Community
to Wholeness

William A. Nordenbrock, CPPS



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Introduction

In Roman Catholic circles today, to speak about the “polarized church” has almost become a redundancy; is there any other kind of church? It is seemingly impossible to gather in a group of Catholic ministers without the conversation becoming a telling of “war stories.” No matter the ministry setting of the participants—education, parochial, religious congregational leadership, or other—often the topic becomes the difficulty of ministering within a church that is fragmented along ideological and theological lines. The stories will seldom speak of the value or gift of diversity within the affected faith community, because the diversity seems to be inseparably linked to a righteous and vocal intolerance. Usually in these discussions, it becomes quite apparent, although not frequently acknowledged, that the complaining ministers often speak out of their own ideological mindset and are not innocent bystanders to the conflicts and fragmentation that is their source of concern.

In his book, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*, Peter Steinfels places the contentious and fragmented culture that is visible in the Catholic Church within the broader context of society. Noting the size of the church in relation to the population of the United States (roughly one fourth of the population), he sees it as inevitable that, as a sub-culture within the whole, the church would be influenced by our national ethos. He writes:

A church that embraces so many different groups inevitably becomes not only a bridge but also the battleground for the culture wars dividing American society. Many of the issues facing Catholicism mirror those of the larger society: anxiety over rapid change, sexuality, gender roles, the family; a heightening of individualism and distrust of institutions; the tension between inclusiveness and a need for boundaries; a groping for spiritual meaning and identity; doubts about the quality of leadership.¹

While his observation resonates with a certain obviousness, it raises an important question as to our understanding of the church and the appropriate relationship of the church to the world. Who should be influencing whom?

The conflicts present within the church are not limited to ideological or theological differences. Especially at the level where people live, their local faith community, we sometimes appear to be a large family squabbling. I've heard stories of squabbles about liturgical practice, about the exercise of authority and how decisions get made, about conflicts that arise out of personality clashes between staff or church members, and many other stories of faith communities that have fractured relationships because of conflict.

Another source of a fracturing of the community is the misdeeds of clergy or other leaders of the faith community. There are many well-publicized stories of the life of the community being severely damaged by the betrayal of trust of a pastor that sexually abuses a child or the staff person who embezzles funds. As the horrendous accusations get made and the stories get told, the members of the faith community struggle to comprehend the new information and to reconcile it with their own experiences of the accused pastor who ministered to them when they were mourning or who helped them celebrate the important family faith moments of baptisms and weddings. The relationship of the faith community is distressed as some seek to support the accused and others reach out in compassion to those who report the abuse.

Still another category of conflict seems to be around the difficulties that a faith community experiences when trying to create community of those of different cultural backgrounds. These cultural differences may be tied to ethnic differences that need to be addressed as a result of immigration or migration patterns within an urban area, but this is also the result of the declining numbers of clergy and the perceived need to consolidate parishes. These parishes may or may not have similar ethnic heritages, but each parish has its own way of doing things and relating to one another as a community of faith. Sometimes a consolidation is like mixing water and oil.

So, how does a church leader respond to this fracturing of the community? How can the pastoral exercise of leadership facilitate the healing of the community and the reconciliation that is needed to restore the community into right relationship, to restore the communion of the faithful?

It is this pastoral concern that continues to grow within me. I am a member of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and we claim reconciliation as an element of our charism. As a staff member of the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR) we are developing a ministry that responds to the need for reconciliation within the church. Simply, the church must respond to this need for reconciliation within the church, and pastoral leaders need to acquire the understanding and develop a pastoral approach to facilitate the healing of the Body of Christ.

It needs to be said that there can be no single pastoral approach for promoting reconciliation within the church. A pastoral leader who wishes to respond to conflict within the faith community and be an agent of reconciliation needs a pastoral methodology that has a broad range of methodological options, all of which must be grounded in an authentic ecclesiology and an understanding of a Christian theology of reconciliation. In this book I will explore one such approach, placing it within that theological framework.

Within the PBMR, a praxis for the ministry is developing using the practical theology approach of: praxis, theological reflection,

praxis. The story that I will tell of my ministry with St. Agatha Catholic Church was my thesis project for a doctor of ministry degree. I approached the leadership of the parish with a simple proposal: let's see if we can develop a pastoral approach that will help this community experience healing and create a model that others can use as well. They responded and were as motivated by the desire to create something that can help others as they were by their own desire for healing.

What we discovered together is that a pastoral approach that is rooted in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) can be an effective strategy for promoting reconciliation and the restoration of communion in an ecclesial setting. AI is an organizational dynamics theory that is recent in its development, and it offers a radical shift in our understanding of organizations and organizational change theory. From my first exposure to the theory in the reading of James D. Ludema's article, "From Deficit Discourse to Vocabularies of Hope: The Power of Appreciation,"² I was intrigued by AI's potential to contribute to the praxis of reconciliation. Subsequent reading and course work excited me as I began to envision how the theory might be applicable in ecclesial settings and provide another "tool" that can be used in a ministry of reconciliation.

This book is written to share that tool with others and is done as an encouragement for those who see the need for reconciliation within their faith community and struggle to find a way to respond. When faced with the task of leading a fractured community, hope is often the first virtue to leak out of the cracks. Healing and reconciliation are possible. Effective pastoral response is possible.

I am a Roman Catholic priest and my writing will reflect that background and my denominational concern. While I acknowledge that orientation, the concern for reconciliation is not uniquely Catholic. It is my hope that this book will have applications beyond my denomination and will offer hope and guidance for ministry regardless of one's denominational commitment.

The book will unfold in three sections along the following trajectory. The first section is to provide the necessary founda-

tion. Chapter 1 presents a vision of a church in communion. This communion ecclesiology is not an elaborate theological construction. Rather, it focuses on the spiritual underpinning of a faithful people who are in communion with God and one another. Chapter 2 offers a practical theology of reconciliation that brings together theological and sociological perspectives. Chapter 3 is given to the task of presenting a concise understanding of Appreciative Inquiry theory and process.

The middle section of the book tells in four chapters the story of the pastoral intervention at St. Agatha Catholic Church in Chicago. St. Agatha was a community that had suffered the betrayal of trust of a pastor who had abused young members of the school and parish. My work with them spanned over six months, as I assisted a new pastor and the parish leadership team to seek renewal and healing for their parish.

In the final section of the book, we reflect on the Appreciative Inquiry process at St. Agatha. First, we hear from the members of the parish leadership team as they reflect on the experience and its impact on their parish. Second, I offer my reflections on the process, specifically in light of the spiritual foundations found in communion ecclesiology and a Christian understanding of reconciliation. A final chapter offers the reader who shares a desire to effect reconciliation within the church some challenges and encouragements.

The book concludes with an epilogue written by Rev. Larry Dowling. Dowling was the pastor assigned to St. Agatha after the abuse was reported and the former pastor was removed. He figures prominently in the narrative that is told in the middle section of this book, and two years after the process he remains the pastor of St. Agatha. In the epilogue, he shares his current observations of the continuing effect of the AI process at St. Agatha. I am very grateful for his review and feedback of the middle section of this manuscript.

Along with my appreciation for Larry Dowling, I am especially grateful to the wonderful people of St. Agatha Catholic Church in Chicago. They were and continue to be a welcoming and hospitable community that inspires me with their sincere

and Spirit-filled worship and their lived desire to faithfully walk with Christ. I will continue to use them as my example of a Catholic parish at its best! In particular, along with the pastor, the members of the core team for this project were thoughtful partners in this ministry of reconciliation, without whom this project would have been impossible. In the beginning, I expressed to them the desire that together we would create a model of responding to conflict and polarization present within the church. They are true cocreators of what you read in this book. May God's blessings continue to flow among them as they live their way into their dream.

Rev. Edward Foley, Capuchin, also contributed significantly to this work. He was my D. Min. thesis project director and it was through him that I was first exposed to the theory of Appreciative Inquiry. It was through his mentoring that I began to see the possible application of Appreciative Inquiry for the restoration of communion in fractured faith communities. During my ministry at St. Agatha he was a constant encouragement and a professional sounding board who helped to shape the project.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the role of my religious congregation, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. We claim a ministry of reconciliation as an essential element of our charism, a self-understanding that is largely due to the work of Rev. Robert Schreiter, CPPS. It is his work that is at the heart of chapter 2. As our "family theologian" he has made accessible a theological framework for understanding reconciliation and helped to create a desire within our membership to live a spirituality of the reconciliation. I'm also deeply in debt to the many confreres who, through dialogue and shared expressions of our spirituality, helped to form my understanding and commitment to a ministry of reconciliation. Especially I wish to recognize those with whom I was privileged to create the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation in Chicago. As we continue to work together in that ministry, we nurture the hope and dream that reconciliation is possible. Their accompaniment fuels my passion for reconciliation within our church.

I would be happy to receive your comments and questions on my work at St. Agatha and the role that Appreciative Inquiry can have in a ministry of reconciliation and other efforts at renewal within the church and faith communities. I can be engaged in dialogue through my e-mail account: bill.nordenbrock@gmail.com or contacted through the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation in Chicago.

SECTION ONE

A Church of Communion

In the 2004 Catholic Common Ground Initiative lecture, the journalist John Allen noted that while there is much discussion within the church in regard to the polarization that is experienced, there is very little dialogue. He writes:

When it comes time for discussion, I am often startled at how quickly things degenerate into disputation. The alarming phenomenon is not merely that Catholics seem angry with one another, but that they increasingly seem to be speaking separate languages. Self-identified “progressive” Catholics read their own publications, listen to their own speakers, attend their own conferences, and think their own thoughts. Self-identified “conservatives” do the same thing. Hence when you bring people from these two camps into the same room, they have moved so far down separate paths that even if there is good will for a conversation, quite often a shared intellectual and cultural framework is missing.¹

It is with a hope for unity that Allen notes that the needed intellectual and cultural framework for the mutually respectful dialogue must be found in Catholic tradition.

The theologian and ecclesialogist Dennis Doyle looks to communion ecclesiology to provide that needed framework. “The

problem facing U.S. Catholicism today lies not so much in its diversity," he writes, "as in the lack of a unifying vision that mediates among the various stances and approaches to provide some sense of a shared Catholic identity."² Doyle believes communion ecclesiology offers such a needed vision. He begins his work *Communion Ecclesiology* with the declaration, "The vision of the Church as communion enlightens and inspires. The process of dialogue in the spirit of communion fosters hope and encouragement."³

I approach communion ecclesiology from the pastoral concern of one who ministers within the church with a particular concern for reconciliation within that church. I experience the fragmentation and division within the church to be scandalous—in the strict sense that this very public polarization hinders the evangelical mission of the church. The church cannot effectively preach the Good News of Jesus unless we are a more visible embodiment of the Word that we preach. But the scandal is deeper than the hindering of the mission; it is an unfaithfulness to what the church is called to be. The French-Canadian theologian Jean-Marie Tillard puts it quite succinctly when he writes:

It is very obvious that the Christian witness as such (the *martyria*) is tied to the visible unity of the disciples of Christ. Because how can one announce *truly* and in a credible way the Gospel of reconciliation in Jesus Christ while presenting oneself to the world as disciples of Christ who are divided among themselves and have put up new barriers? But what is at stake here is not limited to the missionary impact of the message. It is essentially a question of being what one is called to be, of doing what is necessary so that the work of God has the quality that it should have, to glorify the Father by manifesting the authentic nature of his plan, of giving Salvation its full dimension.⁴

I am far from unique in holding this concern. In those recurring discussions that I spoke of in the opening paragraph of the introduction, always the recognized need and desire for reconciliation is present in those groups of ministers telling the horror

stories of a polarized church. We all desire and hope for a vision of church that we can present to our fellow believers, through preaching and lived witness, which can inspire others and promote the healing of the divisions that fracture our unity.

For Doyle “communion ecclesiology is a content and a process, a vision and a summons to higher ground.”⁵ Put another way, for one who seeks reconciliation within the church, communion ecclesiology is a vision that we strive to embody and it is a spirituality that we must live if we are to fulfill that vision.

The development of communion ecclesiology is dynamic and ongoing. Our current understanding has grown out of the interplay of many voices over time. In his book, Doyle draws on many theological sources to present an understanding of communion ecclesiology.

Among the various versions of communion ecclesiology, Doyle finds four elements that are seemingly always present. The first is that communion ecclesiology is an effort of *ressourcement*, that is, an attempt to connect with the original vision of the church held by the first millennium Christians, prior to the division among the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Christians. Second, communion ecclesiology places an emphasis on the spiritual relationship between humans and humans with God, over the more juridical and institutional aspect of the church. While there are multiple versions of communion ecclesiology, the foundational understanding is that the church is best understood in terms of relationships. The church is constituted by our relationship with God and one another. Third, communion ecclesiology holds the shared participation in Eucharist as being a needed visible sign of unity. And finally, there is a dynamic interplay between unity and diversity.⁶

Recognizing that there are many legitimate theologies of communion ecclesiology, Doyle presents a sort of synthesis and outlines a communion ecclesiology that seeks to bring together into a web of understanding five versions or dimensions: divine, mystical, sacramental, historical, and social. For Doyle, these five dimensions must be present within a communion ecclesiology that is faithfully “catholic.” While Doyle looks for these

elements in the various theological approaches that he explores in his book, it is the very influential French theologian Henri de Lubac that he cites as offering the best synthesis of these five dimensions.

Five Dimensions of Communion Ecclesiology

The Church Is Divine

An important and essential dimension of communion ecclesiology is that our understanding of our identity as a church is rooted in our belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. Henri de Lubac wrote, "God did not make us . . . for the fulfilling of a solitary destiny; on the contrary, He made us to be brought together into the heart of the life of the Trinity. . . . The people united by the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: that is the Church."⁷

This element of the communion ecclesiology is based in an anthropology that rejects the notion that the individual is the basic unit of human reality and posits instead a view that humans are essentially social. This reflects the relational reality of the three persons within the one God: that God is both one and a community. For humankind, individuality remains crucial, but not more essential than community. Just as the unity of the three persons of the Trinity is essential to our understanding of God, our interrelatedness as humankind is a necessary element of understanding humankind. In this way, the Trinity provides the relational foundation for understanding the church, and in the vision of communion ecclesiology, the church is to be a visible sign of that Trinitarian unity.⁸

The Church Is Mystical

Closely related to the divine element, our understanding of the church must include a mystical element. The mystical church is more than a mere human institution and it is more than the "fallible receiver of divine revelations."⁹ The church is a mystery that is itself a revelation of God.

Images found in Scripture and that are prominent in the documents of the Second Vatican Council are the church as the Body of Christ and the doctrine on the communion of the saints. These images highlight the mystical and transcendent nature of the church. In communion ecclesiology, the church is understood as being more than an institution that is rooted in a particular time and place; rather, it transcends those limitations to describe a relationship among all the faithful through all time.

Doyle again turns to Henri de Lubac to illustrate this dimension. "De Lubac grasped well the mystical form of relationality in which images and symbols are used to express glimpses of the Church as mystery. . . . The Church is truly the mystical Body of Christ in that it represents the spiritual and social reunification of the unity of humankind. The Church is truly the Bride of Christ because it is so closely united with him. The Church is our mother because it brings Christians to birth within the Body of Christ."¹⁰

The Church Is Sacramental

An important theme in the document *Lumen Gentium* is that the church is a kind of sacrament. Doyle gives inspirational credit to Henri de Lubac for this understanding. He quotes de Lubac: "If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him, in the full and ancient meaning of the term, she really makes him present."¹¹ Like Christ who is both fully human and fully divine, as a sacrament of Christ, the church too shares that dual nature. As a sacrament, the church has both visible and invisible elements.

Doyle describes the significance of the sacramental nature of the church succinctly. "The Church consists of sacramental communities of Christians who love each other. . . . The Eucharist is the celebration *par excellence* through which the reality of the Church finds its fullest expression."¹² It is in the sacrament of Eucharist that members of the church are united to Christ. It is in that union with Christ that all the members of the body are brought into one communion as the Body of Christ, revealing

that, like the Eucharist, the communion of the church has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. It is Eucharist that signifies and creates the intimate communion of all the faithful, that is, the church.

The Church Is Historical

While some may lean toward an idea of church that is too human, the opposite is also detrimental to a catholic communion ecclesiology. It is equally a distortion to think of the church only in divine, mystical, or sacramental terms. Here we see the necessity of including both vertical and horizontal dimensions in our understanding. The church is also an institution of fallible human beings that is situated in a context of time and place. A catholic vision of communion ecclesiology must be willing to recognize the truth that the church that is situated in history has at times failed to live the divine elements; we have developed, changed, and, at times, erred grievously.

Within this dimension a useful image is that of the church as the pilgrim people of God. Offering a needed balance to the Body of Christ imagery of the mystical and sacramental church, the pilgrim people represent the human side of the church reality. The church has grown and developed organically over time—starting with a relationship between Jesus and his followers—and through time and in real places is expressed as the relationship between people and between people and God.

The Church Is Social

This final dimension is inextricably linked to the historical dimension. The church is a society of Christian believers. It is not possible to think of Christian belief as an individual or private practice, an individual relationship with Christ. Rather, Christian belief must be understood to include the horizontal dimension of the gospel. As the pilgrim people of God journey through time, they do so together.

Doyle writes, "The sacraments have a social dimension because as means of salvation they are instruments of unity."¹³ While Eucharist is a sign of our unity as a church, that unity does not stop with the walls of the church building. Those who are present for the celebration of Eucharist are sent out to continue the evangelical and reconciling mission of Jesus. This mission into the world must arise from our understanding of the church as a lived solidarity with others. The important image of the church that expresses this dimension is the church as a leaven in the world.

Within communion ecclesiology, the image of the church as leaven in the world has important implications. Primarily, it projects an "understanding of the church as a social body with a commitment to social justice and to global relationality. Christian solidarity is complemented by human solidarity."¹⁴ Second, it "expresses a vision of the world, with all of its ambiguities and negativities, as the essentially good arena in which the lives of those who belong to the Church are lived out."¹⁵

These five versions or dimensions of communion ecclesiology need to be held together to create the needed synthesis and we do that through the use of analogies. It is an analogical imagination that allows us to speak of the church as the Body of Christ and to appreciate that there is something holy and divine, mystical and sacramental about being the church. At the same time, we are able to speak of the church as the people of God and the leaven in the world and recognize that as a church we are part of a long lineage of fallible human beings with an unfolding history and an ever-changing and very diverse social context in which we try to live out our faith. We are both: we are a church that gazes heavenward in our response to God and a church that looks to the side and sees that same God in the lives we share with other believers.

The use of analogies to point to the various aspects of communion ecclesiology allows those competing elements to be held together in one theological construct. An analogy does not claim to be an all-inclusive definition or description, but an image that

points toward a truth. It is through the use of multiple analogies that a multifaceted theological truth can take shape. Again, an example can be seen in the writing of de Lubac who could speak of the church as a bride of Christ to highlight the unity that the church has with Christ *and* speak of the church as the harlot of Christ to acknowledge that a church of humans is sometime unfaithful to that unity with Christ.¹⁶ While the two analogies are starkly antithetical, neither analogy denies the truth indicated by the other. Many images are needed to hold the truth of our identity as a church.

Spirituality of Communion

My concern is the implications of communion ecclesiology for the spiritual life of the church. Being church is a spiritual activity and within communion ecclesiology is an inherent spirituality. I define spirituality simply (nonacademically) as a set of beliefs and values that serve to orient a person as they examine and live their life, particularly their relationship with God and others. Here my guiding questions will be: How do we live our way into the vision of communion ecclesiology? In particular, what does this vision require of a member of the church in their relationship with others within the church?

In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II wrote that “To make the Church *the home and school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearning.”¹⁷ He then asks the important question: “But what does this mean in practice?”¹⁸ He answers the question by saying that before making practical plans, what is needed is to promote a “spirituality of communion.”¹⁹

John Paul II outlines a spirituality of communion with four elements or characteristics. The first is that a spirituality of communion must be mystical in that it is primarily rooted in the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us. Second, the spirituality embodies a solidarity with our broth-

ers and sisters whom we recognize and accept as being part of ourselves in the unity of the Mystical Body. In this solidarity we are able to share in the joys and the sorrows of their lives and live together in a deep and genuine friendship. Third, that solidarity implies that we hold others in a positive regard, recognizing the giftedness of each person, gifts that are not just given to them directly but also given to us through our relationship with them. Finally, a spirituality of communion must embody a hospitality that knows how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters. Without following this spiritual path, John Paul II warns that any external structures of communion will serve little purpose and will be “mechanisms without a soul.”²⁰

A praxis of communion must be built on the foundation of a radical commitment to unity within the church. As noted above, this is a “duty” of all Catholics, but it is a duty that needs to be embraced not out of a sense of obligation but out of love for the vision of communion ecclesiology. To be in union with brothers and sisters in the church is a requirement of faithfulness, but the fulfillment of the requirement is the joy of communion.

To be in communion as a church is a measure of our faithfulness, both individually and communally. Our faithfulness to God is intrinsically linked to our communion with one another in the church. This twofold direction of faithfulness, the horizontal and the vertical, is apparent in the Scriptures and in communion ecclesiology. Yet it is a constant temptation to separate the love of God from our love of neighbor, to separate communion with God from communion as a church. It is the remembering and embracing of that inseparable link that helps us to make the radical commitment to unity.

It is Eucharist that provides the central image for church in communion ecclesiology and it is table fellowship that must be at the center of a praxis of communion. A radical commitment to unity includes a commitment to stay at the communion table. This has a twofold effect.

First, through our participation in the celebration of Eucharist, we keep the central image of communion ecclesiology before us. It is in the celebration of Eucharist that the divine, mystical,

and sacramental dimensions of communion ecclesiology are made real; that which is invisible is now made visible. In receiving the Body (and Blood) of Christ, we are reminded that we do so as the Body of Christ.

Second, Eucharist is a sacrament of reconciliation. At Eucharist we remember and give thanks for the reconciliation of humankind through Christ. But even more so, through the prayer and sacramental action, we ask that any breaks in our communion be healed so that our unity will be restored. When we look across the table at one from whom we are estranged, we are reminded that we are part of a mystical union that is greater than that which separates us. The table of Eucharist is to be a bridge of communion and reconciliation.

The seeming failure of Eucharist to, in fact, effect reconciliation within a divided church, is a particular source of sadness. More so when the polarization that divided the community is liturgical, that is, about how we gather around the table. Such a situation, more than any other, requires of us that radical commitment to table communion.

Communion through Dialogue

Dialogue is also a key activity in the living of a spirituality of communion. Talking together (or at one another) becomes dialogue when the spiritual discipline of listening is joined with the speaking of truth. In faith communities or situations with diverse theological viewpoints, it is dialogue that can help us to restore or maintain communion.

Listening is a spiritual discipline. It is spiritual in that the motivation to listen to another in a situation of conflict must be based in our living a commitment to unity. It is a discipline in that it is often not easy and it requires practice. Often, listening is not something that we desire to do; simply avoiding conversation with another when we know we have differing theological positions often seems an attractive alternative. Without a spiritual commitment to communion and the discipline to live that spirituality, dialogue will not happen.

Dialogue involves the speaking of truth. If you have suffered through polarized and conflicted discussions, your immediate question might be: Whose truth? The answer, of course, is that each person must speak what they believe the truth to be but speak their truth recognizing and respecting the principle of plurality, that is, acknowledge that there does exist legitimate diversity in a church of communion. In fact, there is no communion without that diversity. To live a spirituality of communion is to cherish and work for a unity that is broad enough to hold all legitimate diverse viewpoints; it is not to call for a uniformity to that which I perceive to be the truth.

In the Catholic Common Ground Initiative lecture previously cited, John Allen presented a spirituality of dialogue. It is offered here as a way to broaden the scope of discussion about the role of dialogue in the praxis of communion. That spirituality was presented through a schema containing five key elements.

“The first is a dose of epistemological humility.”²¹ By this Allen simply means that we need to be willing to admit that we do not know everything. Hence, we should be open to the possibility that others might have something to teach us. If we rush to form our own opinion, without the encounter with others through dialogue, we lose the opportunity to find the truth in that situation.

“The second is a solid formation in Catholic tradition as a means of creating a common language.”²² There can be no dialogue without a common language that arises out of a shared intellectual understanding. Allen illustrates this point by noting the difficulty that many Americans have in understanding the documents that come out of the Vatican. Because those statements are written with an assumption of classic Aristotelian-Thomistic cultural formation but are read by those with a liberal democratic worldview, the result is often confusion and anger. It takes much dialogue to “translate” meaning between intellectual frameworks and to establish a shared framework.

This highlights the need for the third element in a spirituality of dialogue, which is patience. Coming to a common understanding often requires that we dedicate the time needed to

arrive at that understanding. "If the unity of the church is important [read: *if we have made a radical commitment to unity*], then we need to give time to those with whom we tussle, time to understand and to be challenged."²³

"Fourth, a spirituality of dialogue requires perspective, meaning the capacity to see issues through the eyes of others."²⁴ In this, I hear an echo of the call of John Paul II to live a spirituality of communion in solidarity with our brothers and sisters, seeing them with a positive regard as a gift to the church.

"Fifth and finally, we must foster a spirituality of dialogue that does not come at the expense of a full-bodied expression of Catholic identity. There is no future for dialogue if convinced Catholics sense the price of admission is setting aside their convictions."²⁵ In *Novo Millennio Ineunte* John Paul II writes that "dialogue cannot be based on religious indifferentism" but must be rooted in the truth that we believe.²⁶ The context of his statement is interreligious dialogue and the missionary duty of the church for the proclamation of the Word, but it is equally applicable as a principle for a spirituality of dialogue within the church. He continues by saying that our "missionary duty does not prevent us from approaching dialogue *with an attitude of profound willingness to listen*" because of our belief in the presence of the mystery of grace that is the Holy Spirit.²⁷ In the same manner, dialogue in the church must permit the expression of the truth that the participant believes, but speakers of truth must also be guided by a spirituality of communion that opens them to the presence of the Spirit in the words of others.

With this fifth element of his spirituality of dialogue, Allen has perhaps identified the largest obstacle to dialogue between self-identified progressives and self-identified conservatives within the church. Among conservatives, "dialogue" has come to mean conceding to relativism at the expense of truth. With them, there can be no dialogue unless the groundwork is laid to create a place where they can safely express their convictions. This does not mean that conservatives should be excused from giving an honest hearing to others who hold convictions that

are contrary to their own, but praxis must account for their suspicion of dialogue.

By way of conclusion, I return to the importance of analogies. Our ability to live a spirituality of communion and dialogue is fostered when we have an appreciation for analogies and develop our analogical imagination. When we are able to speak analogically, we are able to express the truth of our own convictions, and to leave room in the dialogue for the expression of convictions that we do not share. It is in making room for the other that communion is fostered. And it is in communion that we realize a vision of church that is faithful and expressive of our catholic tradition.

Tillard reminds us that "Communion is not the same as a gathering together of friends. . . . It is the coming together in Christ of men and women who have been reconciled."²⁸ For Tillard, the church is formed through reconciliation that leads to communion. He writes: "The Church in this world is nothing more than the concrete portion of humanity inscribed into the sphere of reconciliation opened up by the Cross. Viewed from a historical perspective it proves to be the work of the Spirit taking human tragedy and immersing it in the power of communion and the peace of the Cross so that . . . the design of the Father will come to fruition."²⁹

While communion is the vision that can guide the church, it is the embodiment of a spirituality of communion that must be the visible sign of God's plan for the community of the faithful. The hallmark of that plan of God is that all are reconciled in Christ. It is to reconciliation that I now turn.