Gold Tested in Fire

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A New Pentecost for the Catholic Priesthood

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Dedicated to my brother priests of
the Society of the Priests of St. Sulpice
1642–2012
who for 370 years have faithfully
served the ministry of
initial and ongoing formation of priests
around the world.

Ad multos annos!

Contents

Preface

A flood of publications on the priesthood accompanied the Year for Priests (June 2009–June 2010), promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the death of St. Jean Vianney, the Curé of Ars, and to bolster the image of the priesthood in the twenty-first century. Thus, it may seem surprising to be offering yet another book on the same topic. Yet it is warranted for three reasons.

First, the topic of priesthood is a perennial one. Interest in the priesthood has not been in any way diminished by the controversies that have surrounded it, especially with regard to various scandals that have been in the limelight in the last decade. Indeed, one might say that interest in the priesthood has been piqued by the controversy. I believe modern Western culture is still fascinated by the priesthood. Media images of priests, not always unflattering, continue to appear, most recently with regard to the priestly role in combating evil through exorcisms. In other words, the priesthood is still a mysterious and intriguing profession.

Second, many publications that appeared for the Year for Priests went over familiar church teaching on the topic or offered timely personal and spiritual reflections on priestly ministry. Many of these are inspiring, and some are attempts to synthesize church teaching on the topic of the priesthood. I have wanted to offer my own voice to this conversation, based upon reflections on selected biblical, theological, and pastoral perspectives that I have thought to be important. My own approach comes from the experience of thirty-five years of priesthood, many of them spent in initial and ongoing formation of priests. It does not attempt to offer a "theology" of the priesthood or a comprehensive model for priestly ministry. Instead, it offers some diverse but key insights on the challenges of contemporary priestly ministry. One characteristic of these essays that will be noticeable, however, is that they are all *biblically* based. That is, they take their orientation from insights based on the Bible. Many of the chapters of this book began as presentations at priest retreat conferences or were published as essays in magazines intended specifically

for priests. Previously published essays have been revised, updated, or expanded to some degree, as seemed suitable.

Finally, while this book is not intended as an *apologia* for the priesthood, it is borne of a love of the priesthood and the firm conviction that the priesthood is an essential, God-given ministry in the church. I believe the entire church benefits from wrestling with the challenges that have emerged in the priesthood since the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). As the fiftieth anniversaries of the opening and closing of the council approach, I believe we have an excellent opportunity to deepen our understanding of the council's teaching and its aftermath. In this spirit, anything that helps promote deeper reflection on the priesthood can be profitable. The struggles experienced in the priesthood in recent decades are not a sign of disintegration but a call to renewal and a return to the authentic roots of priestly ministry. My earnest desire is to reinstill confidence in the priesthood through a careful reading of some of its essential foundations and in the context of all ministry exercised in the life of the church.

My gratitude extends to many different individuals who have encouraged me in this project, particularly Peter Dwyer and Hans Christoffersen of Liturgical Press, and their excellent staff. I also thank my fellow Sulpicians, Fathers Thomas R. Hurst, SS, Thomas R. Ulshafer, SS, Lawrence B. Terrien, SS, Melvin C. Blanchette, SS, and Frederick J. Cwiekowski, SS; as well as Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB, and Msgr. Paul Langsfield, who read parts of the manuscript or assisted me with other details. Although I alone bear responsibility for any errors in this book, their keen advice has been much appreciated. Father Hurst, president-rector of St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, deserves my special gratitude for having read the full manuscript with care and for having offered some helpful corrections. I also thank the many seminarians and priests with whom I have been privileged to work in ministry over the years. Their questions, observations, and feedback have given me encouragement and often made me seek a more profound understanding of the priesthood that is such a precious gift to the church.

As indicated by the dedication, I am particularly grateful to my brother Sulpicians around the world for their selfless service to the church and for their personal support of my own ministry as the twenty-sixth superior general of La Compagnie des Prêtres de Saint-Sulpice.

R.D.W.
Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, 2011

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Chapters 2, 3, 6, and 9, as well as the preface, introduction, and epilogue, appear here for the first time in print. I wish to thank the following for granting permission to use in this book previously published material, often in considerably revised and updated format.

Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, for an earlier version of chapter 7, "Priest and Poet," *The Priest* 52:9 (1996): 12–18.

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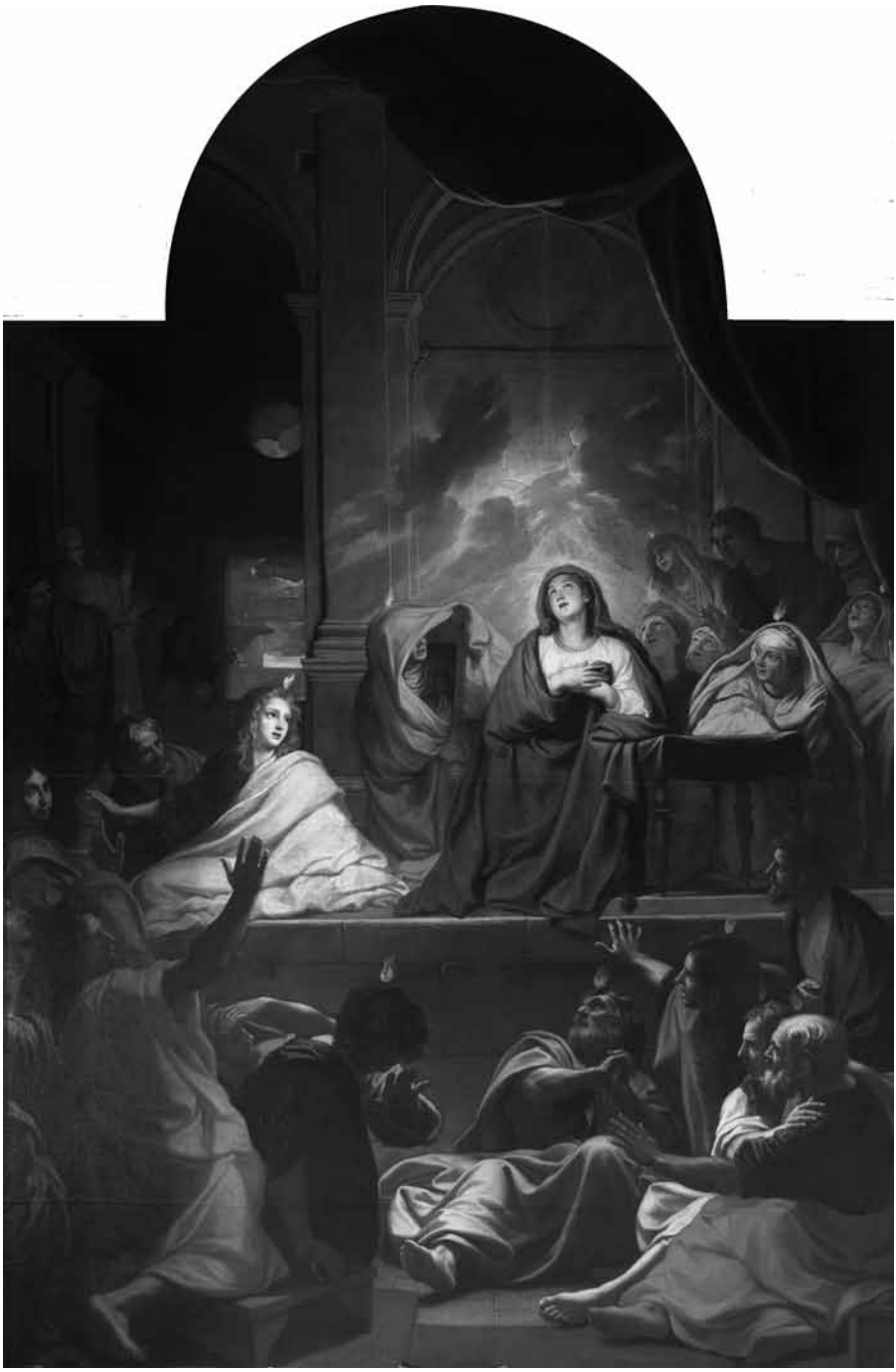
The Pastoral Review, for an earlier version of chapter 11, "Ongoing Priestly Formation: Option or Necessity?" *The Pastoral Review* 6:2 (2010): 33–39; and for parts of chapter 1 containing excerpts from "The Year for Priests: Shepherds and

Sheep," *The Pastoral Review* 6:1 (2010): 4–10, republished with the permission of the editor.

For an earlier version of chapter 8, see "Wisdom & Ministry: The Search for Sages," *Church* 11:4 (1995): 15–18.

Abbreviations

Basic Plan	The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests
CCC	*Catechism of the Catholic Church*
DMLP	Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests
NABRE	New American Bible, Revised Edition
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PDV	*Pastores Dabo Vobis*
PO	*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests
PTCM	The Priest and the Third Christian Millenium



Charles Le Brun, *Pentecost*, 1665–68. Oil on wood, 395 x 275 cm. Paris, Séminaire Saint Sulpice.

Introduction

> Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation.
>
> —Sirach 2:4-5

> In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.
>
> —1 Peter 1:6-7

The chapel of my current residence in Paris contains a large, famous painting of Pentecost, the dramatic scene in the Acts of the Apostles that describes the coming of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire upon the apostles and their companions (Acts 2:1-4). This particular painting by Charles Le Brun (1619–90), the favorite artist of King Louis XIV, was commissioned by Father Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–57), founder of the Society of the Priests of St. Sulpice, of which I am a member. He commissioned this painting as a reminder of the guiding image for his community of diocesan priests founded specifically for priestly formation. The church was in need of a new Pentecost. He set about responding to that need through the renewal of the clergy.

A little history helps put Father Olier's vision of priestly formation in perspective. In the early seventeenth century, the priesthood was in disarray. This state of affairs had existed, in fact, for some time. The lack of training for priests, their lack of knowledge of the Bible, and their occasional immoral behavior were all factors that led Martin Luther and others to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Until the Counter-Reformation and the call of the Council of Trent (1545–63) to establish "seminaries" (metaphorically, "seedbeds" for vocations), places

where priests could be professionally trained for their ministry, the church had done very little to formally educate priests and to give them a solid spiritual, intellectual, and moral formation. As a result of the council's call for more direct priestly formation, numerous bishops founded seminaries as an attempt to provide formal training for priests and to assure the presence of faithful and morally upright servants in ordained ministry. Most famous among these bishops is St. Charles Borromeo (1538–84), who set about priestly formation in his diocese of Milan.

In France, however, it was not until the time of Father Olier that attempts at reforming and educating the clergy were able to establish a strong foothold. Along with many other members of what became known as the French school of spirituality, Olier could see that the church needed reform. But he believed such reform could best be accomplished if the clergy themselves were first reformed. Cleanse the shepherds, and the sheep will follow. Thus he invited a group of young men to join him in the parish of St. Sulpice, of which he was the pastor. He believed that the best priestly formation came from modeling priesthood. His efforts met with almost immediate success and, before long, a separate center or seminary was needed to form the young men who arrived to answer the vocational call to be priests. Over time the Sulpician model of priestly formation took hold throughout France and spread further abroad, including to Canada (1657) and the United States (1791).

In this context the reason for Father Olier's demand for a painting of Pentecost becomes clearer. Theologically, Pentecost represented a true rebirth for the community of disciples. Initially, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the apostles and their companions had hidden in terror. Fearful that their fate would be the same as that of Jesus, they hid themselves, ignoring their call to an apostolic worldwide mission to which Jesus had summoned them. Pentecost changed all that. God sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, fired them up, so to speak. They regained their courage and, guided by the Holy Spirit and filled with God's grace, they went forth courageously to spread the Good News that Jesus Christ was the true Savior of the world.

Olier, who was familiar with and devoted to the Bible as the Word of God, believed the church in his day was in need of a new Pentecost. As one gazes upon Le Brun's unique rendering of the scene, two things are striking. One is that the apostles are also surrounded by other figures, many of them women. In fact, in the center of the painting is Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose presence stands out. Olier, as with many other

members of "the French school," had an intense Marian devotion, which has historically been a feature of Sulpician spirituality. Subtly Le Brun's picture communicates a basic truth that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit does not just come to the apostles but is a gift to the entire church. Even more important is the understanding that Mary herself, especially in her portrayal in Luke-Acts, is preeminently a model disciple of Jesus, her own Son. She is the one who embodies discipleship because she both "hears" and "accomplishes" the Word of God (Luke 8:21; also 1:38). And Acts places her in the midst of the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

A second striking feature is the literal but discrete depiction of the tongues of fire settling on those assembled in the Upper Room. Symbolic of inspiration, being filled with fervor and renewed with strength, the fire represents a new birth, an empowerment, a bestowing of grace-filled courage to embark on the worldwide mission to which Jesus called the apostles. Pentecost is thus always a new birth, a new start.

Yet this portrait at Pentecost hides an even more subtle truth known by the ancients—the strengthening power of fire.[1] The two biblical citations (one OT, one NT) at the head of this introduction express this insight. Fire was known to purify and strengthen metals. Fire is able to temper metals in such a way that they can endure enormous amounts of stress and fulfill their purpose better. Metals are made more durable through fire. Fire thus became a prominent image for strengthening the faith through severe testing. For the early Christians, persecution, suffering, rejection, ridicule—all these were like being molded by fire. Their faith led them to an acknowledgment that fire does not always destroy. Sometimes it makes one stronger.

Although one cannot naively compare the priesthood in the seventeenth century to that of the twenty-first in all its details, I believe there is a similarity that cannot be ignored. As in the seventeenth century, we currently live in a time when the priesthood has suffered a serious image problem. Although the causes and circumstances are not the same, the priesthood has undergone an incredible testing in both eras.

When it comes to the priesthood in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the most obvious challenge has come from the sexual abuse scandal and other serious moral lapses among the clergy. The priesthood has been sorely tested in ways unimagined in the immediate wake of Vatican II. The scandal that emerged in 2002, and that has continued on various continents, has put the priesthood under intense scrutiny. There is no need to deny this reality or try to hide it. Some priests have failed

miserably in their duties as shepherds, faithful servants of God and God's people. In fact, Pope Benedict XVI has purposefully drawn attention to it in numerous talks he has given during his pontificate. One recent intervention was rather lengthy and explicit, and it deserves citation here.

In his customary Christmas greeting to the members of the Roman Curia on December 20, 2010, the pope referred to a vision of one of his favorite mystics, St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179).[2] In a mystical vision recounted in AD 1170, Hildegard described the image of a beautiful woman, ornately dressed, who appeared to her. The woman's attire, however, was torn and stained. Hildegard explains that the words of the woman came to her thus:

> "I lay hidden in the heart of the Father until the Son of Man, who was conceived and born in virginity, poured out his blood. With that same blood as his dowry, he made me his betrothed. For my Bridegroom's wounds remain fresh and open as long as the wounds of men's sins continue to gape. And Christ's wounds remain open because of the sins of priests. They tear my robe, since they are violators of the Law, the Gospel and their own priesthood; they darken my cloak by neglecting, in every way, the precepts which they are meant to uphold; my shoes too are blackened, since priests do not keep to the straight paths of justice, which are hard and rugged, or set good examples to those beneath them. Nevertheless, in some of them I find the splendour of truth."

A voice from heaven then explains to Hildegard the meaning of the image of the woman:

> "This image represents the Church. For this reason, O you who see all this and who listen to the word of lament, proclaim it to the priests who are destined to offer guidance and instruction to God's people and to whom, as to the apostles, it was said: go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15).

This is undoubtedly a powerful vision. The image of priests is both disparaged and praised. The pope insightfully saw in this mystical vision a parallel with our own day. He expressed it in these words:

> In the vision of Saint Hildegard, the face of the Church is stained with dust, and this is how we have seen it. Her garment is torn—by the sins of priests. The way she saw and expressed it is the way we have experi-

> enced it this year. We must accept this humiliation as an exhortation to truth and a call to renewal. Only the truth saves. We must ask ourselves what we can do to repair as much as possible the injustice that has occurred. We must ask ourselves what was wrong in our proclamation, in our whole way of living the Christian life, to allow such a thing to happen. We must discover a new resoluteness in faith and in doing good. We must be capable of doing penance. We must be determined to make every possible effort in priestly formation to prevent anything of the kind from happening again.

I find both the vision of Hildegard and the words of the Holy Father encouraging. They explicitly and humbly admit the harm done by the sins of some priests, but they do not wallow in hopelessness. At numerous times in its history, the church has been seriously tarnished by the horrendous actions of some of its leaders. Yet all is not lost, though the church must do absolutely everything to ensure that such evil is excised from the priesthood. In particular, any abuse of the flock, especially the "little ones" entrusted to our care, can never be tolerated. We must ensure that it never happens again.[3]

The image of the priesthood in our day is stained as much as, if not worse than, ever before. It is in need of serious repair. Some priests and some bishops have done irreparable harm to victims of abuse. Furthermore, there have been various revelations of financial impropriety and dereliction of duty among some clerics. But this need not be seen as the death knell of an antiquated institution. On the contrary, as Pope Benedict clearly indicates, it is a clarion call to renewal. It is also a summons to complete purification. It is a time of intense testing. We are being tested in fire. We are also being called to be remade, precisely so that we can become better shepherds of the sheep entrusted to our care. It is an opportunity for the priesthood to be cleansed, to be remade and to become stronger. For people of faith, the sentiment of Ben Sirach and First Peter is as sound as it ever was in their day. Like gold tested in fire, the priesthood can emerge stronger, more faithful, and wholly renewed because of this challenging period of severe testing.

As a Sulpician and a diocesan priest, my faith in the priesthood has not been shattered by the events of the last twenty years and beyond. Interestingly enough, neither has the attraction to the priesthood dimmed inordinately (at least in the United States) in the wake of the recent scandals. Although I too have been angered, embarrassed, and shocked at the widespread kinds of criminal and immoral behavior of a small percentage of priests[4] (and even some bishops), I also know how frail

and human we priests really are. The fact is that we suffer from virtually every kind of human aberration possible. This does not excuse the behaviors or mitigate their consequences. Even less does it excuse the cover-ups by church authorities that are more scandalous and disheartening. But all of this points to the need for renewal and the grace of conversion in the lives of priests and seminarians.

And so we return to Pentecost. We need to open ourselves up again to the Holy Spirit and the fire of renewal. Pentecost is not a one-time-only event, just as conversion cannot be limited to a once-and-forever happening.[5] My hope is that these essays can contribute to the renewal of the priesthood in our day to support the ongoing process of proving the strength of the priesthood by the "firing" process. We pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit once more to come upon all priests (and seminarians) to strengthen and guide us once more on paths that are straight and true. Being tested by fire is not easy. We will indeed be sorely tested and perhaps even humiliated. But the results can lead to a rebirth. Just as happened at the first Pentecost or at the time of the Protestant Reformation, the trials led to renewal and transformation, so now I believe we can anticipate a renewal as effective and refreshing as has ever occurred in the church's history.

Chapter One

The Priest as Shepherd

Many priests and most laypeople have probably never read the late Pope John Paul II's 1992 apostolic exhortation on priestly formation or *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (*PDV*), which grew out of the 1990 bishops' synod on the same topic.[1] The reasons are doubtless rather simple. First, most think it is only about priestly formation and therefore is exclusively directed to those who work in the highly rarified atmosphere of priestly formation. Second, it is rather long and does contain some ecclesiastical jargon, which tends to be daunting for laity and busy priests alike. Yet it would be a real mistake to overlook this document, for its influence has been widespread since it was promulgated. Moreover, I suggest its impact goes far beyond initial priestly formation (the seminary context). Rather, *PDV* puts real flesh on the theological bones of the priesthood that emerged in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65).

Given its seminal character and the fact that I often refer to this document throughout this book, this chapter will present several aspects of *PDV* that continue to shape the priesthood. Most especially through its pastoral orientation and its insistence that there are four main pillars for priestly formation (human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral), and consequently for priestly life, *PDV* offers a good starting point for contemporary reflections on the priesthood.

Three Key Elements of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*

Scriptural Basis

The first observation about this remarkable document, which is the most important teaching on priestly formation since Vatican Council II,

is that it is rooted in Scripture. The title itself comes from the Latin version of a passage in Jeremiah, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer 3:15). This promise of God to provide shepherds to care for the people is enhanced in *PDV* by two prominent NT passages. One is from John's gospel, in which Jesus speaks of himself as "the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11), and the other is the Letter to the Hebrews' mention of Jesus Christ as "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb 13:20). These passages, along with related complementary ones, give the pastoral exhortation its scriptural foundation in the desire of God to provide pastoral caretakers for the "flock." Priests are called to be true shepherds to their people, and *PDV* attempts to provide guidance at every level of formation, both initial and ongoing, to achieve this goal.

Pastoral Orientation

This scriptural orientation is, of course, consistent with Vatican II's own teaching about the priesthood, most notably in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (*PO*), the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (1965). Although *PDV* quotes from this document frequently, one notes a more pastoral orientation in *PDV* than in the council's decree. This is a second key element.

The pastoral style and goal of *PDV* is quite evident and implies that the goal of all ministry in the church is ultimately pastoral in nature. Ordained ministry does not exist for its own sake but for service to God's people. In fact, *PDV* explicitly uses *PO* in pointing out the close bond between a priest's own spiritual life and the ministry that he gives to his people.

> Therefore, an intimate bond exists between the priest's spiritual life and the exercise of his ministry, a bond which the Council expresses in this fashion: "And so it is that they are grounded in the life of the Spirit while they exercise the ministry of the Spirit. . . . For by their everyday sacred actions, as by the entire ministry which they exercise in union with the bishop and their fellow priests, they are being directed toward perfection of life." (*PDV*, 24)[2]

This profound bond between a priest's spiritual life and the service of his people is one of the most comforting assurances to come from the church's understanding of the priesthood. It points to a paradox in ministry. Though we are ordained to serve others and are thus called to

personal holiness to do so, we paradoxically find our own spiritual lives enriched by those whom we serve. Our people often bring out the best in us. They can also challenge us to deepen our spirituality, even as they seek to receive from us the very best ministerial services we have to offer.

I might note here that this is one aspect of ministry that distinguishes diocesan priestly spirituality from that of religious priests. Diocesan priests are ordained specifically for parochial ministry in the midst of a presbyterate and in cooperation with, and under the authority of, a diocesan bishop. Whereas religious priests derive their spiritual identity from the religious community to which they belong, diocesan priests are by definition bound to a diocese, a geographic region erected for the service of the local people of God.[3] Religious priests who serve in parishes, of course, also share in this priestly ministry and identity. But I believe their spirituality is rooted in the community to which they are bound by solemn vows, whereas diocesan priests are intimately bound to the communities of laity they serve. The closeness to our people is an aid to our own spiritual identity as shepherds.

Shift in Language

A third key element of *PDV* is the subtle shift in language that has taken place to describe the threefold ministry of priests. For ages the church has traditionally used the language of the threefold ministry of Christ the High Priest (who is the only priest of the new dispensation mentioned in the NT): priest, prophet, and king. These images come from the structure of leadership in the OT. God used such individuals to shepherd the people, each of whom contributed to the life of Israel, whether through cult (priest), the Word of God (prophet), or governance (king).

The church quickly adopted this three-tiered perspective for its ordained ministries. Bishops embody the fullness of the priesthood, but ordained priests[4] share in their ministry of shepherding the people. We still speak of priests being configured, by ordination and the laying on of hands and gift of the Holy Spirit, to Christ—priest, prophet, and king. This configuration gives us a share in the threefold ministry of Christ the shepherd and king of his people: sacrifice, proclamation of the Word, and ruling. These constitute the threefold "powers" (Latin, *munera*) of the priesthood.

PDV also makes use of this traditional model. Various observations about these three foundational aspects of priestly ministry are scattered

throughout the document. But there is also an important shift in emphasis, evident from the language used. Referring to the threefold configuration, *PDV* speaks rather of the ministry of priests as Word, sacrament, and pastoral charity (26). Both the order and the wording are important, so we need to look at these three priestly "powers" more closely.

Ministry of Word

In line with Vatican II's reemphasis on the ministry of Word and sacrament in the lives of priests, *PDV* gives precedence to the Word of God. *PDV* states explicitly:

> The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God. He is consecrated and sent forth to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to all. (26)

This primacy of the Word of God leads us in two directions at the same time. Being ministers of the Word does not mean we priests merely give a message to others. We must also receive it ourselves. In the same section *PDV* reminds priests that we are not the "master" of the Word but its "servant":

> [The priest] is not the sole possessor of the word; in its regard he is in debt to the People of God. Precisely because he can and does evangelize, the priest—like every other member of the Church—ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized. He proclaims the word in his capacity as "minister," as a sharer in the prophetic authority of Christ and the Church. As a result, in order that he himself may possess and give to the faithful the guarantee that he is transmitting the Gospel in its fullness, the priest is called to develop a special sensitivity, love and docility to the living tradition of the Church and to her magisterium. These are not foreign to the word, but serve its proper interpretation and preserve its authentic meaning. (26)

This dual dimension of the ministry of the Word, both outwardly and inwardly directed, is a novel emphasis that places a higher expectation on the ability of priests to effectively communicate God's Word today. It is also a reminder that we do not proclaim our own word when we are ministers of *the* Word. We remain servants of the church. In practical terms, it raises the anticipation about our ability to comprehend, to incarnate, and to preach and teach the Scriptures effectively.

Ministry of Sacrament

The priest as minister of Word and sacrament is a familiar designation from Vatican II (e.g., *PO*, 2), which helped the church restore a balance in ministry that had been distorted from the time of the Reformation. Without wishing to oversimplify the matter, one can say that the Reformation essentially led Protestants to emphasize the Word of God over the sacraments, and Catholics, in turn, did the opposite. Vatican II clearly brought the two, Word and sacrament, back together. In fact, in the reform of the liturgical rites of the church, Vatican II emphasized that the sacraments should never be celebrated apart from the Word of God. Word and sacrament are intimately bound together, and exercised together in the ministry of priests.

For its part, *PDV* calls priests to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, because of its preeminence, with full dignity and heartfelt effort. The document also calls special attention to the sacrament of reconciliation, which is as important for ourselves as for our people (26). In summarizing the ministry of sacrament, *PDV* says the following:

> It is above all in the celebration of the sacraments and in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours that the priest is called to live and witness to the deep unity between the exercise of his ministry and his spiritual life. The gift of grace offered to the Church becomes the principle of holiness and a call to sanctification. For the priest as well, the truly central place, both in his ministry and spiritual life, belongs to the Eucharist, since in it is contained "the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself our pasch and the living bread which gives life to men through his flesh—that flesh which is given life and gives life through the Holy Spirit. Thus people are invited and led to offer themselves, their works and all creation with Christ." (26)[5]

In short, the cultic ministry, traditionally identified with the "priestly" function of Christ, leads us to exercise our role as mediators between God and humanity in a most incarnational way. By means of the sacraments, we bring God closer to the people and vice versa.

Ministry of Pastoral Charity

The third pastoral role priests play is perhaps the most dramatically reoriented in *PDV*. Although the traditional Latin expression is invoked (*munus regendi*, "power of governance"; *PDV*, 26), it is described as

"pastoral charity." The document calls it "a very delicate and complex duty" that should be exercised by priests in the manner of true elders (presbyters, from the Greek *presbyteroi*) in the community.[6] This is striking precisely because it does not evoke the image of the king, the ruler, the legislator, or the law-enforcer. Indeed, the text goes on to list essential pastoral qualities for priests with these words:

> This ministry demands of the priest an intense spiritual life, filled with those qualities and virtues which are typical of a person who "presides over" and "leads" a community, of an "elder" in the noblest and richest sense of the word: qualities and virtues such as faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, a welcoming spirit, friendliness, goodness of heart, decisive firmness in essentials, freedom from overly subjective viewpoints, personal disinterestedness, patience, an enthusiasm for daily tasks, confidence in the value of the hidden workings of grace as manifested in the simple and the poor (cf. Ti. 1:7-8). (*PDV*, 26)

To say the least, the list is daunting. Who of us really embodies all of these qualities? Nonetheless, in providing an ideal to strive after, *PDV* has given a rich interpretation to the traditional "ruling" ministry of priests in service to the people of God. The priority is exercising pastoral charity and not "lording" over people, which is exactly what Jesus asked his disciples to avoid (Matt 20:25-26; Mark 10:42-44; Luke 22:25-26).

Finally, *PDV* notes the complexity of this third *munus*:

> This *munus regendi* represents a very delicate and complex duty which, in addition to the attention which must be given to a variety of persons and their vocations, also involves the ability to coordinate all the gifts and charisms which the Spirit inspires in the community, to discern them and to put them to good use for the upbuilding of the Church in constant union with the bishops. (26)

This third power, then, is truly an exercise in pastoral charity in the sense of trying to bring all the people of God together for the good of the community.

The Four Pillars of Formation

Having examined three key elements of *PDV*, along with the three *munera*, we now turn to its most prominent teaching, namely, the four pillars of priestly formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. It has become so commonplace to speak of these four pillars that we may

not be conscious of just how novel this structure is, for two reasons.[7] First, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first time in an official church document that human formation has been formally acknowledged as foundational. We shall comment on this in a moment. Second, acknowledging that there are four pillars of formation, covering four essential aspects of contemporary priestly ministry, means that they cannot be reduced to one. All four are important to achieve balance, unity, and perspective in priestly formation.

Human Formation: The Basis of All Priestly Formation

Previous church documents speak frequently of spiritual formation of priests. That was clearly also on the mind of Pope Benedict XVI when he proposed an *annus sacerdotalis*, a "Year for Priests." He wanted to bolster the priesthood and lend support to priests while also calling us to a deeply spiritual renewal.

In light of this, what are we to make of *PDV*'s bold statement that human formation is "the basis of all priestly formation" (43)? If we pause to reflect carefully, we find a profound wisdom in this document's perspective. It is deeply incarnational. It takes seriously God's work through human instruments. Without the proper human qualities *PDV* calls for—integrity, affective maturity, knowledge of the human soul, capacity to relate to others—priests can become mere automatons, mechanically performing rites for people but not really communicating the love of Christ in any meaningful way. More important, without good human formation the other three pillars cannot root themselves adequately or bear proper fruit.

In my years as a formator in seminaries, I found concrete evidence of this assertion among seminarians whom I taught and for whom I was either a formation advisor or spiritual director. If a seminarian has many or deep human deficits, such as an insecure identity or a lack of psychosexual maturity, he cannot take full advantage of spiritual growth, intellectual stimulation, or pastoral training. Virtually all one's energy goes into trying to address the basic human issues that sometimes are overwhelming. Unfortunately, such deficiencies, if left unaddressed, will manifest themselves in later ministry. In light of the sexual abuse scandal, we now can also see the wisdom of serious scrutiny in the admissions process for seminarians. The proper use of psychological testing, personal interviews, and teams of admissions personnel help to foster the proper discernment of a candidate's readiness for priestly formation.[8] All this is an aspect of the first pillar, human formation, but it is also a

demand for the mature integration of all aspects of human growth, which begin with basic human qualities. This is precisely why the 1990 synod fathers insisted, "The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation" (*PDV*, 43).

The first pillar of human formation, then, provides a solid foundation, but it is not the only one. Three others remain to ensure a well-rounded priestly formation and identity. The remaining three pillars of priestly formation—spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—are treated in *PDV* in ways that are fairly consistent with many prior church documents on priestly formation. Yet we can take a brief look at each of these pillars to see how they are intended to form a unified approach to priestly ministry and life.

Spiritual Formation

Without a healthy personal spiritual life and an intense life of prayer, priests obviously lose their way. One of the common denominators in the lives of priests who have wandered from their promises of celibacy, obedience, and simplicity of life is the lack of a deep life of prayer. Fostering a personal relationship with Christ is absolutely essential. *PDV* calls it "living intimately united" with Jesus Christ (46), and speaks of developing "a deep intimacy with God" (47). Using an image from John's gospel, *PDV* explains this intimacy in these words:

> Our union with the Lord Jesus, which has its roots in baptism and is nourished with the Eucharist, has to express itself and be radically renewed each day. Intimate communion with the Blessed Trinity, that is, the new life of grace which makes us children of God, constitutes the "novelty" of the believer, a novelty which involves both his being and his acting. It constitutes the "mystery" of Christian existence which is under the influence of the Spirit: it should, as a result, constitute the ethos of Christian living. Jesus has taught us this marvelous reality of Christian living, which is also the heart of spiritual life, with his allegory of the vine and the branches: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. . . . Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:1, 4-5). (46)

Without this profound spiritual relationship with Christ, which finds its concrete expression in periodic silence, *lectio divina*, daily Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, days of recollection, meditation and contemplation, and a variety of spiritual exercises, priests can quickly become burnt out. At the same time, *PDV* notes that this intense personal spiritual life rightly leads us into the pastoral arena:

> Spiritual formation also involves seeking Christ in people. The spiritual life is, indeed, an interior life, a life of intimacy with God, a life of prayer and contemplation. But this very meeting with God and with his fatherly love for everyone brings us face to face with the need to meet our neighbor, to give ourselves to others, to serve in a humble and disinterested fashion, following the example which Jesus has proposed to everyone as a program of life when he washed the feet of the apostles: "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:15). (49)

Intellectual Formation

PDV also notes the important role of intellectual formation. Faith is not merely a matter of prayerful, mystical, or cultic experience. Faith also demands the exercise of our minds to comprehend the mystery of God. The ancient dictum of *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking knowledge") applies especially to us priests. Essentially, *PDV* calls priests to become "pastoral theologians." We cannot nourish our people with pious platitudes, especially in our time when so many laity are well read and educated. They also seek guidance to serious theological, ethical, and pastoral questions that require some intellectual rigor. *PDV* describes this type of priestly theologian:

> The theologian is therefore, first and foremost, a believer, a person of faith. But the theologian is a believer who asks himself questions about his own faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*), with the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of the faith itself. (58)

The text goes on to warn of the danger of ignoring the importance of intellectual formation, something that at times is a temptation for seminarians and priests alike.

> It is necessary to oppose firmly the tendency to play down the seriousness of studies and the commitment to them. This tendency is showing

> itself in certain spheres of the Church, also as a consequence of the insufficient and defective basic education of students beginning the philosophical and theological curriculum. The very situation of the Church today demands increasingly that teachers be truly able to face the complexity of the times and that they be in a position to face competently, with clarity and deep reasoning, the questions about meaning which are put by the people of today, questions which can only receive full and definitive reply in the gospel of Jesus Christ. (56)

This is essentially a call to academic rigor in relation to a spiritual depth essential to live the celibate life of a priest.[9] The blend of the man of prayer, a believer, as well as one who struggles to understand the truths of the faith in all their complexity, in order to communicate them faithfully, is exactly the kind of priest needed today, especially in the context of the pluralism that characterizes modern society. It is easy to think that, from the viewpoint of overwhelming pastoral needs, priests don't have time to attend to ongoing intellectual formation, but not addressing this urgent need impoverishes priestly ministry and ultimately leads to an empty arsenal of pastoral insight to sustain ministry.

Pastoral Formation

The fourth and final pillar is, in a sense, where all four get integrated, namely, pastoral formation. This is one area that seminary teachers generally find easy to promote among seminarians. Indeed, one of the more successful elements of priestly formation since Vatican II has been the introduction in many seminary programs of the "pastoral year," a year of formation taken in a pastoral assignment apart from the seminary and under the supervision of trained guides and local mentors. This is one way in which seminarians can experience firsthand pastoral ministry. This year can also help a diocese and a seminary faculty determine the readiness and capacity for priestly ministry of an individual candidate. Seminarians usually revel in their pastoral placements, enjoying the concrete experience of ministry; and they are rewarded often with the support of people who affirm them and encourage their vocation. This is the arena where the future priests' human identity, experience in prayer and liturgy, intellectual acumen in philosophy and theology and the Word of God, and pastoral skills should all intertwine. I dare say also that this is the most fulfilling arena for priests personally. After all, the primary reason most of us accept this special vocational call is to serve God by serving God's people.

PDV, however, also emphasizes an interesting aspect of pastoral formation that should not be passed over lightly. In pastoral ministry seminarians learn to become "men of communion." Priests are by nature men of communion, men of the church. The message we proclaim is not our own, and the ministry in which we engage is shared with others. It is a free gift of God, not something we alone choose. We join a presbyterate, a group of priests working together in ministry and united with our bishop, and we exercise a collegial ministry with other ministers in the church, especially with deacons and lay ministers. All are part of the priestly people of God, and our priestly ministry is a sharing in this identity. Priesthood is not a license for personal employment. It is a vocation, a call issued by God, discerned by the church, and exercised for the good of God's people.

The task of integrating all four pillars of priestly formation is not easy. *PDV* offers no magical formula for integration and success. We priests know well our shortcomings and our failures. Experientially, many dioceses and seminaries have found that mentoring is one way to promote an effective and healthy integration of all the elements of priestly formation.[10] Pairing experienced pastors with newly ordained (regardless of their ages) can be an effective means of promoting integration while simultaneously fostering group identity. This is one way in which the ministry of presbyters, true "elders" in the community, can pass on their wisdom to succeeding generations.

Ongoing Applicability of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*

This analysis is not intended to be comprehensive but to provide an orientation or general overview of some key aspects of priestly ministry today that will be treated in this book. *PDV*'s relevance not only to priestly formation but also to priestly ministry and life should not be underestimated. *PDV* is a novel and important document. It is not merely a guide for priestly formation. It is virtually a treatise on the mystery of priestly identity. As such, I regularly recommend it to priests as a text to read during their retreats.

As Pope Benedict himself has acknowledged, the priesthood has gone through some rough times of late. Some of our brother priests (and bishops) have let the church down. They have seriously strayed from their priestly promises. As in the time of Jeremiah, some, who were supposed to be shepherds taking care of the flock, have been fleecing them instead. I once heard a layperson comment on a priest who had sexually

abused: "This was no wolf in sheep's clothing; this was a wolf disguised as a shepherd!" No judgment could be more devastating or more revealing of the need for a true renewal in the priesthood to reestablish priests as faithful shepherds, modeled after the Good Shepherd himself.

Most priests and bishops have, thank God, been faithful to their calling. The Year for Priests in 2009–2010 was a great opportunity to rejoice in this fidelity. It also offered us priests a chance to deepen our reflection on the priesthood. And it gave the people of God a chance to honor those priests who have been faithful to their ordination promises and who have so faithfully served over the years in pastoral ministry. But that year was only a beginning. There remains much more to be done. Ultimately, the priesthood is a *lived* ministry, day in and day out on the "front lines" of the church's pastoral vocation to serve others as Christ has served all. We are called to follow Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, and to mold our lives according to his life. Shepherding God's people is both a privilege and an enormous responsibility. In *PDV* we have a sophisticated analysis of the challenges in priestly formation and ministry today that tries to flesh out the multiple dimensions of this call. In short, I suggest that this profound document invites us to incarnate in an ever-deepening way the identity of the one and only true priest, the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ.