

Thomas Aquinas and Subjective Disposition: The Challenge

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There's a big elephant in the living room. We continue to administer the sacraments of Christian initiation but in many cases their "fruitfulness" seems to be lacking. We all know the deep disquiet that surrounds the common experience of the sacrament of confirmation. The sacrament that has as its purpose strengthening the recipient in their Christian commitment seems in many cases not to accomplish that. Pastors and religious educators across the country attest to the sad experience of seeing parents drop their children off for confirmation class who themselves don't attend Mass regularly or at all. And the even sadder experience of seeing many of the confirmed cease contact with the Church immediately after receiving the sacrament. And why is it that many of those completing the RCIA process and receiving the sacraments of Christian initiation or full communion with the Church disappear in a year or two after their reception? Something is wrong and we all know it. Despite having such excellent catechetical documents as *Catechesi Tradendi* and the General and National Catechetical Directories, which emphasize so clearly the importance of formation and not just information, and conversion and discipleship as the appropriate outcome of the reception of the sacraments, we still seem to be heavy on the information and light on the formation with the consequent widespread lack of conversion and discipleship.

I believe we would find it salutary to recover the wisdom of Thomas Aquinas in his surprisingly clear - blunt even - teaching on the very real possibility of having a validly conferred sacrament not bear fruit in the recipient's life because of the lack of critical subjective dispositions. I would like in this short essay to briefly note the factors that Aquinas identifies as blocking the subjective fruitfulness of validly conferred sacraments and then draw some implications for sacramental preparation today, and in particular for the sacrament of Confirmation.

The Fruitfulness of the Sacraments and Preparation for the Sacraments

The reaction to the theology of the Protestant reformers produced in the Catholic Church what could be regarded as an overemphasis on the *ex opere operato* (by the fact of the action being performed) aspect of the sacraments working, to the neglect of the practical importance of the *ex opere operantis* (from the action of the doer) aspect.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms the importance of both aspects.

From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them. (CCC 1128)

In the very heart of our theological tradition resides a great wisdom—that of St. Thomas Aquinas—about the importance of preparation and subjective disposition on the part of those receiving the sacraments in order for them to actually bear fruit in the lives of their recipients.

The Baptism of Adults: The Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas

In the third part of the *Summa Theologiae* where Thomas deals with issues concerning the sacraments he has some very useful things to say that are relevant to the concerns we have identified. We will only consider here his teaching as it pertains to the baptism of adults and show how this teaching has important application to the sacramental crisis we are experiencing today. He identifies a number of factors that need to be present in order for the reception of the sacrament to be fruitful as well as factors that block the sacrament's fruitfulness or effectiveness in the lives of their recipients. He makes the point that a sacrament can be validly given and received but still not be fruitful; an outcome that seems unfortunately widespread today.

Repentance

Thomas unambiguously teaches that those who are not willing to repent of sin should not be baptized. Quoting scripture and Augustine to support this point he states:

Now so long as a man wills to sin, he cannot be united to Christ. . . Secondly, because there should be nothing useless in the works of Christ and of the Church. Now that is useless which does not reach the end to which it is ordained; and on the other hand, no one having the will to sin can, at the same time, be cleansed from sin, which is the purpose of Baptism; for this would be to combine two contradictory things. Thirdly, because there should be no falsehood in the sacramental signs.” (ST III, q. 68, a. 4)

Thomas clearly teaches that the kind of repentance necessary before Baptism does not necessitate making use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (that is for post-baptismal sin) but rather an “inward confession of sins to God is required before Baptism but not the Sacrament of Reconciliation.” (ST III, q. 68, a. 6)

In contemporary sacramental practice when someone physically presents oneself to receive a sacrament proper disposition is often assumed. Thomas teaches the contrary.

A man is said to be insincere who makes a show of willing what he wills not. Now, whoever approaches Baptism, by that very fact makes a show of having right faith in Christ, of veneration for this sacrament, and of wishing to conform to the Church, and to renounce sin. Consequently, to whatever sin a man wishes to cleave, if he approach Baptism, he approaches insincerely, which is the same as to approach without devotion. (ST III, q. 69, a. 9, ad 3)

On the other hand when a lack of sincerity such as lack of true repentance or lack of faith or lack of intention to receive and live the unique grace of the sacrament, blocks the fruitfulness of a validly received sacrament, subsequent repentance and recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation can release the fruitfulness of the sacrament.

In like manner, when a man is baptized, he receives the character, which is like a form: and he receives in consequence its proper effect, which is grace whereby all his sins are remitted. But this effect is sometimes hindered by insincerity. Wherefore, when this obstacle is removed by Penance, Baptism forthwith produces its effect. (ST III, q. 69, a. 10.)

The points that Thomas makes in regards to the necessity of repentance and the sincere intention to receive the graces of the sacraments in connection with adult baptism has application to other sacraments as well. If one does not will to conduct one's life in harmony with the purpose of the sacrament one will not receive it fruitfully. For there to be no "falsehood in the sacramental sign" the recipient of the sacrament must intend what the sacrament intends. This, of course, raises serious questions about the widespread practice regarding the Sacrament of Confirmation today where the great majority of those receiving it, rather than becoming more committed witnesses to their faith, drift away from it. There appears to be a widespread "falsehood" in the sacramental sign. The same can be said in many cases of sacramental marriage.

Faith

Thomas clearly teaches that the sacraments aren't "magic" but require faith on the part of their adult recipients in order to bear fruit.

Therefore the sacrament of Baptism is not to be conferred save on those in whom there appears some sign of their interior conversion ... Baptism is the sacrament of faith. Now dead faith does not suffice for salvation." (ST III, q. 68, a. 4, ad 2, 3) Right faith is necessary for Baptism, because as it appears from Rom. 3: 22 "the justice of God is by faith of Jesus Christ." (ST III, q. 68, a. 8). Just as the sacrament of Baptism is not to be conferred on a man who is unwilling to give up his other sins, so neither should it be given to one who is unwilling to renounce his unbelief. Yet each receives the sacrament if it be conferred on him, though not unto salvation.

It would seem that by "right faith" Thomas is not meaning "perfect faith" but at least a general faith and intention to receive the sacrament as it is understood by the Church. (See ST III, q.68, ad 3).

An important point to note here is that in this case – the absence of adequate faith – Thomas considers that the sacrament is validly conferred but the person so baptized is not justified, is not saved! Less radically, what blocks the fruitfulness of a validly conferred sacrament, once removed, releases the grace of the sacrament.

Thomas though envisions that there can be such a defect of willing the intention of receiving the sacrament that not only is the sacrament validly conferred but remains unfruitful until the defect is removed—whether it be a lack of repentance or faith—but in some cases the sacrament has not even been validly conferred and the person in that situation needs to be “rebaptized.” Not only is repentance of sins necessary but also the recipient of the sacrament must “of his own will, intend to lead a new life ... it is necessary for him to have the will or intention of receiving the sacrament.” St. Thomas cites Rom. 6: 4 which states that we are buried with Christ “so we may walk in newness of life.” (ST III, q. 68, a. 7). “If an adult lack the intention of receiving the sacrament, he must be rebaptized.” (ST III, q. 68, a. 7, ad. 2).

It is written (Wisd 1: 5): “The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful.” *But the effect of Baptism is from the Holy Spirit. Therefore insincerity hinders the effect of Baptism ...* consequently in order that a man be justified by Baptism, his will must needs embrace both Baptism and the Baptismal effect. Now, a man is said to be insincere by reason of his will being in contradiction with either Baptism or its effect. (ST III, q. 69, a. 9)

In contemporary sacramental practice one often hears that even though there appear to be serious defects of intention and preparation in someone who is approaching a sacrament, “The sacrament will take care of it.” Thomas does not agree. Thomas teaches that the reception of the sacrament should not be counted on to remove obstacles of lack of repentance, unbelief and other forms of “insincerity.” The removal of these obstacles needs to precede the reception of the sacrament.¹

When God changes man’s will from evil to good, man does not approach with insincerity. But God does not always do this. Nor is this the purpose of the sacrament, that an insincere man be made sincere: but that he who comes in sincerity, be justified. (ST III, q. 69, a. 9, ad 2)

Could there be some—many even—who are being confirmed or married in the Church, who lack the intention of receiving the sacrament as it is defined by Thomas, lacking the intention to lead the new life that each of the sacraments uniquely signify, lacking the intention of the sacramental effect? If so, if they come to a subsequent Christian awakening do they need to be “reconfirmed” or “remarried” to use the language that Thomas uses in connection with Baptism?

¹ See Colman O’Neill, *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments*, revised edition, Romanus Cessario (New York: Society of St. Paul, 1991), pp. 38 and 126 ff.

Preparation and Devotion

Thomas is aware that the “fruitfulness” of the sacraments can be understood as spanning a continuum where there are varying degrees of fruitfulness. In any case he teaches clearly that the degree of fruitfulness in the recipient of a particular sacrament is closely tied to the quality of the preparation that is given before receiving the sacrament and the subjective disposition of “devotion” that has been elicited in the recipient.

Adults, who approach Baptism in their own faith, are not equally disposed to Baptism; for some approach thereto with greater, some with less, devotion. And therefore some receive a greater, some a smaller share of the grace of newness; just as from the same fire, he receives more heat who approaches nearest to it, although the fire, as far as it is concerned, sends forth its heat equally to all. (ST III, q. 69, a. 8)

In the text just cited, Thomas stresses that the varying receptivity on the part of the recipients account for the varying fruitfulness in the recipients lives. In another text he indicates that while the grace received by similarly disposed recipients may be similar at the beginning considerable divergences can develop over time if one recipient is more attentive to the grace and its growth than another.

That greater or lesser grace appears in the baptized may occur in two ways. First, because one receives greater grace in Baptism than another, on account of his greater

devotion, as stated above. Secondly, because, though they receive equal grace, they do not make an equal use of it, but one applies himself more to advance therein, while another by his negligence baffles grace. (ST III, q. 69, a. 8, ad 2)

The initial fruitfulness of the sacraments is tied to the quality of the preparation and the “devotion” of the recipients. Preparation is needed. The fundamental principle of grace building on nature of both reason and faith having their important contributions is insisted upon by Thomas in his sacramental teaching. St. Thomas cites Romans 10:14 concerning how faith comes through hearing/preaching. (ST III, q. 71, a. 1) and that “the life of grace into which a man is regenerated presupposes the life of the rational nature, in which man is capable of receiving instruction.” (ST III, q. 71, a. 1, ad 1)

The ongoing fruitfulness of a sacrament is tied to the quality of the “follow-up” or the environment of faith in which one lives, and the ongoing receptivity to the work of the Holy Spirit in the particular grace of the sacrament. Thomas acknowledges—even in his time—that the clergy are too busy to undertake this responsibility solely by themselves but must involve the lay faithful in the task of follow-up.

The spiritual regeneration which takes place in Baptism, is in a certain manner likened to carnal generation; wherefore it is written (1 Pet. 2:2): “As new-born babes, endowed with reason, desire milk without guile.” Now, in carnal generation the new-born child needs nourishment and guidance: wherefore in spiritual generation also, someone is needed to

undertake the office of nurse and tutor by forming and instructing one who is yet a novice in the Faith, concerning things pertaining to Christian faith and mode of life, which the clergy have not the leisure to do through being busy with watching over the people generally: because little children and novices need more than ordinary care. Consequently someone is needed to receive the baptized from the sacred font as though for the purpose of instructing and guiding them. Also: Dionysius in Ecclesiastical Hierarchies speaks of this “that the parents should hand it [the child] over to some instructor versed in holy things, who would henceforth take charge of the child and be to it a spiritual father and a guide in the road of salvation.” (ST III, q.67, a. 7)

His comments on godparents contain an interesting implication about the social environment in which the recipient of a sacrament is being enfolded.

Augustine says in a sermon for Easter (#168): In the first place I admonish you, both men and women, who have raised children in Baptism, that you stand before God as sureties for those whom you have been seen to raise from the sacred font ... Godparents take upon themselves the duties of a tutor. Consequently, they are bound to watch over their godchildren when there is need for them to do so: for instance, when and where children are brought up among unbelievers. But if they are brought up among Catholic Christians, the godparents may well be excused from this responsibility, since it may be presumed that the children will be carefully instructed by their parents. If, however, they perceive in any way that the contrary is

the case, they would be bound, as far as they are able, to see to the spiritual welfare of their godchildren.” (ST III, q. 67, a. 8)

In response to objection #1 that since “uneducated and ill-instructed” people are “allowed to raise people from the sacred font” there is no need for godparents to instruct their godchildren, Thomas answers:

Where the danger is imminent, the godparent, as Dionysius says...should be someone *versed in holy things*. But where the danger is not imminent, by reason of the children being brought up among Catholics, anyone is admitted to this position because the things pertaining to the Christian rule of life and faith are known openly by all. Nevertheless an unbaptized person cannot be a godparent, as was decreed in the Council of Mainz. (ST III, q. 67, a. 8, ad 1)

Interestingly, when it comes to choosing godparents Thomas holds that it is not so important who they are if the baptized will be raised among “Catholic Christians” or will be “carefully instructed by their parents” or will be “handed over” to those who will instruct and guide them or will live in a society where “the things pertaining to the Christian rule of life and faith are known openly by all.” When this will not be the case Thomas indicates that the godparents will then have a serious responsibility and should be “versed in holy things.”

Adults Must be Tested: Don't Rush

Thomas advises that children should be baptized without delay, “because we do not look for better instruction or fuller conversion. Secondly, because of the danger of death, for no other remedy is available for them besides the sacrament of Baptism.” Adults though should be properly instructed and “tested” before they are baptized, since “adults have a remedy in the mere desire for Baptism . . . And therefore Baptism should not be conferred on adults as soon as they are converted, but it should be deferred until some fixed time. (ST III, q. 68, a. 3)²

The remedy for the original sin of children is the Sacrament of Baptism, but since adults have a remedy in the “baptism of desire” present in those preparing to receive the sacrament there is no need to rush. It is interesting to note that *Lumen Gentium* restricts its use of the effectiveness of “desire” precisely to the situation of Catechumens.

Catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, desire with an explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church, are by that very intention joined to her. With love and solicitude mother Church already embraces them as her own. (LG 14)

In the case of adults preparing for Baptism Thomas considers it of great importance that the motivation, sincerity, and readiness of those seeking to be baptized be carefully discerned. This is the case, first of all, “as a safeguard to the Church, lest she be deceived through

² See also, ST III, q. 66, a. 11, 12; q. 68, a. 2; q. 69, a. 5, ad. 1, 2.

baptizing those who come to her under false pretenses, according to 1 John 4:1 *Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, if they be of God.* And those who approach Baptism are put to this test, when their faith and morals are subjected to proof for a space of time.” (ST III, q. 68, a. 3)

Oftentimes the parables of Jesus are misinterpreted to welcome everyone into the “big tent of Catholicism,” without regard to the actual condition of those entering, either the Church or a particular sacrament. While inevitably there will be “weeds and wheat” growing in the field of the Church the goal is not to assure a good supply of weeds by lack of adequate instruction, formation and discernment in administering the sacraments of Christian initiation or other sacraments as well.

Another reason given by Thomas for the careful screening of candidates for adult Baptism is that growth in understanding and the conforming of one’s life to the truth of Christ and life in the Church requires time. He also suggests that administering Baptism in a solemn way in connection with major feasts such as Easter or Pentecost more properly conveys the significance of the sacrament than administering it in more informal ways in ordinary times. (ST III, q. 68, a. 3) Thomas therefore ends up fundamentally agreeing with the Council of Agde (Can. 34) in recommending an eight month period of catechumenate before admission to Baptism. (ST III, q. 68, obj. 2)

With Thomas' support for an 8 month Catechumenate he again anticipates the decision of Vatican II to restore the adult catechumenate in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. While the RCIA has greatly improved the initiation process in many ways it is oftentimes conducted as more often a matter of information and not also formation, and lacks any significant discernment about the readiness of candidates for baptism or confirmation, in their intention to live a new way of life and in their desire for the graces and obligations of the sacraments. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the de-emphasis of the reality of the catechumenal exorcisms, a practice which Thomas warns against.

The Importance of Exorcisms

Thomas, in his fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles and the Fathers, takes very seriously the reality of the devil and the need to remove his influence from the lives of candidates for Baptism. One reason for the lack of proper fruitfulness in the reception of sacraments is that the power of the devil is not dealt with. "The power of the devil is restrained by prayers, blessings, and the like, from hindering the sacramental effect." (ST III, q 66, a. 10)

It's interesting to note that the objections against the pre-Baptismal exorcisms that Thomas cites have a very contemporary ring. Minimizing the reality of the effects of original sin and the opening to demonic influence that accompanies it, or the claimed innocence of infants, are not warranted in Thomas' understanding by the witness of Scripture and Tradition. Against the objections against the necessity of the exorcisms before Baptism, St. Thomas cites Pope

Celestine (Letter to the Episcopate of Gaul): *Whether children or young people approach the sacrament of regeneration they should not come to the fount of life before the unclean spirit has been expelled from them by the exorcisms and breathings of the clerics...* Whoever purposes to do a work wisely, first removes the obstacles to his work; hence it is written (Jerem. 4:3): *Break up anew your fallow ground and sow not upon thorns ...* Now the devil is the enemy of man's salvation, which man acquires by Baptism; and he has a certain power over man from the very fact that the latter is subject to original or even actual sin. Consequently it is fitting that before Baptism the demons should be cast out by exorcisms, lest they impede man's salvation." (ST III, q. 71, a. 2).

Another objection that Thomas responds to claims that since not everyone is "possessed" by the devil the exorcisms are not needed in many cases. To this objection St. Thomas replies: "The energumens [the possessed] are so-called from *laboring inwardly* under the outward operation of the devil. And though not all that approach Baptism are troubled by him in their bodies, yet all who are not baptized are subject to the power of the demons, at least on account of the guilt of original sin." (ST III, q. 71, a. 2, ad 1) Here St. Thomas is making the distinction between those more severely troubled by the devil (including the "possessed") and those less troubled, but still in need of exorcism.

This of course remains the teaching of the Church but in many cases references to the devil and the exorcisms that precede and accompany baptism are treated as primitive

“symbols” of negative “energies.” But in fact, even in Thomas’s time, skepticism about the actual existence of the demonic was present, to the extent that Thomas felt the need to directly address it.

Are the exorcisms mere signs or do they really have an effect?

It’s startling to read in the objection stated below and in Thomas’ response a temptation to “demythologize” at the height of “medieval” Catholicism.

Augustine says (De symbol I): *Little children are breathed upon and exorcized, in order to expel from them the devil’s hostile power, which deceived man.* But the Church does nothing in vain. Therefore the effect of these breathings is that the power of the devils is expelled ... Some say that the things done in the exorcism have no effect, but are mere signs. But this is clearly false; since in exorcizing, the Church uses words of command to cast out the devil’s power ... Therefore we must say that they have some effect, but, other than that of Baptism ... Those things that are done in the exorcism remove the twofold impediment against the reception of saving grace. Of these, one is the outward impediment; so far as the demons strive to hinder man’s salvation ... as to the devil not placing obstacles against the reception of the sacrament.... The other impediment is within, forasmuch as, from having contracted original sin, man’s sense is closed to the perception of the mysteries of salvation. Hence Rabanus says (De Instit. Cleric. i) that *by means of the typifying spittle and the touch of the priest, the Divine wisdom and power brings salvation to the catechumen, that his nostrils being opened he may*

perceive the odor of the knowledge of God, that his ears be opened to hear the commandments of God, that his senses be opened in his inmost heart to respond. (ST III, q. 71, a. 3)

But won't Baptism take care of the demons?

Just as Thomas cautioned against expecting the reception of the sacrament to do the work that was supposed to prepare for it in the matter of repentance from sin and unbelief, and other forms of "insincerity," he makes the same caution in relation to the necessity of the preparatory exorcisms. To the objection that the sacrament itself will take care of any need for exorcisms St. Thomas replies:

The power of the devil in so far as he hinders man from obtaining glory, is expelled from man by the Baptismal ablution; but in so far as he hinders man from receiving the sacrament, his power is cast out by the exorcisms. (ST III, q. 71, a. 2, ad 2)

Thomas makes clear that the preparatory exorcisms don't need to be repeated but if they are skipped they should be done when their absence is recognized.

Nor are they supplied to no purpose after Baptism: because just as the effect of Baptism may be hindered before it is received, so can it be hindered after it has been received. (ST III, q. 71, a. 3, ad 3)

A growing contemporary Catholic literature is beginning to address the question of why and how post-Baptismal “minor exorcisms”—not in the case of the “possessed” which are reserved to the official diocesan exorcist, when such have been appointed—can bring significant freedom to even Catholics attempting to live a life of great devotion and discipline but who are being hindered by various obstacles.³ Thomas, again considering the work load of priests, envisions “Readers and Exorcists” assisting the priest in the task of catechizing and exorcisms. (St III, q. 71, a. 4, ad. 2)

It is interesting to note the frequency with which Pope Francis emphasizes the reality of the devil in both his informal and formal remarks.

Conclusion

³ There is a growing literature which attempts to address the pastoral needs of those praying for others for deliverance from the influence of the demonic. Three that are written by Catholics that many find of help are: Fr. Michael Scanlan, T.O.R. and Randall Cirner, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Weapon for Spiritual Warfare*, (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980); *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Practical Manual*, Francis MacNutt (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1995); Neal Lozano, *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance*, (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2003). A more theological/pastoral treatment of the area is provided by Cardinal Suenens, with a forward by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens, *Renewal and the Powers of Darkness* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1983). A study on the power of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola to bring about significant inner healing and transformation, which includes “case studies”, is the book by Fr. John Horn, S.J., *Mystical Healing: The Psychological and Spiritual Power of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996). See also the article by Ralph Martin, “The Authority of the Good Shepherd: Overcoming Evil,” in *Good Shepherd: Living Christ’s Own Pastoral Authority*, Fifth Annual Symposium on the Spirituality and Identity of the Diocesan Priest, Co-sponsored by: The Institute for Priestly Formation and University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein Seminary, March 16-19, 2006: 69-81. See also the seriousness with which the tradition regards the work of the demonic in the life of Christians, for example: John Cassian, *The Conferences*, VII, and VIII. *The Institutes* V-XII; Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, I: 2, 16-17; II: 1,2-6; III: 1; IV: 7-9 Francis De Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, IV; Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, Sermons 15: 6, 19:7, 33: 10-11; 63:6; 64: 4.

Many of the problems being encountered in the Church today concerning the lack of fruitfulness in the lives of those receiving the sacraments could be resolved or greatly mitigated by applying the wisdom of St. Thomas concerning sacramental fruitfulness.

These insights of Aquinas have direct applicability to sacramental preparation today. In most cases “the sacrament will take care of it” approach does not work. We can’t provide seriously defective sacramental preparation and expect to see in most cases the fruitfulness that our theology of the sacraments envisions. This of course raises huge questions. All of us have to learn a mode of instruction and pastoral care for those preparing for a sacrament that includes evangelization elements as well as specifically catechetical elements. Another noteworthy feature of what Aquinas envisions in effecting fruitfulness is actually knowing the condition of those we are preparing for the sacraments. This means that more than impersonal teaching has to be given, but that appropriately sensitive but searching pastoral conversations need to take place with each individual preparing for a sacrament. This also means that “one size doesn’t fit all” in terms of the pace of growth in conversion and readiness to receive a sacrament.

Eliciting faith and conversion to the person of Christ and an openness to beginning a journey of discipleship is crucial to sacramental effectiveness. This means that our choice of RCIA leaders, Catholic school teachers, religious educators, youth leaders, and those charged with the formation of parents desiring sacraments for their minor children, has to involve more

than accepting well-meaning volunteers or even paid staff that lack experience in leading others to conversion. Where can such formation be had? Perhaps the most accessible of this type of conversion oriented formation is present in the various contemporary and traditional Catholic renewal movements which are oriented to conversion and that have a track record of such conversions. Movements such as the Cursillo, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Neo-Catechumenal Way, Christ Renews His Parish, ACTS, and many others, including the various youth retreats that are offshoots of the Cursillo Movement that maintain a focus on Christ and conversion rather than just the horizontal dimension of community, have a track record of leading many to a deeper conversion. Traditional methods such as the Ignatian spiritual exercises continue to be effective in eliciting conversion and deeper discipleship. What are some of the elements that make for the effectiveness of these movements and methods in eliciting conversion that can be applied to sacramental preparation? All involve some dynamic and confident presentation of the *kerygma* and personal testimony of ordinary people from various walks of life to the reality of what is being proclaimed, that makes clear that a response is necessary to the generosity of God in giving us his Son. Elements of teaching, proclamation, personal testimony, prayer, community interaction, all with a view to eliciting a response of commitment to Christ – conversion – characterize these movements and methods

We see these same elements present in what prepared the disciples for the first Pentecost and the subsequent experiences of the Spirit characteristic of Christian initiation throughout the Acts of the Apostles. As we again enter a cultural situation that has more in

common with what the early Church had to face than anything we have known in our lifetimes
the wisdom of the beginnings takes on a new relevance. But that's a topic for another article.