

*Personal Reflections on a Loving Pastor and Faithful Servant of the Lord:
Cardinal William Wakefield Baum*

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It is with gratitude for the invitation from the Congregation for Catholic Education that I share these reflections on the life and ministry of His Eminence Cardinal William Wakefield Baum. I have the privilege of serving as the Cardinal William Baum University Professor of Theology at The Catholic University of America as well as his successor as Archbishop of Washington.

It was my joy to know, work, and pray with Cardinal Baum from the time I was a young priest right up to the moment when with others I gathered around our beloved friend and commended his soul to the Lord. As I now look back and remember his life, ministry and legacy of this gentle and good pastor, I give thanks to God for his witness and fruitful service to the Lord he so much loved.

Among the legacies of Cardinal Baum is a revitalized educational ministry throughout the Church. He began as Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1980, in that post-conciliar period of manifold challenges. As he did wherever he was sent, His Eminence accepted this appointment with characteristic deep faith in the Church as the living presence of Christ in the world and the manifestation of God's kingdom coming to be in our time.

Soon Cardinal Baum was given the charge by Pope, later, Saint, John Paul II to oversee an Apostolic Visitation of all the seminaries and houses of formation in the United States as part of the renewal of the Church envisioned by the Second Vatican Council. The task of conducting that visitation was given to Bishop John Marshall of Burlington, Vermont, while I was assigned to the responsibility as the Secretary of the Visitation. A few years earlier, Cardinal Baum had provided Capuchin Father Ronald Lawler and myself invaluable assistance in the publication of an adult catechism, *The Teaching of Christ*. Now, I was happy to be able, once again, to work with him.



The visitation process was a massive undertaking and at every step, Cardinal Baum was involved. Over the next six years, 220 individual institutions, major seminaries, schools of theology, college level seminaries, religious houses of formation and college level diocesan houses of formation were visited. In anticipation of those visits, more than a year was spent preparing the Visitation instruments, which were the compilation of what was expected of the various institutions in the formation of future priests according to the published documents of the Church. Training sessions were also held for bishops, major superiors, seminary rectors and personnel who would participate in the visitations. This vast effort under Cardinal Baum was in addition to all his regular responsibilities as Prefect.

The visitations themselves took place over the following five years in comprehensive fashion, culminating in the publication by the Congregation of reports on the state of priestly formation at each of the indicated levels. In addition, each institution and its sponsoring bishop or religious community received a report with both commendations and recommendations.

It is generally recognized today that this Visitation, under the direction of Cardinal Baum as Prefect, greatly met the expectations of Pope John Paul II, who had indicated that he felt that the renewal of the Church in the United States, in accordance with the call of the Council, would only take place with the renewal of seminary formation. Certainly, the vibrancy of so many priests today in the United States is a testament to the success of His Eminence in this critical work.

One sign of the fruit of that labor is found in our newly established archdiocesan college/pre-theology house of formation, the Saint John Paul II Seminary. Established four years ago, the seminary is now filled and there is a waiting list. The last official public activity of Cardinal Baum was the dedication of that seminary in October 2011.

The faithful service of Cardinal Baum would also bear fruit, one-hundred fold, with his collaborative work in preparation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. With this invaluable document, the catechetical confusion that marked so many sectors of

the Church would begin to subside and clarity be restored in the teaching of the faith. “it is a great achievement”, His Eminence would later affirm. “We live in a world of flux. We are buffeted by winds of change in doctrines and ideologies. We need very much a sure Catholic guide to what the Church believes, teaches and transmits.”

Proclaiming the changeless saving truth about Jesus Christ was the primary goal of William Baum throughout his priestly and episcopal ministry. To that end, he helped also to strengthen the Catholic identity of institutions of higher education with his assistance in the publication of Pope John Paul II’s apostolic constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*.



Above all, he said, he wanted to make the connection between the way we live and the teaching of Jesus Christ. We can see this in his episcopal motto, *Ministerium reconciliationis*, “ministry of reconciliation”. In his service to the Congregation for Catholic Education, this particular ministry of reconciliation was evident. It was the responsibility of the Congregation for oversight and relations with Catholic colleges and universities throughout the world. In this time of great development, Cardinal Baum met regularly and continually with the leadership of Catholic higher education during a decade that witnessed a significant realignment of university governance and structures that continues to be operative today.

How appropriate that after a decade of service overseeing the universities, colleges and seminaries throughout the world, Cardinal Baum would become the head of the Vatican Sacred Penitentiary, that office that oversees the real of sacred space where conscience gives onto the very presence of God in our lives.

While we remember Cardinal Baum here for his distinguished service as Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, his memory is dear everywhere he went, particularly in the archdiocesan Church of Washington, where he was our spiritual shepherd from 1973 until he was called to be Prefect of the Congregation.

If we were to examine his *curriculum vitae*, we would see many other remarkable assignments – advisor and *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council, where he helped draft the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*; executive director of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; bishop of the

Diocese of Springfield- Cape Girardeau; cardinal-electoral in the three conclaves that would elect Popes John Paul I, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI; Major Penitentiary; and, no less important, parish priest. In each of these places, His Eminence touched the souls of people in immeasurable ways.

At the center of it all was Cardinal Baum's commitment to generously serving the Lord as his priest, manifesting Christ's love and teaching, leading and sanctifying those entrusted to his care. He did this faithfully and with great joy for more than 64 years, since his ordination in 1951 at the age of 24 in the Diocese of Kansas City, where he grew up. The consequence of this commitment is that, like leaven in the world, His Eminence helped to grow the Church and manifest the kingdom of God with his quiet, yet powerful ministry. His witness is an inspiration to all of us who want more faithfully to follow Jesus Christ.

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