

**THE SACRAMENTS OF
RECONCILIATION AND EUCHARIST
IN THE LIFE OF DE LA SALLE
BROTHERS IN SRI LANKA (2/2)**

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The understanding and meaningfulness of the Sacrament

Except for about 06% of the whole sample (those who responded to the questionnaire), most of the respondents consider the Sacrament of Reconciliation as relevant and meaningful to them. At the same time, 64% of the total respondents also feel that this Sacrament has at times become a routine for them, with the same sins repeated again and again.

While 88% of the respondents feel it important for them to get at least some help in this sacrament in order to avoid repeated faults, 82% seem in fact to receive some help for their daily problems. Except for one respondent (03%), the rest have found this sacrament to be helping them to be forgiving towards every one.

More than one third (36%) of the respondents seem to find the penance given to them to be rather meaningless 33% feel that no one has the right to impose a regular rhythm of confession on them.

The need of the Sacrament

An interesting observation which emerged from the questionnaire is that except for one in the age group 36 - 45 (03%), the rest consider themselves to be persons who can commit sin and so are in need of this sacrament.

Frequency of reception

While one in the age group 36 - 45 (03%) always frequents this sacrament about once a month, one third (33%) of the total respondents never frequent it at all in a month.

Role of the Priest

More than half of the respondents (54.5%) prefer never to go to confession to a priest who knows them well. On the other hand 12.1% do so always.

Similarly, while 24.2% would always like to remain unknown in the confessional and prefer the confessional box, 30.3% prefer an open-dialogue with the priest.

Except for one (03%) in the age group 26-35, all the other respondents find the community celebration with individual confession, the best expressions of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Difficulties faced

The most common (66.6%) difficulty seems to be finding a suitable priest for this sacrament. Another difficulty (45.5%) is a sense of fear and/or guilt in approaching this sacrament. Some (54.5%) have the problem of expressing their sins in the confessional or of telling the whole truth.

(b) The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Understanding of the Sacrament

All the respondents, except one (03%) in the under 26 age group are aware that community involves common worship. However, it seems to 63.6% of the respondents that the community aspect of the Eucharist is just a matter of song, gestures, and praying together. On the other hand, to 45.4% of the respondents, the celebration of the Eucharist appears to be an empty ritual. At the same time, all feel that the basic character of the Eucharist is a sacrificial meal.

All are aware that the Eucharist is not their only access to the presence of Jesus the Christ in their lives. 90.9% of the respondents acknowledge that Eucharistic celebration cannot be divorced from Eucharistic living.

Meaningfulness of the Sacrament

All the respondents testify that they have (to some extent at least) discovered that the Eucharist can be an integrating factor of their daily life and provides them a chance to learn and grow as a human being.

All (except one in the age group 36 - 45) also recognize that the reception of the Eucharist mysteriously engages them in communion with others. Therefore, they have concluded that without the spirit of mutual service, they will not in fact be celebrating in memory of Him, even though they perform the ritual of the Eucharist.

87.9% add that a community can easily miss the Jesus in whose name they are gathered.

Need of the Sacrament

All the respondents feel the need to celebrate bodily and ritually who they are as a community in Christ. Moreover, 93.9% find the Eucharistic prayers a message to be truly prayed. Furthermore they (93.9%) make it a point to come alone to spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

The role of the priest

Quite a number of the respondents (63.6%) indicate their experience of the Eucharistic celebration as a symbol of clerical power.

Observations of the researcher/author:

Results of the overall sample of the participants in this study seems to show significant changes in their approach to the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation seems to be in a state of transition. The importance of personal responsibility in moral decisions and the freedom of conscience have very much been emphasized today. As a result people felt that they have to decide for themselves according to their own conscience rather than according to clear and certain moral precepts. This has left certain "pious" people unsure about the morality of what they were doing. Some have begun to doubt whether they can commit sin at all against God.

The results of the present study indicate a general appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. However, there does not appear to be much of a critical understanding of this sacrament as such. There was only one comment which reflected the current trends towards this sacrament.

Among educated classes the traditional penitential system has broken down. Newer forms such as community celebration with individual confession have aroused interest among many as shown by the results of this study. However, the practice of occasional penitential services with general abso-

lution aimed at improving community life by mutual reconciliation does not appear to have taken much root in the respondents to the questionnaire of this researcher.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is also connected to the kind of image of God which one had developed from the earliest years. If that God is for the most part benign, accepting and life-encouraging, it is easy to turn to him spontaneously in openness and ask for forgiveness. If, on the contrary, He is mostly an admonishing, sternly observant and punitive God, there will be an inclination to hide from, not to think of, and even consciously to ignore such a God. Reconciliation with a punitive God easily becomes a chore, a response of fear. A number of respondents to this researcher show the better kind of attitudes toward God and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Today, the minister functions more as a healer than as a judge. However, not all priests are temperamentally suited to be confessors and celebrants of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The survey shows a common pattern of difficulty of finding a suitable priest.

In the celebration of this sacrament, the Church reveals itself not only as the Sacrament of God's mercy in the world but also as a sinful community, still "on the Way." If this is not manifest, people will take their personal problems to counselors and therapists rather than to priests and pastors.

It is up to us religious educators to be creative and find our own cultural metaphors for forgiveness and reconciliation and develop liturgical symbols that speak to us of God's mercy and pardon. At the same time, it has to be kept in mind that these rituals of penance and reconciliation cannot substitute for the reality of conversion and reconciliation. The survey shows a need of the respondents to understand better these ideas about reconciliation.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Popular religious literature is replete with examples on the infinite merits of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, etc. The Eucharist is the primary ritual that symbolically and really incorporates the primary resources of the giving of nourishment, communication and some gestures of healing. It is a superlative experience for restoring and giving growth in personality for the Christian within his religious activity.

Eucharistic presidency is a specific ministry within the Eucharistic assembly. On the other hand, the ministries that contribute to the quality of the Eucharistic celebration (liturgical planners, music ministers, liturgical dancers, ushers) and those that contribute to the sacramentality of the celebration (deacons, distributors of communion extraordinary ministries of Eucharist, readers, acolytes) help in this sacrament's effectiveness. Without an appreciation of such ministries in the assembly of God, the Eucharistic celebration tends to be a symbol of clerical power. The survey shows a concern about the sacraments and clerical power.

Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament (primarily intended for the sick) provides a most powerful symbol of the abiding presence of Jesus the Christ within the Church. It also provides a marvellous opportunity for simply relaxing in the presence of the Risen Lord and spending time contemplating Him, who offers Himself in the Eucharist. The survey shows that 65.7% of the respondents spend time before the Blessed Sacrament in prayer.

Significant overall time effects were noted by the participants of this study regarding meaningfulness of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Moreover, the fact there were no significant differences in their responses regarding the need of this Sacrament suggests a wholesome devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

At its present stage of development, the Eucharist is a multi-valent religious symbol. It is a complex sacramental

sign which can express and reveal a variety of Christian values and meanings. In fact, it is not a single door to the sacred but a multiple door to sacred truth and mysterious reality.

Therefore, it is important to develop Eucharistic celebrations that inspire us to praise and thank God. However, "the fact must be honestly faced that even the most desirable changes made on behalf of contemporary needs will fail of their purpose unless a renewal of spirit gives life to them." (Perfectae Caritatis. 2.e)

Conclusion:

On the basis of evidence resulting from the analysis of the data gathered for this study, the following conclusions are made:

1. Of interest in the present study is the general understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist among the De La Salle Brothers in Sri Lanka. The vast majority found them quite relevant and meaningful to them.
2. Although a few considered these celebrations to be rather mechanical and routine, yet the majority found these two sacraments quite meaningful.
3. A felt need for these Sacraments was evident in the responses of the participants. However, the quality of the celebrations of these sacraments appears to need improvement.
4. Of the common difficulties encountered by the participants, the availability of suitable celebrants is a problem. A sense of fear and guilt is also felt by some participants with regard to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
5. Of interest in the present study is the fact that the role of the local Church assembled, as meeting together to celebrate the mysteries has also to be emphasized in these liturgical celebrations.
6. Although the data should be interpreted cautiously there is evidence to suggest that there is a need to update the knowledge of the current trends in the area of sacramental theology for a good number of the participants.

When all is said and done, it has to be kept in mind that what we are trying to celebrate in these two sacraments (Reconciliation and the Eucharist) is a mystery; and so the mystery which is unfolded before the participants remains to some extent incomprehensible. These two sacraments, perhaps need to be experienced as privileged gifts of grace to be activated continually by living them. Therefore, not just "being" absolved of sin but "living" as forgiven and forgiving and reconciling persons is vital. Similarly, not just "receiving" Eucharist but "being" Eucharist in service of others go hand-in-hand.

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