

***In persona Christi* is not the same as *in persona Jesu*. If the individual presiding at the Eucharist is acting *in persona Christi* (or as an *alter Christus*), rather than *in persona Jesu*, why is it necessary for the presider to bear a physical resemblance to the earthly Jesus?**

**The risen Christ transcends east and west, slave and free, male and female. The role of an *alter Christus* must do likewise.**

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**I am sure that by editing this document I have not done it full justice. It is available in its entirety at <http://www.pretresmaries.eu/>. It is attributed to J. Mulrooney and M. Hyland.**

### **Unity in diversity**

The promulgation of *Anglicanorum Coetibus* on the 9 November 2009 poses a question to the European Federation of Roman Catholic Married Priests – a glimmer of hope or a retrograde step?

The European Federation is a union of groupings of Roman Catholic married priests from Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Austria and the United Kingdom. Hence there is a variety of cultures and social contexts. There are also links with other Federations of Roman Catholic married priests. In no way can there be a unanimous point of view on every minute theological detail or, indeed, on all matters of praxis and strategy. The history of the movement evidences a long period of reflection, tensions and often passionately held differences. Out of that the following voice of unity emerges, much of which is at odds with the contents of *Anglicanorum Coetibus*. In addition to uniting support groups for Roman Catholic married priests and their families, when confronted with the ever growing crisis of the dearth of ‘male, celibate, clerical’ candidates for the office of priesthood, the Federation speaks out strongly against the obligatory law of celibacy and, positively, focuses on the community base which should be the nursery for supplying candidates for priestly office. It wishes to shift the emphasis from a focus on one particular type of ministry to a re-examination of the plurality of baptism based ministries in the service of the people of God. On the principle that justice cannot be divided, their reflections on the Gospel principles of truth and justice have led them to take aboard all forms of discrimination both in society and especially internally in the church. Discrimination against the laity and, in particular, against women is to the fore.

It might be thought that Rome’s response to the petition of groups of Anglicans to be received “into full Catholic communion individually as well as corporately” and the setting up of “personal ordinariates” for those who wish to enter in a corporate manner, following the reception of other Anglican married priests over the past number of years, might suggest a glimmer of hope at least as a gradual move to change the obligatory law of celibacy. A close reading of this brief document *Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus* suggests rather that this is a retrograde step on so many fronts: the obligatory law of celibacy, ecumenical endeavours, the attempts to move to a more collegial, transparent and democratic exercise of pastoral office in the church.

... It is never mentioned that the petitioners are from a traditional wing of the Anglican Church (if we may be allowed to use that language) who find themselves at odds with what might be termed the more liberalising tendencies in the Anglican Communion. Individuals or groups for that matter, making an option for change on positive grounds is one thing – moving over, not as a move towards, but as flight from is another matter. The opening words of the Constitution attributes that petition to the movement of the Holy Spirit: “In recent times the Holy Spirit has moved groups of Anglicans to petition repeatedly...” These words seem to jar with the Gospel of John 3:8: “The wind blows where it wills; you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born from the Spirit”. This play on the Greek word ‘pneuma’ (wind/spirit) at least raises the question, ‘Could that same Spirit be animating those Anglican groups who are endeavouring to grow in dialogue, not only with their past tradition, but with their contemporary situation in a very different social and cultural context?’ Rome seems to be attributing to the voice of the Spirit what it actually wants to hear and one remembers the attempts to bring into unity similar ‘right wing’ groups in the Roman church, such as the Lefebvre group, Pius the X liturgical groups and others. What are the criteria for discernment? Again what is not said is interesting. In a document which amply cross references Vatican II no mention is made of the primacy of conscience. That might make us think of such groupings in the Roman Catholic Church as *The European Federation of Married Priests, We are Church* and many other networks, which have remained loyal members of the Church and are fighting their corner, pushing for dialogue and openness over against a very traditionalist church institution.

Before moving to the ecclesiological principles it is worth noting how language can be a great revealer or betrayer. The personal ordinariates are for those who are entering into full communion with the *Catholic Church*. The Anglicans would certainly already see themselves as catholic, as a branch of the universal Catholic Church – the root meaning of the word catholic being universal. ...

The regulations which are based on such unecumenical and undemocratic principles are not surprising. There are a great many unanswered questions in these scant regulations. The following are the trenchant points:

Each ordinariate is juridically comparable to a diocese, though without geographical boundaries, but what is the extent of such and how would it work? ...

Certainly such ordinariates can maintain their own liturgical traditions. For how long under such strict controls and in an institution where everything liturgical right down to having girls as altar servers has to be referred to Rome and where there is current unrest about the imposition of a new form of Eucharistic text in Latinised English? ...

In spite of the Anglican tradition of a house of the laity as part of governance the only governing body mentioned is to consist of at least six priests. There is no mention of the laity and would that be possible if they are held to all the obligations of the Code of Canon law? In that code all lay councils are advisory only. Standard practice in most of the Church of England is that the laity has a deliberative voice and bishops are elected by clergy and laity.

“Those who ministered as Anglican deacons, priests or bishops may be accepted by the Ordinary as candidates for Holy Orders in the Catholic Church”. That is, they do not come over as ordained priests in their communities but only as candidates. Anglican orders are still being treated as invalid. Bishops who are married may be ordained as priests but, in spite of some peculiar honorary arrangements will not be able to function as bishops. ...

The simple answer to the original question in the title of this reflection would seem to be in the negative. There is little of hope in the document or in the way in which it was launched which would raise our expectations about ecumenism, about the abolition of the obligatory law of celibacy, about the cessation of discrimination, especially against women, or about the moves to a more decentralised, democratic and responsible exercise of the pastoral ministry in the church of Rome. ...

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**Robert Marquand, staff writer for *The Christian Science Monitor*, writes from Munich and Tübingen about Pope Benedict's agenda for the Church.**

### **Pope Benedict XVI's 30-year campaign to reassert conservative Catholicism**

In the past 30 years, the Vatican has moved strongly to reassert the authority of a traditional, even orthodox Roman Catholicism – to bring the notion of a "one true church" to Europe and then the larger world. The intent was to reverse the "open" or liberalizing trend of the church represented by Vatican II.

In the past three decades, the Vatican has cracked down on liberation theology, affirmed traditional sexual morality, and is now quietly supporting ultradevout Catholic groups such as Opus Dei and the Legions of Christ – while curbing ecumenical outreach and describing Protestant churches as not authentic.

The most constant, diligent, and serious champion of these moves is a shy but brilliant German theologian, Josef Ratzinger – now Pope Benedict XVI.

... To understand Pope Benedict's past, present, and perhaps future responses to the sexual abuse crisis, one must examine the arc of his religious life.

... "The world is evil and the church is pure," says an Austrian church official. "This is serious for Benedict. He doesn't want the church to be a joke. He's suspicious of chaos and avoidance of discipline and order, and of human efforts to adopt popular culture and create church out of the world, instead of a church that transforms the world. This deeply upsets him. He sees all salvation taking place inside the Catholic Church. He believes that."

Yet ironically, child abuse has arguably brought greater disorder than the ferment of Vatican II in the late 1960s. This spring, the pope described pedophilia as "the petty gossip of dominant opinion" before shifting 180 degrees and asking contrition from St. Peter's Basilica on June 11: "We ... insistently beg forgiveness from God and from the persons involved, while promising to do everything possible to ensure that such abuse will never occur again."

Ratzinger was not always seen as the conservative enforcer of Catholic doctrine. In 1965, the arrival of Ratzinger to the theology faculty at Tübingen brought a stir of anticipation. Ratzinger's bestselling "Introduction to Christianity" seemed a new impulse for democracy and freedom. The school had a joint Protestant-Catholic faculty. Change was in the air. Ratzinger was brought in by Hans Küng, a progressive young Swiss lion of Vatican II; for a time, it looked as if the two men were at the start of a beautiful friendship.

Nazism and the war had disturbed young German Catholics who were suspicious of absolute ideology. Vatican II appeared to "open" the church and allow dialogue and airing of views without fear of ecclesiastical reprisal. At Tübingen, Protestants partook of Catholic learning; Catholics learned Protestant concepts of scriptural interpretation and subjective ideas about spirituality from the teachings of Swiss theologian Karl Barth and German theologian Rudolph Bultmann.

Yet Ratzinger's first lecture to the joint faculty, an important tradition for new professors, was surprising. He spoke on "The significance of the church fathers for Christianity." Mr. Küng was "a little shocked," says Professor Häring. "Ratzinger was saying the basis of true theology was not the Bible, but the Bible as interpreted by five centuries of church fathers. He was basically telling the Protestant faculty, 'Get lost.' He was saying you must return to Greek theology ... to Hellenism."

The student protest marches at Tübingen in the '60s were a watershed for Ratzinger, moving him toward conservatism. He departed to a quiet Bavarian college. He wrote against democracy in the church, berated the influence of Marxism, and criticized what he called "the dictatorship of relativism." He disliked the language of individualism, of crisis of faith, the search for freedom and meaning, and existential moments. "He saw it as individuals separated from the collective institution of church, where salvation and meaning are found. In service to the true church, one found a new life," says Professor Kuschel.

In 1977, Ratzinger became archbishop of Munich and Freising. Former Jesuit Paul Imhoff remembers Ratzinger as absorbed in medieval Catholicism. Mr. Imhoff, who was ordained by Ratzinger before leaving the church to marry a theology student, went to a "professors' carnival" with him. "We had jokes, dancing, harmless fun ... Ratzinger was charming. But the whole time he spoke about restoring the old Europe ... where the church takes precedence over the state."

Pedophilia cases started mounting in Vatican files in the 1980s. But now, as head of church discipline, Ratzinger was primarily focused on silencing priests or liberation theologians, such as the Brazilian Leonardo Boff, who tried to empower farmers and peasants. The 1990s brought strictures against abortion, gay rights, same-sex marriage, contraception, and promotion of abstinence and celibacy – just as US bishops were reporting hundreds of child abuse cases, but getting little clarity on how to handle them.

Most heads of the church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) serve two terms, or 10 years. Ratzinger served 24, then became pope.

... Today, after his 30-year quest to reshape the church, the sex scandal may be a sizable legacy. It is unclear where the pope is headed. In the past month, there's been some shift in

tone and attention. In late July the church extended to 20 years the period that victims' claims can be investigated. But the key question of whether offending priests should be reported to civil authorities is undecided in Rome.

Beyond his few pronouncements, the pope's views on the sex scandal are an enigma. Vatican sources say the pontiff spends time writing books and only sees two church officials regularly. "Even bishops now wait two weeks or more for a meeting," says a church official who is concerned about the pope's isolation.

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**From the *Media Matters for America* Web site, the following article addresses a local concern that has attracted international attention.**

### **Media Matters: Of mosques and mendacity**

If you've followed the conservative media over the past few weeks, you can be forgiven for thinking that it's a tough time for white Christians in America right now, what with the New Black Panthers denying white people their voting rights and undocumented workers clogging up our civic machinery with "anchor babies." The message coming from Fox News and some of the more determined attention-seekers on the right is that we're in a battle for white America's Jesus-worshiping soul, beset as it is by immigrants and black USDA officials and, perhaps most threateningly, Muslims.

The New York City landmarks commission decided this week to act in the interest of New Yorkers rather than out-of-state conservative pundits and voted to clear the way for the construction of an Islamic center in lower Manhattan, a few blocks from the site where the World Trade Center once stood. This was unacceptable to said pundits, who insisted that this site of America's mourning should be exempted from American values. "We're all about religious freedom," explained Sarah Palin, but only "down the road." Newt Gingrich announced, "I favor religious freedom," but not "right at the edge of a place where, let's be clear, thousands of Americans were killed in an attack by radical Islamists."

The argument from the right is relatively straightforward -- Muslim terrorists destroyed the Twin Towers, therefore we should ban all things Muslim from the area, in the interest of healing and sympathy (although, as Salon noted, they were curiously silent when Muslims began praying in the Pentagon shortly after 9-11). That argument necessarily holds *all* Muslims accountable for the detestable acts of the small and violent minority of Muslims who take up the terrorist mantle. On its own, that would be offensive enough, but people like Palin and Gingrich purport to be sensitive to that distinction and nonetheless run roughshod over it. Palin famously took to her Twitter account to exhort "peaceful Muslims" to "refudiate" the Islamic center. Gingrich acknowledged the differences between "radical Islamists" and other Muslims before launching into an unhinged attack on the "Ground Zero mosque" and "Creeping Sharia in the United States."

Others simply can't be bothered to even pretend to understand that "Muslim" does not equal "terrorist." A "recruiting tool for domestic extremists" was how Rush Limbaugh described the Islamic center. Glenn Beck called it an "Allah tells me to blow up America mosque."

Comments like these badly mischaracterize what the "Ground Zero mosque" actually is and the role it will play in America's unsettled relationship with the Muslim world.

The people behind the mosque are Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and his wife, Daisy Khan, and contrary to what the right wing would have you believe, *Time* magazine says they're "actually the kind of Muslim leaders right-wing commentators fantasize about: modernists and moderates who openly condemn the death cult of al-Qaeda and its adherents." Rauf has written a book titled *What's Right with Islam Is What's Right with America*. In late 2001, after the 9-11 attacks, Rauf was quoted in New Jersey's *Bergen County Record* as saying that Islam must "define its 'American-ness,' that is, adapt to the American culture." *The Atlantic's* Jeffrey Goldberg, who knows Rauf, describes him as representing "what Bin Laden fears most: a Muslim who believes that it is possible to remain true to the values of Islam and, at the same time, to be a loyal citizen of a Western, non-Muslim country."

That message, however, is unimportant to right-wingers who are more interested in turning the "Ground Zero mosque" into a wedge issue and stoking Islamophobia for political benefit. The tragic farce of it all, as described by *Slate's* William Saletan, is that people like Palin and Gingrich, who purport to be standing up against terror and for America, are actually promulgating the same message as Osama bin Laden -- that "the United States represents Christianity, al-Qaida represents Muslims, Christians won't protect Muslims, the West hates mosques, peaceful coexistence is a fraud, and the 'war on terrorism' is really a war on Islam." It's hard to argue with that assessment when you hear the likes of Limbaugh claiming that the "Ground Zero mosque" means Muslims are "planting the flag of victory." Jonathan Chait surveyed the right-wing opposition to the mosque and concluded that "a lot of people are going to eventually feel ashamed about where they stood." That might be true, but all signs seem to indicate that these people are about as familiar with the concept of shame as they are with religious freedom.

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**To see the rest of the following article by A.W. Richard Sipe, and the links to the sources cited herein, go to <http://ncronline.org/blogs/examining-the-crisis>. This article was published by *The National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company*.**

### **Did Belgium get it right?**

When Belgium authorities moved in on the offices of the Roman Catholic church to obtain documents did they do the correct thing? The world press recorded the operation on June 26. In an unprecedented move, Belgian police authorities raided the offices, private residences, and the graves of Belgian Catholic church officials who may be linked to the ongoing sexual abuse scandal.

Should civil authorities in the United States be more aggressive in pursuing church records and documents about sexual abusing clergy and Catholic bishops who support them? While the legal dimensions of the question are out of my ken, I am aware that the Belgium judge authorized search warrants based on factual evidence. Others can speak about the law. My perspective is different.

I do not ask that question easily or without experience with the maneuvers bishops in the

United States have used over the past two decades to avoid accountability in face of widespread allegations and proof of sexual abuse of minors by clergy.

American bishops have implemented positive protective procedures in their hiring practices; they have instituted good educational initiatives. At the same time most have done everything possible to impede investigations, withhold documents and obstruct justice for the victims of sexual crimes by priests and themselves. They have used every method conceivable to avoid responsibility for crimes; some procedures are within legal limits and others questionable, unthinkable or indefensible, including intimidation, destruction of documents, evasion, deception, and obfuscation of the truth.

Grand juries that have been convened to look at how diocese handled sex abuse cases have all come to conclusions remarkably similar to the grand jury in Rockville Centre, N.Y.: "The grand jury does not believe that the diocese ... has the demonstrated capability to properly handle the issues of clergy sexual abuse." And further, "the conduct of certain diocesan officials would have warranted criminal prosecution but for the fact that the existing statutes are inadequate." Many U.S. priests have escaped prison for their crimes simply because they are clergy and as a result of inadequate statutes of limitation laws.

... Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston and Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia were both saved from criminal indictment by technical limitations of the existing legal codes (i.e. need to prove criminal intent or statutes of limitation) not for lack of probable cause. The attorneys general of New Hampshire and Phoenix made special accommodations to save bishops McCormack and O'Brien from criminal indictment.

Even the depositions of bishops and cardinals taken under oath demonstrate repeated questionable testimony. So far none have been cited for perjury. "Why not?" is a question yet to be addressed.

Let me put it as clearly as I can from my layman's understanding -- many bishops and cardinals have appeared to lie.

Some lies I have witnessed with my own ears and eyes; other discrepancies I discover in the transcriptions of clergy depositions. Let me say it again: according to documents and records in American cases of clergy abuse many bishops and cardinals have appeared to lie. The Belgium authorities were seeking documents because they could not trust the veracity or openness of church authority.

Under certain pressure and in defense of the church's image, bishops can become frankly untruthful. It is not merely a tactic; it is a cultural code. An auxiliary bishop of Baltimore provided the most striking example when he said in defense a clear prevarication, "I only lie when I have to." That was in 1994. When I told the story to a chancery staff member from the St. Paul archdiocese, she said that she had heard the exact words from her boss then vicar general.

Stereotyped responses in depositions and even in court trials deny knowledge and defy credibility: a frequent flat denial is "I don't remember." "I have no memory of that" "I can't recall" "I'm not aware" may be justifiable mental reservations in the judgment of clerics.

The available depositions of Cardinal Law and in particular the 2004 and 2010 depositions of Cardinal Mahony are remarkable examples of what a layperson would call "lying." Mahony denied any knowledge of instances of abuse in a previous deposition and on the witness stand in a court trial. But in 2004 his testimony was reviewed and he was confronted with copies of letters he wrote and signed that proved what he said under previous oath was not true. His only self-defense and explanation of the discrepancy between his under-oath testimony and the documents was that he must have "forgotten" because he was "busy" at the time of his deposition and court trial with an upcoming visit by the pope.

... Even worse examples of ecclesiastical value discordance exist when the speed of bishops' actions in censuring a priest for liturgical deviance (or similar infraction) contrast with the lethargic and resistive response to reports of abuse. One prime case in my experience was that of Eusebius Beltrand, archbishop in Oklahoma, who responded immediately via a stern letter to a parishioner's complaint that pastor Fr. James Rapp of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales had violated some rubrical nicety at the same time he ignored (until forced by parental report to the police) the priest's abusive behavior. The archbishop knew Rapp's previous abuse history when he accepted him into the diocese, but waged years-long legal fight against responsibility. Are too many hours, vast amounts of lawyer-labor and church resources wasted on protecting possibly incriminating documents and guilty churchmen?

The Belgium maneuver of civil authorities seizing documents and probing graves to obtain proof of abuse blasts previously unthinkable questions into American Catholic consciousness: would children be better protected, would the real interests of the Catholic community be better served, would justice be better accomplished if civil authorities treated bishops and priests with less deference? Should Mafia-like behavior by bishops and priests be viewed as "organized crime" rather than peccadilloes best tended to within the clerical brotherhood? Even as recently as 2010 Cardinal Mahony counseled his priests that clergy abuse is a "family problem" and should be treated as such.

... The traditional ecclesial value system is distorted and inadequate to meet current pressures and needs. Values are exposed as bishops respond to revelations of abuse and scheme to fight discovery of facts. The primary clerical value is the avoidance of scandal -- preserving *bella figura* in Vatican terms. What historian Richard Trexler notes of the 14th to 16th century hierarchy of values still holds true: clerical secret sexual transgressions even fornication were "infinitely preferable to those types liable to have public repercussions." Above all there is a desire to avoid scandal. "Scandal, after all, was what compromised the organizational priest's ability to function."

... Secrecy, resistance, intimidation and religious duress have not served church or society well. The Catholic church is not struggling effectively against a systemic cancer that is eating at it from the inside. Does the U.S. Catholic church need the kind of intervention that Belgium civil authorities are willing to institute?

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**John Shelby Spong addresses the subject of prayer from his theological perspective.**

... the way one thinks about prayer is determined almost 100% by how one understands the meaning of God. For most people, God is an external, supernatural presence, who can come to our aid, setting aside the laws of the universe to accomplish a divinely inspired purpose. It is that concept of God which, I believe, distorts human life again and again. That understanding presents us with a parent God who keeps us in the status of being perpetual, spiritual children. This is also an immoral God who has the power to influence events in the world and yet seldom uses it. This is a God who had the power to stop tragedy, but instead allows such things as the Holocaust, the Bubonic Plague, the devastation of hurricanes and Tsunamis and who even is said to use sickness to punish sinners. That definition of God results in a chaotic world run by a capricious, but not necessarily a loving, deity. I believe that this God has died in light of a new understanding of the universe brought about by Galileo and by our understanding of how the universe operates developed for us by Isaac Newton, Louis Pasteur and many others. That idea of God is little more than a wish fulfillment deity, a supernatural being who lives above the sky ready to spring into action whenever we ask this God to do so. Such a God definition is no longer viable or believable. I do not believe in a God who will plug the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico in response to our prayers.

For many people, this recognition represents the end of religion. If the supernatural deity cannot come to our aid then why should we bother with religion at all? For me, however, this is nothing more than the recognition that we must find a new way to think about God and thus a new understanding of what it means to pray. To chart that new possibility is a major piece of why I wrote *Eternal Life: A New Vision*. It also requires a new Christology, which I sought to develop in my book, *Jesus for the Non-Religious*.

To say it briefly, prayer becomes something you are, not something you do. Your life and consciousness become the channel through which the meaning of God flows into human life. Prayer becomes the activity of opening your life to this deeper presence, this transcendent power we call God. Petition becomes the way you share life and love with others. Intercession becomes your willingness to be involved in causes of justice that help to build a world in which all people can live fully, love wastefully and be all they can be. Thanksgiving becomes the constant awareness of the way God changes lives. Meditation and contemplation become the means of spiritual growth and the development of a God consciousness and the praying person becomes deeply aware that God works through his or her life constantly. I think it is a beautiful vision. I am still living into it.

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**The following article appeared in the August edition of *U.S. Catholic*. The author, Peter Feureherd, is a writer from Rego Park, New York. I found the most profound statement made in the article to be one by Mike Bennet, when he said, "As I've gotten older, I've figured out I don't have anything figured out. It's not as cut-and-dry as it once was." To many, it appears that a church that claims to have everything figured out may not have matured yet. Offered with apologies to those too young to understand.**

**The spiritual side of getting older**

The signs are plentiful. You begin to pay attention to those drug ads on the evening newscasts promising relief from ailments you didn't even know existed. The first snows of winter used to beckon with joy; now they are seen as a harbinger of icy falls and reasons to move to Florida. You walk into a room and nervously wonder why you went there in the first place.

Aging. In a go-get-'em, hyper world, it is a dreaded companion, a sign of inevitable decline and, eventually, death.

Yet what the world sees as an ending can be a renewed beginning in exploring the spiritual life.

Benedictine Sister Suzanne Zuercher, 77, a Chicago-based author and spiritual counselor, notes that those eligible for AARP membership are frequently able to emerge from setbacks into the sunlight of a more rooted spiritual life—that is, if they have taken the opportunity to learn from experience, an attribute that maturity offers in abundance.

"Our life changes in many ways," she says about the process of aging. "We've built up lots of experiences. We've fallen down and gotten up many, many times. We develop a wisdom as life goes on."

Zuercher worked as a teacher - from elementary school to graduate school - a school administrator, a psychologist, and an expert on the enneagram and other spiritual systems. Aging for her has meant giving up many high-prestige positions, a familiar routine of maturity.

The aging process is often a series of giving up the familiar, sometimes at great emotional cost. For many that can include moving from a large house where one's family was raised to a small condo, prized for its practicality. A once-supple body begins to take odd shapes. A large professional salary dwindles into a subsistence retirement pension. But there is wisdom to be earned in the process of giving up, says Zuercher.

"The only way to know enough is enough is to know how much is too much," she says. The accumulation of the middle years, whether collected through professional status or material goods, can take our eyes off the prize of spiritual serenity.

"God is the worst thief" This process of letting go, says Jesuit Father William Scanlon, 68, is what he calls a "theology of diminishment." As chaplain of his community's Murray-Weigel Hall in the Bronx, a facility for mostly elderly Jesuits experiencing illness, he has regularly accompanied and prayed with the ill and dying.

"Our guys have to cope with the loss of stuff," he says. For Jesuits, who take a vow of poverty, that usually does not mean the surrender of material goods. It means the gradual losses as life declines, often the impairment of sight, hearing, and mobility.

"A prayer of surrender is the most effective prayer for our guys," says Scanlon. It is, he says, coming to realize that "God is the worst thief you will ever meet. He not only takes your money, he takes your eyes, your breath. The question is, 'How do we cooperate with that?' "

A nun once told him that the long process of decline "is the only way God can get us to experience raw trust, like Jesus did on the cross."

That sense of loss begins well before the end stages of dying, he notes. It often begins at the time a Jesuit is brought to Murray-Weigel Hall after having to leave an active ministry of teaching or pastoral work.

"We don't have wives and children. We have apostolates," says Scanlon. "When we lose that, we sometimes lose our identity." Yet there are other compensations. For one thing, there can be more patience with relationships. Meal conversations at Murray-Weigel can linger for hours, as the residents have the time to share stories and insights.

While our bodies can decline, a spiritually healthy mature person compensates via a deepening of the inner experience.

Work, whether on the job or time devoted to a hobby, takes on a different dimension with aging. Climbing the corporate or professional ladder is a dream buried in the past. The hectic swirl of activities, whether driving kids to dance or soccer practices or running businesses or advancing professionally, also declines.

The youthful enterprise of multi-tasking is often beyond the abilities of older people, says Zuercher. Don't fret, she warns. The end result can be absorption on single items, done with care and concern. That reality, sometimes seen as a drawback of the aging process, actually mimics what mystics have talked about as a spiritual gift.

"You are focusing on the moment, which is the only thing we really have. The center of all spiritual life is living in the present," says Zuercher.

Catholics in their senior years note that the gift of spirituality doesn't just fall from the sky when they're eligible for Social Security and Medicare. They say that developing a sense of spirituality takes time and effort and must be nurtured throughout those busy middle years of climbing the ladder and raising families if it is to take hold later on. Catholics who have made the effort to nurture a spiritual life in their younger years have discovered a spiritual treasure chest as they move into their 60s and 70s and beyond.

Len Sclafani of Queens, New York is a retired New York City police officer and a permanent deacon for the Brooklyn diocese, where he spends much of his time in ministry to men, most of whom are in their maturing years.

"I began to learn in my late 30s how to have a relationship with God," he says. Now in his mid-60s, Sclafani finds that increasingly he has grown "in understanding of what Jesus means to me, that it's all about relationship."

Through his years in retreat work, he has become more aware that "the church is not God. God is God." While the church is one way many meet God, he believes that God is seeking to break through in all sorts of ways, if we are willing and able to see it. His retreat work is often focused on the power of relationships and how they can be like sacraments to locate a God who operates freely in this world.

He now reads scripture with a renewed focus on relationship. One of his favorite stories is Jesus on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-35, a tale of the resurrected Lord breaking bread with his disciples. Sclafani sees the story as a metaphor for older men seeking the spiritual life. They, like the disciples at Emmaus, meet the risen Lord in community. They cannot do it alone.

On the spiritual road, he says, men in particular need to be reminded of the need for companionship; while solitude is vital, few are able to thrive as hermits.

Mike Bennett, also active in men's ministry, has reached 60, but he finds himself still searching. He's found that the spiritual quest regularly draws him down paths he never expected.

At the time of our interview, he was preparing to leave a three-year stint with a renewal center in New Mexico, where he worked as a leader in men's spirituality. Where he will end up, he says, he is leaving up to God. As Bennett has moved toward Social Security age, maturity has not brought certitude or a defined life path.

"As I've gotten older, I've figured out I don't have anything figured out. It's not as cut-and-dry as it once was," he says.

His spiritual life has been galvanized by a number of experiences, including time spent in a charismatic community. More recently he was inspired by a Rites of Passage experience, a male spirituality movement spearheaded by Franciscan Father Richard Rohr. Bennett first experienced that movement back in 2001.

"It turned my spirituality upside down," he says. He retired from his job as a courier at Federal Express in Grand Island, Nebraska and moved to New Mexico with his wife to work in the men's spirituality movement full time. It was a painful move in many ways, as they left their adult children and grandchildren behind in Nebraska.

Like others who seek God in their later years, Bennett has discovered that more awareness has given him greater insight into a religious reality that transcends many of the rules and regulations he was raised with as a young Catholic.

"It opened my eyes to a bigger picture of God. I can't put him in a box. He's way too big for that," he says. For Bennett, God is seen as much in the pain of life and its uncertainties as in the joys. He spent much of the past three years visiting Juárez, Mexico, where Bennett says he has seen God's presence among the poor. As he moves into his 60s, a time often seen as a period of rootedness and looking backward, he has found his worldview transformed.

Spiritual writer and social justice advocate Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B., 72, notes in *The Gift of Years* (Bluebridge) that spiritual and emotional growth doesn't end as we grow older. It can even become more intense as it is leavened by experience.

While the media proclaims that life after 60 is a downward spiral, the reality is much more complex, she says. Some aging people do encounter sickness and disability. Yet, says Chittister, an American who reaches age 65 today, in previous generations a milestone

generally indicating approaching death and decline, can on average expect to become an octogenarian.

Because of improved health care, most people can expect that at least a quarter of their lifespan will be lived after eligibility for Social Security. Chittister emphasizes that life can be full with friends, family, and meaningful work and leisure well past 70. The irony is, she says, that our youth-oriented culture is graying, with older people making up a greater percentage of the general population.

"Every age has a purpose," says Chittister. "Every age has its meaning."

Getting some alone time While many will continue to enjoy the company of spouses, family, and friends in their mature years, a part of growing spiritually is to learn to be comfortable in solitude, says Zuercher.

"As you get older, your friends die, you are more and more alone, you have to be happy in your own company. You put more on inner resources," she says. Some struggle with the empty temptations of old age: Life for some, particularly those with money, can be filled with vacation trips, outings, and socials. Grandparents can become obsessed with grandchildren.

"That can be a very lovely thing," says Zuercher. "But it can be overdone. There's a bigger world than your grandchildren."

That solitude can result in a deeper prayer life. But it doesn't happen automatically as the years go by. The habit of prayerful solitude needs to be nurtured earlier in life, a time when many are pressed down by the weight of work activity.

When solitude is a friend in our crowded, hectic middle years, she says, it can be handled with more comfort when aging causes it to be more abundant.

"You are forced to be a pray-er as you grow older," says Zuercher. The alternative is increased anxiety as worries about ill health and death approach.

As friends die and one's health declines, she says that the Christian concept of eternity becomes more concrete to older people. In that process mature spiritual people may have to redefine what hope is, seeing it more as a present reality than as a vague dream about the future.

"Hope is not about the future. Hope is the absolute trust that there is life in the now," she says. An insight that, God willing, can compensate those who don't remember where they left their keys.

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### **A proposal for dealing with priest perpetrators**

By Mary Gail Frawley ODea

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/examining-crisis/proposal-dealing-priest-perpetrators>

About 5,000 priests and religious brothers have been identified as credibly accused of sexually violating minors. Most of these men were unavailable to criminal prosecution due

to statutes of limitation; some within the statutes are in prison. The rest are dead, have voluntarily left the priesthood, were laicized, are residing in religious communities with more or -- usually -- less appropriate supervision, or wait in limbo for the church to adjudicate their cases.

... It is understandable that victims and others want to see abusive priests taken from their lives. After all, these priests once tore from childhood and adolescence boys and girls whose pathways to spiritual, psychological, and relational growth were obstructed, often tragically, by the destructive aftermath of sexual violation. But, is removing a perpetrating priest from the priesthood the most healing and the safest move? Both pastoral and protective concerns suggest another option.

... A priest who loses his vocation, home, manner of dress, and circle of colleagues is at risk to regress and to re-abuse.

So what can we do with priests who have perpetrated? I suggest a Penance, Productivity, and Provisioning Program for these men.

**Penance:** Priests and religious credibly accused of sexual abuse, but not available to the criminal justice system, would be offered residence in a containment and healing center administered and secured by secular professionals. In return for continuation as a priest, these men would agree to live here for the remainder of their lives. They could not leave the center without a security guard accompanying them. There would be no TVs, computers, or phones in their rooms and reading material, like magazines, would be screened to prevent pornography from entering the centers. Each man would work with a therapist and/or spiritual director to develop an individual penance program, including prayer. Residents would turn over their assets, retirement funding or salaries to the centers to defray the costs of their care.

**Productivity:** Residents would be expected to be productive, and this too could be individualized. Baking bread, tilling the soil, candle making and other crafts, teaching other residents are all possibilities. Some could generate income to help sustain the centers at less cost to Catholics. In addition, residents could make themselves available to researchers seeking to learn more about commonalities among abusive priests.

**Provisioning:** Resident clergy would be able to say Mass and perform the sacraments among themselves; they would remain priests. They would receive room and board, medical treatment, psychotherapy, and spiritual direction according to individual plans. Bishops would commit to visiting their priests annually to extend pastoral care and to remain conscious of the role of sexual abuse in the lives of these men, their victims, and the wider Catholic community.

Every priest credibly accused of sexual abuse would be offered participation in this program. Men who refused the program would then be separated from the priesthood without salary or other benefits canonically possible to withhold. Even then, however, bishops would remain in yearly contact with them, reminding the men that they were priests who betrayed their vocations and should be making reparation while receiving care through participation in the Penance, Productivity, and Provisioning Program.

The Vatican would do well to remember that amputation results in phantom limb pain. The “diseased” part is gone but suffering continues. Maintaining the abusing priest’s attachment to the body of the church keeps him, his victims, his crimes, and his needs visible to hierarchy covenantally required to hold all of that in their sights.

**Mary Gail Frawley-O-Dea, a clinical psychologist, was the only mental health professional to address the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on the sexual abuse crisis at their 2002 Dallas meeting, and she was one of the clinicians speaking about sexual abuse to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men that year. Frawley-O’Dea is coauthor of *Treating the Adult Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, and coeditor of *Predatory Priests, Silenced Victims*.**

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Thank you for your articles and comments. Please continue to send them to [tony@tonyercolano.com](mailto:tony@tonyercolano.com).