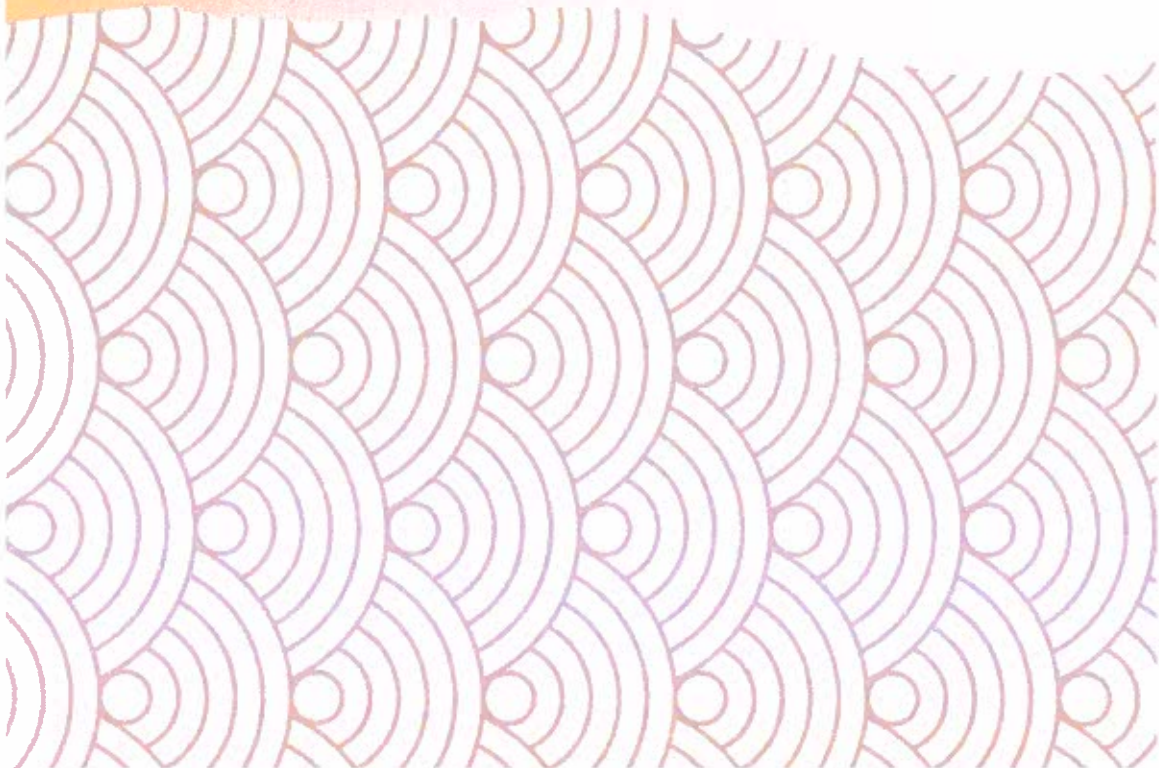




The Teacher and the Bishop



The Teacher and the Bishop

i

The remaining days of Holy Week 1989 were destined, as usual, to be holidays at the seminary. As soon as the last bell rang to end seventh period classes, the priest faculty members set aside their schoolbooks and set about celebrating with their fellow priests of the diocese these holiest of days, entombed still over the horizon of tomorrow. The faculty members who were not so blessed would return home to their families this Wednesday night for the Easter vacation.

That was the way it was. All had their own ritual prescribed. All had their distinct rituals to follow.

At least, that's how Gary thought of it. And one would think he'd know. After all, he had taught ritual all year long, year after year, as part of the sacramental theology course. Taught it as an upgrade of what he'd learned about it in his own truncated seminary years. Taught it as he had continued studying and thinking about ritual in his adult life as a lay theologian. Gary taught it in unique ways that excited most, yet troubled a few. Taught it engagingly enough to have been nominated by his peers to be the first lay person to address the priests of the diocese with a seminar on ritual during their annual week of retreat, just after Easter a year ago. Nonetheless, his selection as speaker was rejected by the bishop at the last minute, without explanation.

Gary figured this memory focused upon his mind because he had just scanned the bulletin board notice about this year's upcoming retreat. It was thumb-tacked helter-skelter above several other multi-colored mimeographed fliers about spring baseball and track tryouts, the librarian's notice about overdue books due back to the library the previous day without penalty under the Holy Week amnesty program, and the reminder that grades were due the first day back from vacation.

The wall intercom system in the faculty lounge broke into Gary's distracted, unsettling, daydream. He heard an administrative assistant's dopplered voice. He wasn't sure if the distortion was from his coming out of his musing or the simple physics of walking up to and then past the intercom box. "Will Gary Jenkins please come to the rector's office. Gary Jenkins to the rector's office, please."

Before Gary could see him, the wry-humored math teacher sitting across the lounge perceived in Jenkins's footsteps a potential audience approaching. Gary heard his annoying Peter Lorre impression chiding, "Ohh. What did heee do? They usually use the phone to call up here. Now everybody, yes everybody, knows heee'ss been called in. Wait, mister big guy. Just wait. Now you'll see. Now you will." Neither man spoke to the other. Gary didn't want to be bothered. He turned and left without a word and headed for the stairs. Grayson was left alone with his algebra tests to nick with red checks as his only audience.

Downstairs, Gary approached the rector's office from the direction of the secretarial pool. This was the customary entry that faculty members used. From around the corner in the foyer hallway, the more formal door to the rector's office, Gary heard, then saw, the rector saying goodbye to a priest. They provided a contrast to Gary's eye. The visiting priest in a black clerical suit with Roman collar, the rector in a floor-length black clerical cassock. As they faced one another, each placed hands on the other's shoulders, with space maintained in between to avoid being a hug. To a second departing visitor, the head of the school extended a characteristically warm and hearty handshake, turned, and went back into his office.

Jenkins bided his time, asking the rector's assistant about her plans for Easter, until the rector would presumably reappear at the side door for Gary. He hadn't long to wait.

"Come in, come in, Gary. This shouldn't take long. I've a lot to finish before dinner and I know you'll be wanting to get out of here for Easter as fast as you can. How are you spending the holiday? Are you planning on being around, or going away?" The rector made the greeting and inquiry with his back to Gary, as he went around and behind his desk to sit down. His cassock swept the carpet and rustled like breeze-shaken, dead oaks leaves still clinging to branches not yet bursting with the new life of spring. He made no eye contact. The priest gestured to the chair in front of his desk for Gary to sit as he went by. This was not the customary ritual. Gary sensed a chill. Usually, the rector greeted faculty members with a handshake, looking into their eyes, and then led them over to the window side of the room so each sat on one of the two love seats, facing each other over a low coffee table.

But not today. Today he was acting differently. Today's was a new ritual.

The rector was uncharacteristically uncomfortable, remote, busy but distracted, almost withdrawn but still immediate. And he spoke again without looking Gary directly in the eyes. That is what bothered Gary the most. The body language could mean many other things. The eyes meant only this thing.

"I wanted . . . needed . . . to catch you before you left. That's why I had you . . . that's why I asked for you to . . . be paged . . . on the loudspeaker. You have an appointment . . . they need you to visit . . . the bishop wants to see you at the chancery tomorrow. You should bring all your class materials . . . texts, notes, lists of resources . . . you know . . . what's in your syllabus you provided the department head . . . for the sacraments course."

Then the hesitancy was gone. His eye contact was suddenly focused. "They want you there at eleven sharp. His Excellency has the Chrism Mass at nine at the cathedral and has to be back there for the Lord's Supper Mass and ordinations at four o'clock."

His concentration vanished just as suddenly, vaporized by its own intensity. Getting up, he looked away, "You know where the chancery is, don't you, Gary?" He cast a quick look over the shoulder and caught Gary's nod. "I thought so. That's what I told th . . . You are to ask for the bishop's secretary. You'll recognize him. You've seen him here before. Right?"

Gary's answer brought the taller man up short. "He was the priest who just left with the guy in the grey suit, right?"

The two men's eyes wafted and then met for about as long as it takes for the smoke from a single snuffed-out taper . . . *the thin tapers . . . the ones given at Baptism and at the Easter vigil . . . that ones that signify holding off the dark of the evil one . . . the ones that light the Way, the Truth, and the Life . . .* to dissipate.

It was an ironic parody of the time-honored ritual of departure, one person from another's presence. There was no occidental handshake. There was no oriental bow from the waist. The lay teacher rose to his feet, turned both hands palms up, breast high, and finished the gesture by shrugging his shoulders. The priest rector simply nodded. It was a leave-taking designed not to belabor the obvious. But there was nothing in the monologue that was obvious.

ii

Collecting up his materials for the next morning's meeting, Gary was all alone now. Apparently, the math teacher was finished, or chose to leave anyway, while Gary was in the rector's office. Alone, that is, except for the memory of his classes over the past two weeks. They came to mind as he packed his things. He started formulating a list in his head of the items left over from those classes that he wanted to address, after he handed out grades and reviewed the third quarter exams, and before he started the new material for the last quarter.

There were two items in particular.

A student in his sacramental theology course posed a dilemma in the last class before the quarter exams. Gary recalled everything the young man had asked. He even remembered the texture of his adolescent voice that assured Gary he was sincere:

There's a sacramental anthropologist who is researching an indigenous culture in their remote woodland habitat. During his immersion he begins partaking in their daily habits and rituals. On a particular feast day as the hours pass, he starts to realize for the first time that this special feast involves a ritual of human sacrifice and cannibalism. Furthermore, it becomes evident that he is to be the sacrificial victim.

What does he do?

His first choice is to honor their culture and ritual, say nothing, and participate in the preparations for his death.

The second option he has is to try to convert the people to another way of

celebrating the feast. But if he does this, is he justified in doing so just to save his life, or must he do so only after understanding where the ritual fits into the culture and comprehending what else the change might upset in their lives? Unfortunately, he can't finish that study by dinner time.

Lastly, there's a third choice. He can silently begin collecting firewood by the armload, stacking it where the shaman has indicated the pyre will be built. On each trip he takes a deeper track into the forest, until on his last trip he discards the wood and disappears into the distance, never to be heard from again. But if he does this, is he justified in doing so only to save his life, or must he do this only to bide enough time to figure out a way to change their ritualistic practice of human sacrifice and cannibalism?

It was the kind of scenario that Gary so enjoyed his students creating. It required thought, stirred class debate, recognized ritual as essential to life, and realized moral responsibilities for choices made. At the beginning of the year, the students needed Gary to set out a scenario. Gary knew his classes were going well when, by spring, students were developing them.

The second item he needed to prepare for came from a student in his scripture class. That young man had been watching television at home just before Holy Week and had seen the movie, *King of Kings*. Gary could hear the boy's voice in his memory as he carried the last box down to his car and drove out of the seminary parking lot.

So, this Jeffrey Hunter guy playing Christ just stands there facing forward. His eyes are closed, and his mouth shut. Pilate makes this Roman centurion be advocate to plead Jesus' case. He comes up with some clever arguments. He can't get Jesus off, but he wins him a stay of execution in front of Pilate.

Now two things bothered me. First, why did Jesus stay quiet? I know we studied all four of the gospel passion accounts this Lent, and we saw each is a little different from the other three; but I still don't understand why he remained silent.

Second, this centurion. I know he's pure Hollywood and isn't in the scriptures. Still though, something about him got me thinking. He starts off trying to get Pilate to let Jesus go. He doesn't succeed. So, he tries to plead the charge down to a lesser offense. He fails. But in doing that, he sees an out. He sees a way to get Jesus out from in front of Pilate and over to Herod instead. Seems he goes from trying to save Jesus to just getting himself out of having to defend him further.

I'd like to get at this some more.

On the way home, Gary stopped at the local video store and rented *King of Kings*. He'd look at it after his chancery meeting in the morning. As he fell asleep that Wednesday night, Gary was making mental notes about which scripture passages he might review with the class after showing them the trial scene from the video when classes resumed.

iii

Gary Jenkins immediately felt out of his element. He had never been to a chancery before. Although he had met the bishop and his secretary during social occasions at the seminary, he never really had any personal dealings with them. When he was a seminary student other people occupied these positions of authority. That was back fifteen years before, and it was in another diocese. Even then, he had no contact with them at that chancery when he decided to leave the seminary system to attend a state college.

Today, three different people had to direct him until he made it to the sixth floor. He sat now and waited in the bishop's office reception area. The middle-aged female gatekeeper was officious and had motioned for him to wait in the seat he now occupied. He purposefully had arrived ten minutes early. He wanted to leave time in case he got lost on the way. He wanted to be early as a customary sign of respect.

Fifteen minutes into his wait, the receptionist looked his way as she listened on the phone. She hung up and walked over to him and spoke an apology that sounded more like an explanation. "That was the bishop's secretary. They have been detained at the Chrism Mass for longer than expected. Please come with me."

The teacher picked up his briefcase and the large cardboard carton with the bulk of his materials and followed her into a dark-wooden-paneled conference room. She pointed toward the far side of the table. "I was told to say that one of the Fathers from upstairs would be down to be with you before the secretary returns, and that he will begin to review the matter with you, sir." She smiled politely, but without any real commitment. It was clear to Jenkins that she did not know who was coming from where and that she was no more aware of what the matter was than he found himself to be. He decided not to ask. He smiled in return. And that was that. She left and closed the door behind her.

Ten more minutes later, a door set in the opposite wall opened and a bushy-haired man entered. He stood about five foot eight and had a pocked face, with brown-rimmed eyeglasses. His left eye was slightly turned in toward his nose. He was arrayed in the business type suit of a clergyman. Uni-colored jacket-pants-and-shirt, with white roman collar in place of where a businessman would hang a tie. The single remarkable feature of his garb was that it was not black. His clothes were a milk chocolate brown. His socks were brown and so were his belt and wingtips. The garb was well-suited to his slender frame and manicured fingers. His shoes were polished and his slacks were pressed with a neat, straight crease, with a narrow cuff.

From the opposing general reception area door, the same woman who had earlier led Gary into the room now entered at the same time as the priest. She came to the priest's side of the long conference table and spoke to the priest, with allowance for Gary to hear; but without actually speaking to them both. "Would either of you like coffee, father?"

"Just a cold drink. Iced tea, if there is, please, for me." He looked toward Gary. His gaze passed over everything around Gary in the room and came to rest on the teacher's face. "And for you? Something to drink?"

"I'm fine. Thanks." Gary could think of nothing else to say. He wasn't sure of the protocol. He had been told no one's name.

"I do hope that you are fine. You look fine. But we may be here a while. And you've probably got a lot of talking to do. A cold drink might be a good idea. Are you sure? Pepsi. Coke. Diet soda. Tea or coffee. I'm going for iced tea myself." The priest was still standing. Until he sat the receptionist would have to wait to leave.

Slowly understanding this ritual that was new to him, Gary grew to realize he was being told more than the menu for cold drinks. He acquiesced and tried to return the verbal handshake. "The iced tea sounds good to me, then too. Thanks for persisting."

"It is in my nature to do so." It was a stunning remark, gilded with a smile, but stunning nonetheless. Gary had the strangest flash before his mind's eye. An icon of a daydream that summed up the last moments. This priest, in a brown t-shirt and gym shorts, was teaching him how to play ping-pong. He gave Gary an easy serve, just so he could return it, so he did. The priest rose up and nailed a wicked volley right back at him. It hit the table, spun, and went right past Gary's paddle; grazing him on the forehead before it ricocheted over to the wall. The priest's ping pong grin morphed back to the conference room demure voice that spoke, "Let us begin as we await our drinks." He sat and the receptionist started for the door.

A small, quiet, inner voice told Gary to beware. He had grown to trust that voice during his overseas field studies trips: *This is going to be like nothing you've ever been through. Be polite. Try to see everything, and to see through everything.* His outside voice spoke calmly. "As you say then." And the same reserved smile, worn by the others he had met in this building, insinuated itself onto his own face.

The brown-jacketed priest noticed the change. His turned-in eye straightened a bit, set within a newly cautious look. He sat across the table and a few seats up away from the teacher. The other six chairs lined up three to a side were to be the mute witnesses to whatever the proceedings would entail. The priest placed a spiral notebook on the table. Its cover was sufficiently graffitied to be clearly someone's other than the priest. The embossed seminary logo was on the cover, just barely discernable within the doodling of a student's wandering mind.

The book was left long enough to be noticed, and then the priest deliberately turned it over on the table. Gary's heart skipped a beat. There on the back was the familiar line drawing he had seen many times at school. It was a pen-and-ink rendition of the poster Gary had the art teacher make for his classroom. A football quarterback was being sacked by a defensive player. The thrower's jersey had the name THEO inscribed in block letters above the number 12 on his back.

This book belonged to one of Gary's SACramental THEOlogy students.

A second item was obviously still in the expandable manila folder that the brown shirt placed on the table, almost ritualistically. It was clearly being saved for later. Gary wondered how many times this man, this priest, had similarly set a chalice, still topped with a pall and draped with a veil, off to the side on an altar, to be within reach at the precise moment it would be required in the ritual of a private Mass.

Gary heard a treasured mentor's voice in the back of his memory. He had no idea why his mind replayed the advice at this precise moment. He heeded it for that exact reason. The echo insisted: *He who talks first, loses.*

The brown shirt seemed somewhat disappointed that his dramatic table-setting did not goad a response from Jenkins. He thought it looked as if was going to have the desired effect, but then he saw that the teacher halted himself. Strangely, it seemed that this Jenkins fellow's head cocked a bit, like he was straining to hear a faraway sound, just before he settled back silently in his chair.

"What were you told to bring here, today? I hope you have your course syllabus. I'd like to look at it. I want to see how . . ." the knock on the door interrupted the parley.

Two glasses of iced tea were set on a tray. The receptionist placed the tray on a sideboard. As she placed the reverend's glass before him, on a cocktail napkin, the priest looked her way. She paused ever so slightly to see if there was another request to be made. None of these motions or subtleties escaped Gary's notice. He was always watching for body language rituals. It was a habit. He did it in restaurants. He did it in classrooms. He did so in churches, synagogues, mosques. Even at railroad stations and bus depots during his vacation travels.

At the same time, he raised his briefcase to his lap. As the receptionist circled the table to bring his iced tea, Gary reached into his briefcase and withdrew the syllabus he had prepared late the night before at home, in light of his aborted interview with the rector. Having observed her giving the priest his glass, Gary quickly imagined, and then readied for, a choreographed exchange. The receptionist set the napkin down first, the glass upon it next, took a half step back to meet his glance, and was about to retreat, in a practiced way, saying nothing. Gary took the chance, kept his silence, and raised as clerical-looking a finger as he could imitate to halt her motion and grasp her attention. It worked. She stood, stepped forward, and automatically put out her hand to take the folder with the syllabus Gary extended at her. Before she could realize it, he nodded, and then looked toward the

priest. The finger that was pointed upwards to grind her to a halt now flicked twice, upside down, and motioned toward the priest. Like an automaton the receptionist circled back and delivered the parcel to the priest.

She left. Silently.

But clearly, she was angrily embarrassed to have fallen victim to this visitor's use. The priests' whims she answered daily were part of her job. She failed this layman's test, though. And now he had been allowed to glimpse, first-hand, just how employees were treated around the chancery. She rightly sensed that she would pay for this dereliction of protocol somehow. She had betrayed and exposed the rituals that were played out here daily. It was a sanctified decorum comported under a veil of decency that so often deceived visitors projecting their unwittingly false expectations.

Gary simply sipped his iced tea and looked across at the brown shirt. The priest had the folder in one stunned hand. With the other, attempting to recover his balance, he raised his glass in mock toast to Jenkins. He also said nothing. He set down the glass and began to read the syllabus. Gary took another sip and recalled the priest's own declaration: . . . *we may be here a while . . . a cold drink might be a good idea.*

But his drink was not refreshing. And Gary felt it tasted less sweet than the recent volley might have led him to believe it would. He was not happy with himself. He had eyed their game. Played it. And won. But it left him feeling as diminished as he had made the woman feel. He was no better than the rest of them in that moment. He had done something that was not fitting, nor just. And now, he waited as the censor scanned the ill-delivered syllabus.

iv

The man in brown sought the sanctuary of his position, and feigned examining the syllabus, to regroup his thoughts. He had been the diocesan censor for less than a year. He had not been the choice of the bishop's secretary. The secretary wanted one of his older seminary classmates to have the position. But the bishop picked the man in brown. After all, as far as the bishop was concerned, there was a tidy sum of educational investment whose benefits were still owed back to the diocese. So, Father Ronald Martin was always a little suspicious when the secretary said there was a sensitive item concerning "orthodoxy and theological correctness" he needed the censor's help to decide. He recalled the evaluation of reading material in the diocesan high school libraries he had to arbitrate just two months after his appointment. And there was the adult education content of Bible studies in one of the major parishes in the diocese right after that. And now this. Reverend Martin wondered if the schedule for today's unavoidable "review" was as impromptu as it first appeared to be. And he worried whether there were one or two people on trial here today.

Martin was in a parish for only five years. The sixteen years before that he was a seminarian and a doctoral student. He had been to France and to Italy for postgraduate theological studies just before the heralded “chill” under Pope John Paul II and his hand-picked German shepherd for orthodoxy, Cardinal Ratzinger. When the emotion-charged challenges of academic freedom ran rampant through the halls of USA catholic universities, the man-in-brown sitting across from Gary Jenkins was leading staid Bible studies for six adults a week in a rural parish. Ronald Martin’s closest brush with Vatican-orchestrated academic silencing and theological disputes came when he read *America* or the *National Catholic Reporter*. He had no firsthand involvement with professors whose continued employment was threatened, based on their presentation of moral issues and positions on church authority.

Father Martin could only wonder whether this morning’s adversary knew these things about him; convinced though he was, that he had to perform as censor as if his past was safe, and his future secure. “As a person teaching ritual, perhaps you should be in the phys-ed department, rather than theology.” He let the comment drop on the table and waited for Jenkins’s reply.

“The image seems to be successful.” The comment from the teacher was terse, polite, and hard to fault since Gary had purposefully not elaborated.

“And what success is that?” With elaboration there could be areas to attack.

“It conveys a reality,” . . . the teacher’s pace was slow, considerate, deliberative. It was what he wanted for self-control. It was what his inner voice told him was the pace to use to control the interview as well.

Wanting to force an error early on, the brown shirt interrupted. “And what reality is that?” At the sound of hearing his own voice, Martin knew his impatience cost him the edge.

Without breaking his pace, Gary continued. It was as if the interrogator hadn’t spoken, hadn’t posed a question worth distraction from the thoughts and words already in process. And by linkage, if the question did not deserve attention, then neither did the questioner.

“ . . . one the students sense and become immersed in automatically. One they don’t have to think about to be a part of. One that doesn’t require artificial or forced cognition. Because the image is so familiar on several levels immediately. It’s one they can taste. Feel. Hear. Remember. Celebrate. Know it is renewed; yet has a specific place and time from which it derives its meaning. Something that invokes and involves them. And it does so from its innate power. Even just watching draws them in. They never had to touch a football to be included. And if they had, then the involvement is even deeper.” He punctuated the end of his statement with a sip of his tea.

It was a master stroke. Gary had taken the attack and deflected it. He had taken the insidious ridicule from the brown shirt. He had kept his composure. He refused to be

infuriated at being mocked for using the drawing of an NFL football quarterback to symbolize his course. Instead, he killed two deep safeties with one post pattern laid perfectly on the seam of the zone.

He managed to present right up front a very basic and fundamental premise of sacramental theology—the essence of signs and symbols and their interaction on the human person. This established the orthodoxy of his views and syllabus. But even more, he was able to belittle by inference the brown shirt's narrowness of theological understandings, because Martin did not see what lay in the drawing. It diminished the censor's prowess as an inquisitor because he did not perceive in advance how vulnerable he made his position by such a weak line of initial inquiry. And as he paused, waiting, Gary felt once again at rest within, and good about, himself. He had won a little battle. But on his own terms. Not the censor's.

For his own part, the censor was also reflecting. *So, the lines are not only drawn,* thought Martin to himself, tapping the back of the notebook. *There are trenches begun as well. Then I'll just dig deeper than he can,* he told himself. At the same time, he was happy the bishop and his secretary had not been there to witness such an inauspicious start.

"So, I am to believe that the young men destined to be the bestowers of the grace of the sacraments of the universal church of Christ in this diocese are to look at a secular sports figure to learn about those sacraments? That's a particularly interesting stance to take." Satisfied with himself, he took a long drag on his iced tea, making the ice cubes tinkle in the glass.

"With all due respect. It's not as interesting as a view that it is the celebrant minister who bestows the grace of the sacrament, and not the Holy Spirit."

Father Ronald Martin almost choked on his ice cubes. He was livid. But he knew that his opponent would best him for good if he continued to be so careless. Trying a new tack, he replied, "You seem well-suited to teaching religion, Mr. Jenkins, if that's to be measured by messages about sacking a quarterback named THEO. Obviously, however, arithmetic does not appear to be your strong point. Your student's notebook indicates that the quarterback's number—12—is what you teach as the number of sacraments. Whatever happened to the church's dogmatic seven sacraments?"

"Perhaps we should look at whose notebook you have there. We could make sure he's a good student. Make sure he copies his notes properly."

Drawing the book away so Gary couldn't see it, the censor visibly panicked. If he let the source of the complaint become known, he'd be back teaching Bible study in a backwater parish, never to be seen again in the corridors of power to which he had fast grown accustomed. "Whose book this is, is irrelevant. You are the focus of this review, not your students. So, let's get to it."

Gary noticed that this censor was reaching for something with a very unsteady hand. Just the type of regretful person Browning was portraying when he asked in a poem Gary used in class—“Andrea del Sarto”—and that his students debated “. . . a man’s reach should exceed his grasp / or what’s a heaven for?” The censor was beginning to look too shaky even to be a defensive lineman reaching out to grasp a cartoon quarterback. Since Father Martin seemed so lacking in self-assurance, Gary convinced himself that his own best chance to make his point with the censor was to be forthright, decisive, and non-antagonistic. Given the floor, he decided to heed the sporting goods manufacturer’s slogan and “just do it.” And so, he began:

“We start with what are framed as the church’s seven sacraments. You’ll see from the syllabus that the source book is Cooke’s *Sacraments and Sacramentality*. Teenagers need relationships, much more than what they perceive to be impersonal rules. They’ll only let the rules of friendship—loyalty, fidelity, intimacy—drive their lives. Cooke presents human friendship as the basis for the sacramentality of human life and personal living. This is a good start, because the idea always makes sense to the students. They relate to it.

“Marriage, for Cooke—and for the course—is the basic ecclesial sacrament, because it mirrors the creative power of the love relationship between God and humans.

“Eucharist comes next, as we look at it as communion and covenant sacrifice. This idea tracks with most teens who associate mealtime with family and friends and nutrition as necessary for good health.

“Initiation comes after that and the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist again, are what we study with Cooke’s book. We get into discussions about these initiations, that aren’t based on hazing new members as a condition of joining. Initiations supported by family, not separating them from family as a competition or as a replacement. Whether it’s parents bringing babies or pre-teens to initiation—or adults choosing for themselves, like they’ve just seen at Lenten Sunday Masses or will see in this Saturday’s Easter Vigil Liturgy.

“Jesus’ healing ministry follows these initiations—Anointing of the Sick is part of that. Some classmates tell of aged or ill family members who they saw anointed at home, or in the hospital, or in a nursing facility.

“Reconciliation is next, portrayed as crucial to keeping human friendship and the wholeness of the community intact in a dynamic healing of the rifts that crop up in relationships. The course places Reconciliation in the context of a broad continuation of Jesus’ forgiving and healing ministry. This leads to discussions that are less emotional than those related to Anointing, and harder to incorporate experiences, because many students and families don’t seem to frequent confession the way you and I did growing up.

As much as Gary tried to draw him in, the censor did not display any reaction to show he was engaged in Gary's explanations—whether to dismiss, agree, or find fault with them. So, the teacher forged ahead.

“Orders and ministry are so deeply connected for Cooke, and in my course, that the discussion of the Sacrament of Orders comes only after the presentation of the full sacramentality of service and ministry, within the faith community and outward toward the whole of human society. The conversations lay a foundation upon which to set Orders and the committed religious life. And we connect these with sanctioned projects that incorporate community service, coordinated with their pastors back at their local parishes.

The censor now became visibly agitated. He used the back of his right hand to push the spiral notebook further away from in front of him so, off to the side, it wasn't worth his attention. “Marriage first and Orders last? Seems pretty anti-clerical to me. Especially for a seminarian's training!”

All Jenkins could think to say was, “Actually, Father, throughout the course of the year many spiritual and contemplative themes we talk about, and pray over, derive from the poetry of a priest-cleric, Father Gerard Manley Hopkins. And most of the books in the syllabus are written by men who are, or were, priests.”

For his part, the censor just shrugged in a non-committal fashion and indicated by a wave of his hand for the teacher to continue with his presentation. Which he did. But not without trying to be mindful to articulate priest-involved portions of the source materials, though adding them broke up the prepared flow of his presentation.

“After these seven ecclesial moments of grace, the course goes back to two seminal Vatican II era books. Each was written by a famous European priest-theologian, both of whom influenced the deliberations at Vatican II. First, with Schillebeeckx the class sees how Christ is a sacrament and then with Rahner we target the church as a sacrament. Christ and Church—sacraments 8 and 9.” Jenkins emphasized this by touching two fingers on his left hand with the pointer finger of the right.

“Most classes respond positively over the early semesters, to poems by Hopkins, such as “Pied Beauty” and “God's Grandeur.” Moving into the last part of the year, the course looks toward the future when these high schoolers will be adult priests or lay leaders in the church. The course aims to groom them for that. After all, this is a seminary.” As soon as he said it, Jenkins regretted this last aside and realized he should not have spoken so.

The censor's left eye twinged.

“Next the course readings are excerpts from Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox that instill the vision of creation as a sacrament. They strike a chord with students' concern for the environment. These samples give the teens a chance to succeed in intertwining religion

and ecology—precisely what Fathers Berry and Fox’s predecessors tried and failed to do in the late 1960s.”

Gary’s voice was growing less paced and deliberate than when he started, betraying the teacher’s excitement about his courses, and working with his students. He held up the thumb of his left hand, his palm facing himself. “That’s number ten. And that’s about where we are so far in the course as we get to the end of Lent. So, the next part of the course won’t yet be in the notebook you have.”

The censor was either lost somewhere else in thought, or just no longer cared. He had already pushed aside the spiral-bound caricatured drawing he maligned earlier. Gary felt as if could have been talking to the wall behind the man-in-brown sitting across from him during this Thursday lunchtime in Holy Week.

The censor thought only that it was high noon—somewhere he imagined between the Holy Thursday rituals of this morning when his bishop had blessed the sacred oils to be used as sacramental signs and when later this afternoon that same bishop would wash some laymen’s feet in the cathedral and then anoint the foreheads of his newly ordained priests. The censor was realizing he had failed at the errand entrusted to him by that very same bishop’s Father Secretary—to burn this sacrificial offering on the pyre of instructional materials laid out upon the chancery table in front of him.

Undeterred by the censor’s seeming disinterest, Jenkins dropped his thumb against his ring finger, and held up two fingers in a “V” shape. “Now there’s still two more. The eleventh is life itself. In short, how these young people can live a life of discipleship that is a sign of their commitment to relationships within the faith community. A community called to bear the gospel witness to the world and care for the environment. This grabs them. It holds out hope for them that there’s an energy to living and life. There’s a way to fly in the face of despair. A way that the choices they make will have an impact. Will actually make a difference. That they have the power to transform fear to trust; despair to hope; thoughts of suicide to a confident self-esteem.”

The censor snapped his head a bit when he heard “suicide.”

“And last, but certainly not least, there is the twelfth sacrament. What we call in the course the ‘yet-to-be-known.’ It’s less technical than Berry’s language of ‘The New Story,’ but it works. These young men I teach are poised at the dawn of the last decade of the 20th century. They know the 80s are hurtling toward a close. This coming New Year’s Eve will welcome the 1990s. These kids were not even conceived before the Second Vatican Council. And they can’t conceive of their experience of church as something that ‘changed.’ They only know one church. And it hasn’t changed. Some of them even think it’s not only unchanged, but that it’s stuck. Sometimes they see the older members of the church wondering where things went. Other times they see their elders not seeming to know where things are going. But what amazes these kids is that they can’t fathom what the whole thing’s about. Instead, they want to know what’s important for today and what is expected of them as leaders for tomorrow.”

“And just how do you think your course amounts to anything in the end?” The defeatist tone of the censor’s inquiry was something his teacher/adversary could not comprehend. So, Jenkins just continued.

“You’ll see the syllabus goes back to Cooke’s book and the formulation that meant something to their elders—from what you and I learned in the Baltimore Catechism. That gives my kids a point of contact . . . that gives them a way of knowing what their elders knew . . . gives their elders a way to respect that these guys know something solid. And that will mean a lot for those who stay, go on, and get ordained. The course syllabus, and a notebook from last year’s completed course, that includes the class work and discussions from after last Easter, not the incomplete one that you were given for today, would show how *‘signs instituted by Christ to give grace’* still works as a way to understand sacraments and sacramentality.

“The whole unknown that unfolds every tomorrow, *“like shining from shook foil”*—in Hopkins’s words the class has come to know—in front of our faces, our startled eyes, our dazzled ears, and our squinting minds is bursting with the impulses of those signs, crackling with them more than the universe bombards astronauts with gamma rays. Signs that reveal the spirit of God in the vague images perched just under the horizon, just past the last planet, just outside the focus of the slide under a biochemist’s microscope, just behind the last vacant look in the eye of a cancer or AIDS patient. Signs that will be missed by anyone or any church not poised to understand they are ready to speed past in the nanoseconds of faith.”

vi

A knock at the door interrupted. Wordlessly, the receptionist carried a phone, plugged it into a wall jack, set it on the table, depressed the blinking button, and handed the receiver to the priest. Ignoring Gary’s presence, the censor listened and nodded. He set the phone receiver back into the receptionist’s waiting hand. She reversed the hook-up approach and left the room. She never spoke a word, nor even looked at Gary.

The brownsuit responded in one, flat-toned verdict. “Cooke is still orthodox enough, for now. But you must know what’s happened to Schillebeeckx and Rahner in European circles. Fox and Berry are unproven. Suspect, at best. As far as your #12—well, what have you published?”

The teacher knew the question was rhetorical.

The censor stood. “The bishop apparently thought the better of it last year at this time.”

The realization rushed into Gary’s mind that the rite of sacrifice practiced here was so coldly implemented. It was something like the bullfight he had been taken to see one

summer while he studied liberation theology in Latin America. The bull is distracted purposefully, first by others, then wounded so it can't hold up its head. Only then does it get to face its executioner. But by then, it doesn't know who will deal the fatal blow.

Gary stared straight ahead. He wanted to say so much more. But he knew he had said all that he was going to say. He was through. The sip of iced tea he took was his signal that he knew he was done. He did not stand when the priest did.

The brownsuit continued. "Father Secretary is back. You are to take your materials and await his call, outside with the receptionist. Good day." With that, he turned, taking Gary's folder with him. He left through the opposing door, and vanished.

vii

Gary showed himself out. He sat in the reception room again, back where he'd been not so long ago, and yet, so very long ago. The receptionist refused to acknowledge him, nor meet his glance. No surprise. He was sorry he had used her. It was a wrong he could not set right. He told himself to focus. Not to let his lapse before distract him now. His pride grew more powerful than he'd known it to have ever been.

He thought again of the bullfight. He would not let them lower his head. They would not confuse him to the point that he'd run amok, lashing out at the air as if it has substance, or could hurt him. These people would not bind his legs and drag him out dead, dripping blood in the sand of the arena, after his fierce heart seized and suddenly ceased to pump his life force through his veins.

Gary Jenkins forced his eyes to roam around the room, to get some bearings. There were the requisite portraits of the papal profile and that of the local bishop, and a crucifix. There was no other framed or unframed art on the walls. The coffee table was adorned with the typical religious literature, reminding Gary of the priests' lounge at the seminary. A movement caught Gary's eye. A door pushed in slightly, returned to its closed position, then pushed again. This time all the way. A teenager came in. He set the new copy of the current weekly diocesan newspaper atop the coffee table, pausing to rearrange the magazines off to the side. While doing so, the copies the paper under his arm displayed a photo Gary could see, on the bottom of page one, below the fold. The picture was hidden out of view in the folded copy on the coffee table.

viii

Gary reached for the paper after the young man left. He opened it full out and looked at the front page as casually as he could force himself to be. All the while he was jumping up and down inside his skin as he read the photo's caption: *Mr. Enrico des Fideli, chairman of*

the Bishop's Annual Fund Drive for Capital Improvements, greets his son upon the young cleric's return from Europe in time for Holy Thursday ordination for the diocese. Father des Fideli is expected to join the faculty at the seminary next week. On the right is Mr. des Fideli's nephew, currently a seminarian for the diocese. Mr. des Fideli looked as well in the picture as he did outside the rector's office door the prior afternoon, though he had on a different suit.

ix

The bishop's secretary was dressed smartly in his black and white clerical suit. He filled the doorway of his room as he stood and smiled at Gary directly. "We can see you now" was all he said. He turned and went back in, leaving the door to his office open, for Gary to follow.

Gary gathered his things and followed. Inside he was not surprised to see that they were alone. It quickly became clear to Gary that this was another part of the ritual. The bishop would not be here to do his own work. Father Secretary would do His Excellency's bidding, where the censor had failed. The secretary was doubly pleased.

The room didn't seem to be the true work office of a man who ran the bishop's day-to-day business and schedule. It was too clean and cleared off. There were three doors other than the one through which Gary entered. He could only surmise that one door was to go to Father Secretary's actual office, one to the bishop's office, and the third led to a way out of the building when he or the bishop did not want to leave through the public reception area.

The teacher was not directed to any chair or place in particular. He was made to pick his own place. He looked at the secretary, seated in the center of the room behind a moderately sized, highly polished, wooden desk. The desktop had only a blotter that covered its middle third. Gary saw no phones, desk lamps, calendars, or other office accessories that added to the height of the desk and that might obscure the secretary's line of sight. Father Secretary, as the censor named him several times, commanded full view of the room, whether the others in the room stood at the door, as Gary did now, or were in one of the two low-back chairs directly in front of the desk, or were seated at the horseshoe-shaped conference table off to Gary's right. The shoe faced the center desk with chairs at one side, so if Gary chose to sit there he would look out over the table to face the cleric in black.

Gary felt trapped. From within his very deepest consciousness, Gary's inner voice spoke to him again: *If you use the table for your books, it will look like you were afraid to get too close. If you sit in front of the desk, you'll have an awkward pile of materials in your lap. Or worse, you'll mess up his floor and you'll have given him a chance to scold you like some kid as he tells you to pick them up. And, for sure, the absolute worst, is the body language power-play concession you'll make if you sit in front of him and have to bend down to set your things on the floor.*

He chose. Moving off to the right with the purpose and precision of a ritual, he stayed on the near side of the table, in the hollow of the horseshoe, set his books down, carefully arranging them without rushing—giving the secretary his back for a moment. Then he turned, walked over to the chair in front of the secretary's desk that was closest to the table and calmly sat down to meet the cleric's glance, eye-to-eye, man-to-man.

It reminded Gary of his altar boy days before the liturgical changes, when he was taught as a kid in a cassock and surplice to go up the steps to the right side of the altar, pick up the big, red-covered missal with its multiple colored ribbons akimbo, turn gracefully and without tripping or dropping the book, come back down the steps, turn to face the altar, genuflect on one knee. Then ascend to the left side of the altar, again without stumbling or dropping the missal and its heavy wooden bookstand, set it down at an angle, slightly facing the center of the altar, smoothing out the pages and ribbons, and then repeating the path, to descend back to the bottom step to stand and hear the gospel of the day proclaimed.

Here in the chancery of the present, there was no disrespect intended in making the choice of the chair or the prior deposition of the materials on the table. But neither was there any emasculation of Gary's position, no longer an altar boy, but as a competent teacher. Nor of him as a person.

When Gary was seated, the cleric began without hesitation. His long, thin, manicured fingers framed an imaginary piece of paper on his blotter. "The bishop finds your teaching and your curriculum disturbing and not suitable for his seminary. He had hoped that you would have understood more astutely his displeasure when he removed you from the priests' seminar program last year at this time. Obviously, you did not respond to his signal of encouragement to change, because your current sacramental theology course is essentially identical to last school year's. The bishop wishes you to give the rector your semester grades by noon Saturday and to remove all personal materials from the seminary by that time. Your salary will be paid through the end of the semester, but there will be no position for you in this diocese next fall. You are not to apply to any of the bishop's regional high schools to teach, nor are you to seek or accept any teaching positions, for youths or adults, in any of the bishop's parishes."

Neither man blinked. Gary knew anything he said to the cleric would serve no purpose. He stood. Walked over to the table. Picked up his materials very deliberately. He left the room without even looking back. He realized on the way out that he would never use the *King of Kings* video to talk to seminarians about why Jesus remained silent. He also realized he now had a few more thoughts on the subject than he had the night before when he rented the movie.

Early Saturday morning, after a third and final stop in four days at the video rental store along the way, Gary returned to the seminary for the last time. He used a cart from the school library to load up the boxes of books he had packed at home and from his office next to the teachers' lounge upstairs. These books were his entire religion collection and personal theological library. On the librarian's circulation desk, they were packed in cartons marked DONATED and stacked in piles tied with brown and fraying cord. Despite the librarian's mimeograph notice still posted on the bulletin boards around the school . . . No fines. Nothing overdue. No amnesty.

That done, he walked to the front reception area. He placed his grade sheets, punched for computer scan recognition, into the oversize envelope labeled CONFIDENTIAL, and slipped it into the rector's secure mailbox in the reception area. On the face of the envelope, he had taped his key for the faculty entrance to the building.

He walked upstairs and down the entire hall, which felt longer and more narrow than usual. All his remaining personal materials fit into just one carton, since the diocesan authorities had ritualistically orchestrated his removal of most of the rest of them on Wednesday afternoon.

Jenkins withdrew a long cardboard tube from a white plastic bag imprinted with a yellow and blue BLOCKBUSTER store logo. He unfurled the poster he had just bought an hour or so before at the video store. He hadn't seen the poster Friday when he returned the *King of Kings* video—which he never wound up watching after all. He had swapped it out and rented a Bogart film to watch on Good Friday afternoon, instead. But the classic movie poster was there for sale this Saturday morning when he returned that film noir. The poster featured Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*. In the foreground stood the counterfeit black bird, scratched across its breast and face, to reveal nothing but lead—where gold and jewels were supposed to be. In the background was Peter Lorre, looking at the fake copy of the statuette that the Knights Hospitallers of Rhodes purportedly forged out of booty from religious wars over Jerusalem and among Christian orders of knights vying for political and ecclesial power in the 13th century. Spoils of war fought in the name of God. Spoiled by the greed of Sidney Greenstreet and the deceit of Mary Astor.

Gary tacked the poster to mathematician Grayson's bulletin board next to his plotted parabolas and graphs, in honor of his terrible imitation of Peter Lorre. He left it as a totem of his departure. He was leaving behind the images and signs of a church whose innards had turned to lead. He would now search for treasure elsewhere. First, he'd start with the representations and language of the arts. He'd look for values there. Be surprised and pleased to discern them there, rather than being horrified and scandalized—again—not to find them where they should have been.

Taking his leave of the place, Gary noticed that the bulletin board in the common area was not as messy as it had been Wednesday afternoon. Now he saw only three items.

The first was the same photo from the week's diocesan newspaper that he had seen at the chancery the day he was dismissed between the Chrism Mass and the Lord's Supper Liturgy.

The second was an official appointment announcement welcoming the Reverend Federico des Fideli to the seminary faculty, effective immediately. The date on the memo was Wednesday's. It was signed by the rector.

The remaining flyer on the board was the traditional Holy Thursday announcement from the chancery carrying the names of the newly ordained for the diocese and their first assignments. Down on the list, added to the bottom out of alphabetical order in which the others were arranged, was one other name. Under a SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS banner the notice went on to indicate the former diocesan censor, Reverend Ronald Martin, had been re-assigned to the most rural deanery of the diocese. There, he would represent the bishop as liaison for adult education and Bible study. His new duties would debut the following week at the annual diocesan priests' retreat. He would deliver the keynote plenary session on the last day. His topic was to be *The Primary and Irreplaceable Role of Ordained Ministers in the Twenty-First Century Church and its Sacraments*.

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