

**THE SACRAMENTS OF  
RECONCILIATION AND EUCHARIST  
IN THE LIFE OF DE LA SALLE  
BROTHERS IN SRI LANKA (1/2)**

**Brother Joseph Michael**

**Introduction:**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Eucharist have often been pondered, discussed and written about, especially after Vatican II. For many “good” Catholics, the traditional Roman Catholic beliefs and practices with regard to these two sacraments represent a very powerful stabilizing force in the midst of change. For other individuals, these have become outmoded and no longer serve as a foundation for their spiritual life. This paper represents an attempt to discover and assess the here and now lived experience of the De La Salle (DLS) Brothers in Sri Lanka with reference to the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

**Definition of Terms:**

For purposes of this study, the following terms are defined as follows, in order to have a clear understanding of the problem:

1. A Sacrament
2. The Sacrament of Reconciliation
3. The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

**(1) A Sacrament**

From time immemorial people have given the high points of their existence a festal or a significant form. The sacraments too are ways of celebrating our existence, given to us by the Lord in His Church. Key points of our existence are given significant forms to say that we are redeemed and given new life.

Living in the multi-cultural and multi-religious context of Sri Lanka, it can be seen how the four major religious - Hindu, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam live here side by side. Religious services and functions abound.

Moreover, every religion also makes use of sacraments, although they do not call them so. The term sacrament comes from the Latin word *sacramentum* - an oath of allegiance made by soldiers to their commander and the gods of Rome. Christian writers in the second century AD borrowed the term and used it to talk about the ceremony of Christian initiation to their Roman contemporaries.

A Sacrament is a visible sign of God’s desire and pledge to deepen his relationship with us. It promises the gift of grace we seek: healing, nourishing, cleansing, freeing, consecrating, blessing, empowering us to accept his reign in our lives and deepen our covenant with him and his people.

**(2) The Sacrament of Reconciliation**

There have been many sacraments of forgiveness and reconciliation in the history of Catholicism. Baptism was the first sacramental ritual to be clearly associated with forgiveness of sins. In the Middle Ages, the anointing of the sick was for spiritual rather than physical healing. The Eucharist became par excellence the sacrament of reconciliation with God and people.

Popular understanding since the early Middle Ages has focused on the forgiveness of sins and used the term “confession,” a liturgical format which gives prominence to the individual penitent’s narration of sins to the priest so as to receive absolution. In 1215, Lateran Council IV declared that “all Catholics who committed serious sins had to confess them to their pastors within a year.”

The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is conferred by the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This Sacrament consists of three actions of the penitent and the priest’s absolution. The penitent’s acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation. Individual and integral confession of grave sins followed by absolution remains in the Latin rite an important means of reconciliation with God and with the Church.

**(3) The Sacrament of the Eucharist**

People of many religions claim to experience the presence of gods or spiritual beings; they offer sacrifices to deities and supernatural powers; they commemorate the memory of persons and events in the past; they share ritual meals that have sacramental significance.

At various points in its history, the Sacrament of the Eucharist has emphasized now one and now another facet of the Christian mystery. In its root, perhaps the Eucharist is a single mystery, but in its manifestations it is complex, revealing a sacramental dimension to almost every aspect of human existence.

The term “Eucharist” is derived from the Greek word which means “to give thanks.” Jesus himself “gave thanks” at the Last Supper (Lk. 22 : 19; Mk - 14 : 23; Mt. 26: 27; 1 Cor. II: 24 ) and probably at the other meals which he shared with his disciples. In fact, the Sacrament of the Eucharist can only be understood against a background of many meals of fellowship which Jesus enjoyed with his disciples, both men and women.

The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, that is, of the work of Salvation accomplished by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, a work made present by the liturgical action.

**Statement of the Problem:**

This study aims to find out how at present the De La Salle Brothers in Sri Lanka differ in their perceptions and feelings towards the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the general understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist among the De La Salle Brothers in Sri Lanka?
2. How meaningful are these Sacraments to the De La Salle Brothers in Sri Lanka?
3. Is there a felt need of these two Sacraments among the De La Salle Brothers in Sri Lanka?
4. What are the common difficulties encountered by the De La Salle Brothers in Sri Lanka with regard to these two Sacraments?
5. How do they view the role of the priest in these two Sacraments?

**Method:***Sample*

The participants for this study included all the De La Salle Brothers resident in Sri Lanka up to January 14, 1997. They ranged in age from those in their twenties to those in their eighties.

The following table shows the distribution of these Brothers in the Sri Lankan sector in terms of their ages.

Age Group	Number	Percentage
< 26	02	3.22
26 - 35	12	19.35
36 - 45	13	20.97
46 - 55	10	16.13
56 - 65	09	14.52
66 - 75	07	11.29
> 75	09	14.52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>

With the approval of the Brother Directors of each community, questionnaires were distributed to all the Brothers in each community. By January 15, 1997, 34 Questionnaires were returned to the author. As the age of the respondent was not mentioned, one particular questionnaire was not taken into consideration for purposes of analysis. Another questionnaire was received on January 15, 1997. However, this too had to be discarded because the page containing information about age was not available.

The other 33 completed questionnaires were selected as the samples for statistical evaluation.

The following table shows the distribution of respondents according to their chronological age.

Age Group	Number	Age Group	Number
< 26	2	56 - 65	5
26 - 35	7	66 - 75	4
36 - 45	9	> 75	1
46 - 55	5	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>

**Survey Instrument:**

The survey instrument used in this investigation was a questionnaire constructed by the researcher. Numbers 1 to 15 of the questionnaire referred to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, while numbers 16 to 30 referred to the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

This questionnaire was designed to elicit information needed about the perceptions and feelings of the DLS Brothers in Sri Lanka to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist as manifested by subscription to self-descriptive statements implying an appreciation of these two Sacraments.

**Analysis:**

The researcher has found it satisfactory to present the frequency tallies and the percentage of the various age groups in the statistical treatment of the data, rather than use a system of weightings.

This analysis by age group gives also a kind of cross-sectional view of the overall experiences/responses of the Brothers in Sri Lanka.

**Results.**

Through the questionnaire, the researcher tried to investigate the following:

**(a) The Sacrament of Reconciliation**

- The understanding of the Sacrament (Q. 12)
- The meaningfulness of the Sacrament (Q. 1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 14)
- The need of the Sacrament (Q. 11)
- Difficulties faced (Q. 5, 8, 9)
- Role of the priest (Q. 4, 13, 15)
- Frequency of reception of the Sacrament (Q. 2)

**(b) The Sacrament of the Eucharist**

- The understanding of the Sacrament (Q. 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 27)
- The meaningfulness of the Sacrament (Q. 21, 24, 25, 26, 29)
- The need of the Sacrament (Q. 20, 28, 30)
- The Role of the Priest (Q. 19)

The results of the study are interpreted as follows:

**(a) The Sacrament of Reconciliation**

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