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## Upon Retirement: Recollections and Reflections

Allan Bouley OSB  
*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*

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# Upon Retirement: Recollections and Reflections

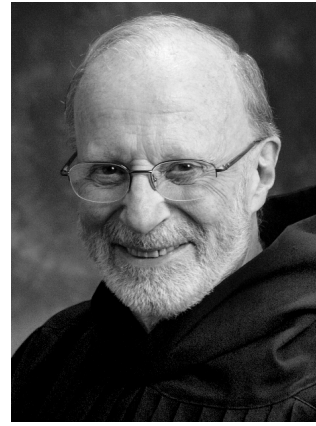
Allan Bouley, OSB

I made final profession in the old Abbey Church (Great Hall) in July of 1960, having been told by Abbot Baldwin Dworschak that I would be going to Rome in October, to the international Benedictine College of Sant' Anselmo to study for a Licentiate in Theology and then a Doctorate in Moral Theology at the Alphonsianum. In those days you did not discuss personal preferences with regard to future work in the community. It was an honor to be sent "to Rome." And in the fall I sailed there with a good deal of anticipation and trepidation, having accepted whatever the future might hold. My personal hopes to teach English and world literature were set aside.

In Rome, in fairly short order, John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council, it convened, and produced the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy as its first document. We had Benedictine *periti* living with us at the college who shared with us daily all the ins and outs of curial shenanigans, power struggles, and backroom maneuverings as the council fathers labored to nudge the church into the twentieth century. The experience left me with a life-long "hermeneutic of suspicion" with regard to most things emanating from the Curia and the Vatican. It was also a time of heady hope and optimism as the spirit of *aggiornamento* filled the air.

With the strong leadership of Cyprian Vaggini, OSB, Sant' Anselmo launched its Liturgical Institute, the first faculty in the Eternal City to begin adopting Italian (rather than Latin) as the language of instruction, and multiple vernaculars for seminars and written exams. Later I would be asked to switch to a doctoral program in Liturgical Studies at the Institute. So much for Moral Theology! (And, yes, there is divine providence.)

With my Licentiate work nearly complete, I was brought back to Collegeville for the academic year 1964–65 in order to be "re-acclimated to the community" before starting my doctoral work in liturgy. I was all set to teach college theology courses at Saint John's University and prefect the dayhop students. It would be my first time teaching anyone. But the newly elected Abbot of St. Procopius near Chicago had been asking Abbot Baldwin for a dogma professor for their small seminary (the community also sponsored St. Procopius College—now Illinois



Benedictine). Abbot Baldwin asked me to go there and do that. I agreed to go. With three weeks' notice, I became the dogma department there: I taught Fundamental Theology, Christology, Ecclesiology, Sacramental Theology, and Mariology to seminarians and a course in religion to college sophomores with someone else's syllabus and text list. It was not difficult to be a success, since my predecessor had taught by plunking down on the lectern, day after day, a dogma text, entirely in Latin, from the Gregorian University in Rome, which he proceeded to translate for a roomful of students frantically trying to take notes since virtually none of them could read Latin. That was my first year of teaching. I also helped out in a suburban parish every single weekend. It was the proverbial baptism of fire. It also meant that I actually spent nine months of my year "at home" in Lisle, Illinois, frantically trying to stay a class or two ahead of my students. One thing it taught me: Roman teaching methods do not work very well.

I returned to Sant' Anselmo and began the liturgy doctorate. Course work complete, I decided to return to Collegeville to write my dissertation. Though it was not finished, I began my faculty appointment in the Seminary and School of Theology in 1969, teaching full time and also taking an increasing role in the elaboration of the monastery's vernacular Liturgy of the Hours. I quickly sensed a serious lacuna in the Seminary curriculum. Up to the council, future priests studied liturgy piecemeal: some in Moral Theology, some in Canon Law, some in Latin classes (so you could pronounce liturgical texts and maybe even understand some of them), and finally teaching yourself how to "say Mass" with the help of, e.g. O'Connell's, *The Celebration of Mass*. After the council virtually all of that disappeared. The lacuna and challenge: how to educate future priests about the history, theology, and pastoral practice of the liturgy in

a post-conciliar age? It seemed imperative that *some* preparation be given to those who would preside at parish worship.

So I invented a two-semester sequence of courses called Liturgical Preaching and Presidency (LP&P, quickly nicknamed “Let’s Play Priest” by seminary wags), which over the years evolved into Pastoral Liturgy I and II. Nothing in a Roman doctoral program prepared me for that.

All the students then, of course, were seminarians, fairly serious, and yet often fairly frivolous. I remember videotaping a “laboratory” (read: fake, play-acting) funeral one sunny spring day. The funeral “Eucharist” having ended, another presider was to take over at the door of Emmaus Chapel and lead us to the backyard for the “committal” at graveside. Well, he happened to be the son of a Great Lakes ship captain. He appeared out of the blue in full ship captain’s uniform, and the “funeral” became one with full military honors, complete with flag on the coffin, fake gun salute, and a real bugler blowing taps from the roof of the short wing of Emmaus. Another time: St. Patrick’s Day at a lab liturgy that included “Eucharist.” The practice-presider was a quiet Irish kid who had obviously prepared very well. But a surprising number of people returning from receiving from the cup had odd grins on their faces. Reason: The quiet Irish kid had filled the “wine” carafe with Irish whiskey rather than the water we normally used for such exercises.

The stories and the people remembered from years past could be recalled and recorded for pages. But that is not my prime purpose here. I need to write in more general terms.

*In retrospect, there are many things that I am glad to have been a part of in my nearly 40 years of teaching in Saint John’s University and the School of Theology:*

Having had a hand in the education of a majority of the active priests (and more recently some permanent deacons) of the Diocese of St. Cloud and of priests from other dioceses in Minnesota, the Dakotas, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Louisiana.

Welcoming international students from the United Kingdom, Australia, Africa, Korea, other points East, and especially from China, where at least three priests educated here in the liturgy program are top players in liturgical renewal in the Catholic Church in China.

Enjoying the presence and ecumenical contributions of students belonging to the ELCA and Mis-

souri Synod of the Lutheran Church, the Episcopal Church, and United Church of Christ. The Lutherans have found the liturgy program of the SOT an ecumenically sensitive place in which to pursue their interest in a discipline still considered suspect in some of their own seminaries.

Having the opportunity to spend ten months of 1979–80 in Israel, first teaching in our Jerusalem Program, then, on sabbatical at the Ecumenical Institute at Tantur. It included visiting sites from Dan to Beersheba, many at least twice, plus Cairo, the Nile, and the pyramids and temples of Egypt.

Being invited to teach as a visitor at The Catholic University of America in 1985–86, working with undergraduates and doctoral candidates. It was the year that Charles Curran was fired from his job there because he was a naughty moral theologian. Again, I gave thanks that I had ended up in a less neuralgic field. I also concluded that CUA, like Washington, D.C. itself, was a nice place to visit, but . . .

Seeing the SOT warmly accept and affirm the ministerial call of ever increasing numbers of lay men and women and of female religious as the number of seminarians decreased dramatically.

This shift has made the classroom a much more interesting place: more variety of persons, backgrounds, and already acquired experience and skills; very high levels of motivation and involvement in the educational process. I have been on the admissions committee for some years. I am constantly impressed and moved by the sense of call, of ministry, of sacrifice, of self-giving evidenced in the life vignettes displayed in the admissions essays of applicants, whether they are fresh out of college or recently so, or engaged in a significant career change, or coming after years of volunteer service in the church. Their generosity and openness to risk as they aspire to prepare for a future in which material benefits are likely to be meager is often astonishing.

Having had a congenial group of faculty, staff, and administrative colleagues for most of these four decades has been a distinct blessing sometimes not found even in “religious” institutions elsewhere. Except for one quite rough patch some twenty years ago, I have found that we work in a collaborative manner so that we not only urge the same on our students but actually model it. We are an open, honest, amiable, and amicable bunch of people, generous with time and talent, and interested in the welfare of students and the institution. We do not engage in monothink nor do we always agree, but

the differences are out in the open, contribute to the rich mix of ideas, and generally are worked through professionally and without feuding or rancor. We like each other, and that is a blessing easily overlooked because we are quite used to it.

As the day of retirement draws near and I think back, I believe that it was God's providence that led me, via obedience to the Abbot and the needs of the community, to the teaching of liturgy. It may not have been, initially, my own fervid choice, but it has been an area of study and work that has captured my interest and enthusiasm sufficiently enough for it to have been a satisfying "career." More importantly, it has been God's way of keeping me near to my central monastic vocation, to theological and personal *lectio*, to the vibrant center of the church's pastoral life, despite the vacillations, fidelities, and failures of my own spiritual journey. I do not think that teaching *Beowulf*, Shakespeare, Keats, O'Connor, or Hemingway would have been, for me, as grace-filled. Still, I have been distanced enough from the work that it does not define who I am, and I am able to put it aside without regret or anxiety. And I am sure that the future, as the past, is in God's hands. There is no safer place.

To end, I want to share what I wrote last year in my letter to Bill Cahoy telling him of my intent to retire in the Spring of 2008:

I have especially appreciated the courage of the SOT in maintaining its high intellectual and pastoral standards and strong centrist approach to theology in the Catholic academy (grounded in history, the fathers, the monastic ethos and without being beholden to any theological 'school') especially over the past more than 25 years, as the official Catholic Church moved and continues to move further and further away, in fact if not in rhetoric, from the rich promise of Vatican II. Its retrograde moves, especially in the area of worship and liturgy, have been the cause of considerable pain for me, and are also a small part of my decision to retire at this time.

Be assured that my fond regards, moral support, and best wishes for you, the School of Theology, its faculty, staff, alums, and current students is strong and will continue to be so long into the future. †



Sunday Morning

Lauren L. Murphy