YEAR OF FAITH

OCTOBER 11, 2012 – NOVEMBER 24, 2013

ESSAYS BY THE FACULTY OF
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Essays by the Faculty of The Athenaeum of Ohio

Editor: Terrance Callan

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Preface

Rev. Benedict D. O’Cinnsealaigh STD

In his Apostolic Letter *Porta fidei* (The Door of Faith) Pope Benedict XVI declared a *Year of Faith* beginning on October 11, 2012, and concluding on November 24, 2013. The beginning of the Year of Faith is both the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and the 20th anniversary of the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Pope Benedict XVI describes observance of the Year of Faith in the following words:

Reflection on the faith will have to be intensified, so as to help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel, especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing. We will have the opportunity to profess our faith in the Risen Lord in our cathedrals and in the churches of the whole world; in our homes and among our families, so that everyone may feel a strong need to know better and to transmit to future generations the faith of all times. Religious communities as well as parish communities, and all ecclesial bodies old and new, are to find a way, during this Year, to make a public profession of the *Credo* (8).

At the Pope’s request, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith developed recommendations for living the Year of Faith. These recommendations include the following:

Associations … are invited to promote specific initiatives which, through the contribution of their proper charism and in collaboration with their local Pastors, will contribute to the wider experience of the *Year of Faith*. … in a creative and generous way, [they] will be able to find the most appropriate ways in which to offer their witness to the faith in service to the Church.
Preface

One way the Athenaeum of Ohio/Mount St. Mary’s Seminary has chosen to implement this recommendation is to offer the Church this collection of essays as an aid to its growth in understanding and embodying faith. We hope you find them enlightening, provocative and useful.
Faith in the Letters of Paul

Terrance Callan PhD

As is well known, faith is a very prominent topic in the letters of Paul. Paul speaks of faith mainly by using three related terms:
1. Least common is the adjective “believing” or “worthy of belief” (pistos) which occurs 33 times.
2. Next most often used is the verb “to believe” (pisteuō) – it occurs 54 times.
3. Most common is the noun “faith” (pistis) – it occurs 142 times.

Belief as Characteristic of Christians

The participle of “to believe” (pisteuō) is often used to speak of Christians as believers without specifying the object of their faith. One instance of this is found in Rom 1:16 which speaks of the gospel as the power of God for salvation for everyone believing. There are eleven other instances of this, all but two in letters whose authenticity is not questioned. Especially in the Pastoral Epistles, the adjective “believing” (pistos) is used with the same meaning. For example, 1 Tim 4:3 refers to food that God has created to be received with thanksgiving by the believing. The adjective “unbelieving” (apistos), used mainly in the undoubted letters, always designates someone who is not a Christian. This way of speaking shows that for Paul, faith is a central element of Christian existence. Faith is so characteristic of Christians that they can simply be designated as those who believe. Similarly, Christianity can simply be called faith. Gal 1:23 describes Paul’s conversion after having persecuted Christians as a matter of preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.

The Content of Faith

The passages mentioned thus far say little about the content of Christian faith, though Rom 1:16 probably presumes that one believes the gospel. Elsewhere Paul uses “to believe” (pisteuō) to specify the content of Christian faith. In a number of passages Paul speaks about Abraham’s faith in God. In Rom 4:3 and Gal 3:6 Paul
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does this by citing Gen 15:6 - “Abraham believed in God [dative case], and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Paul makes further reference to Abraham’s faith in God in Rom 4:5 and 17. Since Abraham’s faith is a model for the faith of Christians, Christian faith is also faith in God. This is explicit in Rom 4:24 and Titus 3:8. In 1 Thess 1:8 Paul also uses the noun “faith” (pistis) followed by the preposition pros to specify Christian faith as faith in God.

Just as Paul uses “to believe” to specify Christian faith as faith in God, he uses it to specify it as faith in Christ. In Rom 9:33 and 10:11 Paul does this by citing Isa 28:16 (“whoever believes in him will not be put to shame”) which he understands as referring to Christ; in this passage “him” is the object of the preposition epi. Paul also speaks of faith in Christ in Gal 2:16 and five other passages. Paul also uses the noun “faith” followed by the preposition “in” (en) to specify Christian faith as faith in Christ. This is found in Gal 3:26 and five other passages. The same idea is expressed by using “faith” followed by the preposition eis in Col 2:5.

The idea that Christian faith is faith in Christ may also be expressed by using “faith” followed by “Christ,” or an equivalent term, in the genitive case, though this is disputed. Such expressions are found in Rom 3:22 and seven other passages. Some argue that in these expressions, the term in the genitive case indicates the one who possesses faith, i.e., they speak of Christ’s own faith, not the faith of others in Christ. Thus Rom 3:22 would speak of the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ’s faith, not through faith in Jesus Christ. Understood this way, in these passages Paul emphasizes the importance of Jesus’ own relationship with God.

One of the main arguments in favor of this interpretation is that when Paul uses a term in the genitive case following “faith,” it frequently indicates the possessor of the faith rather than the object of the faith. Thus in Rom 3:3 Paul refers to God’s faith and in Rom 4:12 and 16 to Abraham’s faith; cf. also Titus 1:1. This is also true when the term in the genitive case is a pronoun. In Rom 4:5 Paul refers to “his faith” and in nine passages refers to “your faith.” On the other hand, as we have seen, Paul uses a variety of different grammatical expressions to speak of faith in God and Christ. And in some cases, it seems clear that a term in the genitive case used with “faith” indicates the object of faith; cf. Rom 4:17. The clearest instance is Gal 2:16 where Paul first refers to being made righteous through faith in/of Jesus Christ, then says that we have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be made righteous from faith in/of Christ.
Faith in the Letters of Paul

Using these three expressions in parallel, the middle one of which unambiguously refers to faith in Christ, strongly suggests that here “faith” followed by “Christ” in the genitive case also expresses the idea of faith in Christ. Another instance in which a term in the genitive case is used with “faith” to indicate its object is Phil 1:27 which refers to faith in the gospel; cf. also Col 2:12; 2 Thess 2:13.

For Paul faith in God and faith in Christ are connected. According to Rom 4:24, faith in God is faith in the one who raised Jesus from the dead (cf. also 1 Thess 1:8-10). It is faith that God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 10:9, 10, 14). Faith in Jesus is also faith that Jesus died and rose (1 Thess 4:14; cf. Gal 2:20). This is the content of the gospel that Christians believed when it was preached to them (1 Cor 15:1-11). Therefore, if Christ has not been raised, Christian faith is in vain (κενscrollTop69 - 1 Cor 15:14) or empty (ματαιᾱ - 1 Cor 15:17).

Origin and Character of Faith

According to Paul, faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:9; Gal 5:22; Phil 1:29). However, he can also speak of the Spirit as coming from faith (Gal 3:2, 5, 14). Perhaps Paul understands believing in Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit as simultaneous. This would allow him to speak of faith as both the gift of the Spirit and the basis on which one receives the Spirit.

The gift of faith is given in the context of hearing the gospel. In Rom 10:14 Paul asks how people could believe in one about whom they have not heard; in v 17 he concludes that faith comes from hearing (cf. Gal 3:2, 5). In 1 Cor 2:5 Paul says that the Corinthians’ faith is not in human wisdom but in the power of God. Earlier, in 1:18-25, he has explicated the contrast between human wisdom and the foolishness of his proclamation. Paul speaks of faith as something one has (Rom 14:22; 1 Cor 13:2; 1 Tim 1:19), in which one can stand (1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 1:24) or be established (Col 1:23; 2:7). He also speaks of faith as something that grows (2 Cor 10:15; 2 Thess 1:3), as something in which one can be weak (Rom 4:19; 14:1), grow strong (Rom 4:20), or abound (2 Cor 8:7); cf. the reference to the measure of faith in Rom 12:3. Paul says that faith is one of three things that endure (1 Cor 13:13).

In the Pastoral Epistles Paul says that he has kept the faith (2 Tim 4:7). Faith (and other things) can be pursued (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22), followed (2 Tim 3:10) and shown (Tit 2:10); or on the
other hand, be renounced (1 Tim 4:1), denied (1 Tim 5:8), set aside (1 Tim 5:12) or upset (2 Tim 2:18).

Faith leads to action. In 1 Cor 13:2 Paul speaks of faith as something that can move mountains. In 2 Cor 5:7 he speaks of walking through faith. In Gal 5:6 he speaks of faith working through love. In Phil 1:27 he speaks of striving together in faith. In 1 Thess 5:8 Paul urges the Thessalonians to put on the breastplate of faith (and love); Eph 6:16 speaks of taking the shield of faith. In both passages, faith is seen as part of the armor that should be worn by Christians as they resist the powers of evil.

For Paul faith has a public character. Paul says that the faith of the Romans (Rom 1:8) and Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:6) is announced. In 1 Thess 1:8 Paul speaks of the Thessalonians’ faith as having gone forth. Correspondingly, it is said that the faith of the Thessalonians can be known (1 Thess 3:5) and that one can hear of people’s faith (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; Phm 5) and remember it (2 Tim 1:5). Those who hear about the faith of others are encouraged by it (Rom 1:12; 1 Thess 3:7).

The idea that faith is so characteristic of Christians that they can simply be called believers, and even more the idea to be discussed below, that faith is the source of salvation, suggest that faith is uniquely important for Christians. But at other times Paul seems to speak of faith as one of a group of somewhat comparable items. Faith is only one of several gifts of the Holy Spirit. Faith is one of three things that endure (along with hope and love). Faith is one part of the armor that Christians should wear. And in ways not yet mentioned faith is included in lists of virtues. In 1 Thess 1:3 Paul speaks of the Thessalonians’ work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope. In 2 Cor 8:7 Paul lists things in which the Corinthians excel, beginning with faith and continuing with speech and knowledge. Several times in 1 and 2 Timothy faith is included in lists of virtues that Timothy possesses or should possess (1 Tim 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:10).

It is not clear whether faith is here being used in a different sense than elsewhere in Paul’s letters. If not, this may indicate that faith is not as uniquely important for Paul as some of his language suggests. Perhaps he speaks of faith as the source of salvation for rhetorical purposes, but does not mean that it alone is the source of salvation.
Faith as the Source of Salvation

Paul understands faith in God and Christ as the way in which Christians receive salvation from sin. This is especially emphatic in Romans and Galatians where Paul argues that salvation comes from faith and not from keeping the Jewish law. Paul makes this argument in order to counter the view that Gentile Christians must keep the Jewish law. In order to reject this view, Paul argues that righteousness does not come from keeping the law, but from faith. Since righteousness is the opposite of sin, righteousness restores harmony between human beings and God; righteousness is salvation.

In conjunction with the argument that salvation comes from faith and not from keeping the Jewish law, in Galatians Paul speaks of faith as something that appeared at a certain point in the history of God’s dealings with the Jewish people. In Gal 3:23-25 Paul speaks of the time before faith came and of what happened when faith came. Although Abraham had faith, Paul here supposes that the time between Abraham and Christ was the time of the law. He associates faith with the new period inaugurated by Christ.

One prominent way in which Paul expresses the idea that righteousness comes from faith is to say that it is “from faith” (ek pisteōs). Paul uses this phrase 22 times, all but once in Romans and Galatians. Both Romans and Galatians quote Hab 2:4 “The righteous one will live from faith” (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11); this may be the origin of both the connection and this way of expressing it. In Rom 1:17 Paul says that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith. Elsewhere Paul simply speaks of being made righteous from faith or of righteousness from faith. In Gal 5:5 Paul speaks of awaiting the hope of righteousness from faith. This connection is expressed more obliquely when Paul speaks of the promise as coming from faith (Rom 4:16; Gal 3:22); the promise is the promise of righteousness. In Rom 14:23 Paul says that everything not from faith is sin, the opposite of righteousness. In Gal 3:7 Paul says that being from faith makes one a son of Abraham; in 3:9 he says those who are from faith are blessed; both are ways of speaking about being righteous. In Gal 3:12 he says that the law is not from faith to indicate that it is not a way to righteousness.

Paul also uses the prepositional phrase “through faith” (dia pisteōs) to express the idea that righteousness or being made righteous comes through faith. The former is explicit in Rom 3:22; Phil 3:9; the latter in Rom 3:30; Gal 2:16 (in these two passages “through faith” and “from faith” [ek pisteōs] parallel one another).
There are a number of oblique expressions of the same idea: in Rom 3:25 Paul speaks about atonement through faith; in Gal 3:14 about receiving the promise of the spirit through faith; in Gal 3:26 about being sons of God through faith; in Eph 3:12 about having access to God through faith; and in Col 2:12 about being raised with Christ through faith. In Rom 3:31 Paul asks if he is nullifying the law through faith, and answers that he is not.

Paul also expresses the idea that faith is the source of righteousness by means of other grammatical constructions. Twice “faith” (pistis) in the dative case without a preposition is parallel to “from faith” and/or “through faith” (Rom 3:28 parallels both in v 30; Rom 5:2 parallels the former in v 1) and expresses the idea that that righteousness or being made righteous comes through faith. In Rom 4:11 and 13 Paul refers to the righteousness of faith, meaning the righteousness that comes from faith. Rom 4:5 and 9 speak of faith being reckoned righteousness. In Rom 1:5 and 16:26 Paul refers to the obedience of faith. The obedience that comes from faith is the opposite of sin and thus synonymous with righteousness.

At times Paul says explicitly that faith is the source of salvation. In Rom 1:16 Paul speaks of the gospel as the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. In 10:9-10 Paul says those who confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead will be saved. In 13:11 Paul says that salvation is now nearer than when we believed. In 1 Cor 1:21 Paul says that it pleased God to save those who believe through the foolishness of his preaching. In 15:2 he speaks of the Corinthians as saved through the gospel if they have not believed in vain. Paul similarly links faith and salvation in five other passages. In 1 Tim 1:16 he speaks of faith as leading to eternal life.

**The Reason that Faith is the Source of Salvation**

It is clear that Paul understands faith as the source of salvation, but not equally clear why. Several explanations emerge from the above summary of Paul’s speech about faith as the source of salvation. As we have seen, Paul regards the faith of Abraham, particularly as summed up in Gen 15:6, as a paradigm of Christian faith. Insofar as Abraham’s salvation through faith indicates God’s will for human beings, Paul sees faith as the source of salvation because God has determined that it should be so. Paul also sees God’s will in this regard as expressed in Is 28:16 and Hab 2:4.
We have also seen that the faith of Abraham and others was reckoned righteousness. Because faith somehow makes one righteous, it also saves. It is being unrighteous that separates one from God and makes one liable to punishment by God. If faith restores righteousness, it also removes separation from God and liability to divine punishment. Likewise, Paul speaks of faith as obedience. If unrighteousness is disobedience, faith reverses this unrighteousness and its consequences.

In order to understand more deeply why faith is the source of salvation, it is necessary to look more closely at Paul’s soteriology. We have already seen that Paul understands humans as needing salvation from sin. Paul’s basic understanding of sin is that it is idolatry, giving the worship that ought to be given to God to some one or some thing other than God. In Paul’s understanding, this idolatry makes the idolater the slave of the false god(s) he or she worships. And that slavery issues in behavior that is contrary to the will of the true God.

Paul understands the death and resurrection of Jesus as the means by which God saved the human race from sin. Paul explains this in more than one way. At times he speaks of Jesus’ death as a sacrifice that makes reparation for sin and so frees people from it. The main passage in which Paul presents this understanding is Rom 3:24-26. Here he speaks of the sacrificial death of Jesus as effective through faith (v 25). This may mean that Jesus’ death frees one from sin only when it is believed to do so.

Paul’s main explanation of the way Jesus’ death and resurrection saves humans from sin is to understand it as an action in which people share. By dying and rising with Jesus, Christians die to sin and rise to a new life of freedom. One passage in which Paul presents this understanding at some length is Rom 6:3-11. In v 8 Paul says that if we have died with Christ we believe that we will also live with him. Faith includes the idea that we will live with Christ in the future, and probably also the idea that we have died with him in the past. In Gal 2:19-20 Paul says that he has been crucified with Christ; it is no longer he who lives but Christ lives in him. This life he lives by faith (cf. Eph 3:17). It is faith that incorporates him (and all other Christians) into the death and resurrection of Christ. See also Col 2:12.

Note that Paul often speaks about dying and rising with Christ without mentioning the part played by faith in doing so. In Rom 6:3-11 Paul speaks about baptism as the means by which one dies and rises with Christ and only mentions faith somewhat in passing.
Baptism is also prominent in Col 2:12. This may be another indication that faith is not uniquely important in Christian existence.

We have earlier noted that Paul sees faith both as a gift of the Holy Spirit and as the basis for receiving the Holy Spirit. We have also noted that faith is only one gift of the Spirit and also in other contexts is included in lists of apparently comparable things. Now we see that baptism and faith are both means of dying and rising with Christ.

Even though Paul frequently speaks about faith as the sole source of salvation, perhaps he could equally well speak of receiving the Holy Spirit or baptism as the source of salvation. (And of course the three are closely related for Paul.) Perhaps salvation through faith is as prominent as it is in Paul’s letters mainly because of its usefulness in arguing against Gentile Christians’ keeping the Jewish law.
The Catholic Theology and Phenomenology of Faith

Deacon T.W. Jamison, OCDS, PhD

What is faith? In Greek it is called πίστις, and in Latin it is called fides, but what exactly do these terms signify in reality? As a common feature of interpersonal relations, faith is an attitude which is fundamental to the human condition across all cultures. Since we are well acquainted with faith, we already implicitly know what faith is. But if we desire a clear understanding of the specific nature of faith, then we must recollect what we know about faith and seek to formulate an explicit definition of faith. Such an endeavor requires a great deal of time and intellectual effort. Fortunately, many others have undertaken the endeavor to define the nature of faith, and we can benefit from their insights.

Human Faith

As a human virtue, faith is the mean between the intellectual vices of credulity and scepticism. As a human act, faith involves intellectual assent to a credible testimony. True faith is never unwarranted, and it is always reasonable. Faith is an intellectual virtue. Thus it is in the same genus as knowledge, wisdom, understanding, art, and prudence. An unreasonable act of faith is not true faith but credulity. The question of whether faith is actually a form of knowledge is the subject of a long-standing debate in the history of philosophy. Faith obviously involves the acceptance of propositions on the basis of the word of a person or persons who may or may not be in a position to know that the propositions are true. Doubt is certainly reasonable whenever there is a sufficient reason to doubt. But faith, too, is reasonable, and it presupposes that there is objective evidence that the source of the content to be believed is reliable.

Since it is possible for a credible testimony to be false, faith often involves a trust which must be given in the context of some uncertainty. Even when the object of faith is actually true, it is received by virtue of someone else’s communication of truth, and that person’s knowledge of that truth may or may not be certain.
Whenever someone is in a position to have evident and certain knowledge of some truth, we say that the person is an authority with respect to that truth. Indeed, everyone who possesses the ability to speak a language is an authority in the sense of being someone who is in a position to know and communicate various truths. Some persons are also authorities in the sense of having expert or esoteric knowledge of particular truths which transcend general human experience.

As a cognitive state, faith is always a participation in the cognitive state of some other person with respect to a specific content. Through social interaction we can participate in someone’s knowledge just as we can participate in someone’s courage in the face of danger. Knowledge has a social dimension, but that fact does not undermine its truth value. Faith can only be as firm as the cognitive state from which it ultimately receives its content. Sometimes faith is opinion, but it is potentially something more certain. Interpersonal communion is essential to the nature of faith. Faith as a cognitive state with a specific content is always derivative and mediated. Its foundation determines its level of certainty. Whenever faith derives its content from someone’s opinion or theory, it is in that case a form of opinion or theory. But whenever faith derives its content from someone’s knowledge, it is then a form of knowledge, provided that the content is accurately received and then reasonably believed. And whenever someone’s knowledge and testimony are infallible, faith as a form of knowledge is likewise infallible, provided that it is infallibly participating in that knowledge.

Faith and Reason

Faith is essentially based on the recognition and acceptance of someone’s ability and authority to know and speak the truth, not on the examination of reasons or evidence for the truth of what is spoken. With regard to making an act of faith, evidence and inference are required only to judge the credibility of the witnesses and the possibility that what they are claiming is true. Whenever evidence and inference are the basis for accepting some propositional content not merely as possibly true but as actually true, then that content is known not by faith but by some other cognitive process such as judgment or demonstration. In this sense, faith as a cognitive state entails that immediate or demonstrative evidence is temporarily or permanently unavailable to the person or persons to whom the
content is proposed for belief. The unavailability of evidence for particular cognitive contents is a prevalent aspect of human experience and interaction.

Faith is thus a cognitive state that forms the natural foundation of much of what we know. Much of what we know is derivative and has been socially mediated to us by persons whom we trust. Thomistic philosophers, who defend the Aristotelian synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), typically indicate the natural harmony between faith and reason. Human faith is a natural act of the human intellect in response to a credible testimony. It is not a leap in the dark that is in any way opposed to reason. Reason involves the acceptance of propositions whose truth can be judged for ourselves, without the mediation of the testimony of others. These truths may be evident to our senses or to our intelligence, or they may follow by necessity or probability from such evident truths. Reason consists of spontaneous operations of the human intellect on sense knowledge.

Reason is the basis for human language and consists of three basic operations of the human intellect: concept formation, judgment, and inference. These are the three natural acts of the human intellect that are typically specified and described in Thomistic epistemology and logic. Concepts correspond to terms. Judgments correspond to propositions. Inferences correspond to arguments and demonstrations. Some inferences are merely inductive and probable, while others are clearly deductive and necessary (certain). We spontaneously acquire new knowledge by conceptualization, by judgment, and by inference, but also by natural faith. In all four forms of intellectual cognition, an act of knowing can potentially achieve its end and terminate in true knowledge and certainty, but often it will fall short of its end and terminate in a cognitive state less perfect than knowledge, such as opinion. Intellectual cognition entails knowing that we know. The burden of proof for cognitive failure is always on the sceptic. Indeed, we ought not to doubt what we know, unless we have a sufficient reason for some doubt in a particular instance. To doubt what we actually know is to begin to lose touch with truth and reality.

Faith and Charity

Conceptualization and judgment are immediate forms of knowledge, while inference and faith, by contrast, are mediated forms of knowledge. In an inference, a conclusion is known through the mediation of a middle term. In an act of natural faith, a
conclusion is known through the mediation of an act of charity. Thus both the intellect and the will are capable of mediating knowledge. Faith by its very nature involves the will moving the intellect to accept a truth based on a credible testimony. The will is moved by the natural virtue of charity for the one giving the credible testimony. When we doubt a testimony, we ought to have a sufficient reason for doing so. Unfortunately, however, we often doubt a testimony without a sufficient reason for doing so. We often make unwarranted assumptions about other people’s motives, and when we have good motives we often find that we are not trusted. We live in a culture of doubt, where people are generally uncharitable. There is very little trust nowadays because there is very little charity. Natural faith and natural charity are naturally inseparable, and thus they stand or fall together. Faith and charity are naturally sustained by the moral order and can be supernaturally sustained by grace, but we are always free to doubt. Habitual doubt toward others is specifically a moral problem, but it can also be a psychological or sociological problem. Similarly, in order to doubt our senses or our intellectual knowledge reasonably, we ought to have a sufficient reason to do so in any given case.

Natural faith is present in every human culture as the proper mode for the social transmission of truth. A human culture is a fragile cultivated reality that depends on faith, charity, and an intellectual and moral grasp of truth and goodness. Natural faith is obviously the specific mode in which most of us know the truths of modern empirical science. If we want to know what a particular empirical science has or has not proved, we generally read a relevant textbook or ask a scientist who works in that particular discipline. We believe that water is composed of H₂O, for instance, because we accept on faith the word of scientists who tell us that this truth can be proved. Certainly it would be unreasonable for us to doubt that scientists can prove that water is composed of H₂O, unless we have taken the time and made an effort to examine the actual proofs that scientists typically offer for the claim and have found an objective reason to regard these proofs as unsound and inconclusive. At that point, we have begun to participate in the human activity that constitutes chemistry, and we are attempting to make a substantial contribution to it by means of reason. If for some odd reason we do begin to doubt that chemists can prove that water is composed of H₂O, then we must also explain the reason why so many chemists have thought that they could prove it. Many people have faith in scientists simply because it is always possible in principle to switch
to the mode of reason and thus to examine the objective evidence for their judgments and inferences. Many of the truths which are socially transmitted by a given culture, however, are not subject to direct verification or demonstration. Examples of such truths would include historical facts. Historical knowledge necessarily involves intellectual assent to credible testimonies, which is the mode of faith.

**Literary Illustrations of Faith**

We can analyze the nature of faith formally, but concrete illustrations are also helpful. The phenomenological nature of faith is often illustrated in literature. In J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, for instance, Gandalf the Wizard reappears at Bag End in the Shire and delivers some urgent news to his friend Frodo the Hobbit. By searching through ancient historical documents, Gandalf has discovered that the ring that Frodo has inherited from his cousin Bilbo actually belongs to Sauron, the fallen angel imprisoned in the land of Mordor who forged the ring as a magical means by which to extend his power over all of Middle-earth. Frodo’s ring is the “One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them.” Gandalf also informs Frodo that Sauron has learned that his ring is hidden in the Shire and has already dispatched Black Riders to recover the ring and kill the one who bears it. Frodo immediately takes Gandalf at his word and sincerely believes his alarming testimony. Frodo asks Gandalf to take the ring, but Gandalf refuses because he knows that if he possessed the ring he would be unable to resist its power to corrupt. And Gandalf explains that the ring cannot be destroyed except by casting in the fires of the volcanic Mount Doom in the land of Mordor, where it was made. The task of bearing the ring and keeping it hidden from Sauron thus falls on Frodo, whose humility and personal virtues give him some lasting protection from the ring’s evil influence. Gandalf tells Frodo that the decision is entirely up to him, but also that the task has not come to him by chance. Frodo is meant to be the Ring-bearer. Recognizing by faith that he is in great danger, Frodo struggles to accept the mission that has fallen upon him. In order to save himself and his people he must take the ring and flee the comfort of the Shire, while Gandalf goes to seek counsel and recruit some help. When Frodo spontaneously believes this terrible news and accepts the enormous personal sacrifice of the mission, Gandalf is amazed and praises Frodo’s natural virtue.
My dear Frodo! Hobbits really are amazing creatures, as I have said before. You can learn all that there is to know about their ways in a month, and yet after a hundred years they can still surprise you at a pinch. I hardly expected to get such an answer, not even from you. But Bilbo made no mistake in choosing his heir, though he little thought how important it would prove.

Similarly, in C.S. Lewis’ story *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, some children go to stay in the house of an old professor for safety during the London air-raids of World War II, and there they begin to have some unusual experiences. Two of the children, Peter and Susan, go and ask the professor about their younger sister Lucy’s extraordinary claims. They explain that she is insisting that she has gone through the back of a large wardrobe in another room of his house and visited a world called “Narnia.” But they have examined the back of the wardrobe and found nothing there but a solid wooden panel. The old professor’s response surprises them.

“Logic!” said the Professor half to himself. “Why don’t they teach logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn’t tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth.”

Susan looked at him very hard and was quite sure from the expression on his face that he was not making fun of them.

“But how could it be true, sir?” said Peter.

“Why do you say that?” asked the Professor.

“Well, for one thing,” said Peter, “if it was real why doesn’t everyone find this country every time they go to the wardrobe? I mean, there was nothing there when we looked; even Lucy didn’t pretend there was.”

“What has that to do with it?” said the Professor.

“Well, sir, if things are real, they’re there all the time.”

“Are they?” said the Professor; and Peter did not know quite what to say.

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“But there was no time,” said Susan. “Lucy had had no time to have gone anywhere, even if there was such a place. She came running after us the very moment we were out of the room. It was less than a minute, and she pretended to have been away for hours.”

“That is the very thing that makes her story so likely to be true,” said the Professor. “If there really is a door in this house that leads to some other world (and I should warn you that this is a very strange house, and even I know very little about it)—if, I say, she had got into another world, I should not be at all surprised to find that the other world had a separate time of its own; so that however long you stayed there it would never take up any of our time.”

“On the other hand, I don’t think many girls of her age would invent that idea for themselves. If she had been pretending, she would have hidden for a reasonable time before coming out and telling her story.”

“But do you really mean, sir,” said Peter, “that there could be other worlds—all over the place, just round the corner—like that?”

“Nothing is more probable,” said the Professor, taking off his spectacles and beginning to polish them, while he muttered to himself, “I wonder what they do teach them at these schools.”

Lucy’s testimony is very surprising and is outside of Peter and Susan’s own experience, but they know that their sister is a truthful person and that she is not mad, so they ought to have believed her when she insisted that she was telling the truth. Nevertheless, they doubted. So the professor attempts to help them recognize that Lucy’s testimony is credible. C.S. Lewis is giving us here a literary illustration of the human intellectual struggle to have a reasonable human faith. We all experience this struggle every day of our lives.

**Defining the Act of Faith**

Faith is a common theme in the great literature of every culture, not just in Judeo-Christian cultures. But the Sacred

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Scriptures of the ancient Hebrews and the early Christians especially focus on persons who are struggling to believe the word of God, not just the word of another human person. Hebrew and Christian Scriptures offer us a phenomenology of faith in God, not a formal definition of faith in God. The act of believing God is analogous to the act of believing human testimony, but there are some essential differences which a good definition must make explicit. In theology we often attempt to define the nature of the act of faith in God by first analyzing the nature of the act of faith in general. In the discipline of Aristotelian logic and science, a definition of any real nature of a substance or accident proceeds by way of one or more of its causes. Causality is any relation of dependence in a thing’s being or coming to be. Every act can be causally explained.3

Causality is a very broad concept for Aristotle and includes four different types of dependence: formal, material, efficient, and final. These four relations are signified by the four different meanings of the term “cause.” A formal cause is the set of factors that make a thing what it is. A material cause is the matter out of which the thing is made. An efficient cause is the agent that produces a change in a thing or keeps it in existence. (This is the most common meaning of the term “cause.”) A final cause is the end or goal for the sake of which the agent acts in producing a change or sustaining a being. Formal and material causes are typically intrinsic to the thing, and efficient and final causes are typically extrinsic to the thing, but this distinction is not absolute. Agents have essential ends and characteristic ways of acting by nature. Thus we should recognize that agents have intrinsic as well as extrinsic efficient and final causes. Agents can act transitively or intransitively, and virtuous intransitive acts perfect an agent in accord with its nature. The act of faith is one such intransitive act that contributes to the perfection of any creature with a rational nature.

In the illustration offered by Tolkien, where Frodo is informed that he has inherited the evil ring of Sauron and is in fact in great danger, the formal cause of Frodo’s act of faith is that which Gandalf does in order to enable Frodo to participate in what Gandalf knows about the ring and the threat. Taking Gandalf at his word and finding it credible, Frodo comes to know what Gandalf knows. Frodo may have various reasons for believing Gandalf, but the formal cause includes the proper motive of Frodo’s act, specifically

3 See Aristotle’s Physics (II.3, 195a) and Metaphysics (V.2, 1013a).
the authority of Gandalf as the one who knows the truth about the ring and is communicating this truth to Frodo. Gandalf is the formal cause (fides qua creditur) of Frodo’s act of faith because Gandalf provides that which makes the act the specific act of faith that it is. The material cause of the act (fides quae creditur) is that which Frodo believes and thus comes to know in the act. This content includes the truth about the ring and the threat but also the propositions by which Gandalf formulates and expresses this truth. The final cause of the act is the intrinsic good that Frodo obtains by believing Gandalf. The news that Gandalf brings has great relevance to Frodo’s safety and destiny, but even if the news did not have such relevance, believing Gandalf and thus gaining knowledge would still be contributing to Frodo’s perfection and happiness. The efficient cause of the act is Frodo himself, who in charity chooses to believe Gandalf and to act upon this belief. Of course, Tolkien and Lewis recognize that God is the ultimate author of every good act done by a rational creature, but they also know that God never violates the agent’s freedom in acting, and that in the act of faith this freedom always includes the freedom to choose instead to doubt the word of another, with or without a sufficient reason. Creatures are real causes of their own acts. Secondary causality is true causality, and the one who believes or doubts is the true immediate author of the act and is ordinarily culpable for it in relation to his or her knowledge of the credibility of the witness and the testimony.

**Divine Faith**

The act of believing a divine communication (the word of God) is similar to the act of believing a human communication, but believing God requires the created intellect to be elevated to a supernatural mode of knowledge. It also presupposes that God has communicated truth in human terms, and that humans have a natural analogical knowledge of God and a natural potency to be elevated to the order of grace. Believing God is a supernatural act of faith, hence it is called “divine faith” in order to distinguish it from merely human faith. The act of divine faith is not naturally possible for human persons, but God provides the means. According to Catholic doctrine, as clarified by the Council of Trent in response to Protestant doctrine, grace may be either actual or habitual. Actual

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grace is a power that God temporarily gives a person in order to enable that person to perform a supernatural act. Actual grace does not persist in the person after the act is performed. Habitual grace, by contrast, is sanctifying, in the sense that it remains in the person and causes a state of holiness. Habitual (sanctifying) grace is an enduring supernatural quality of the soul which is infused by God and can be lost only by knowingly and deliberately committing a mortal sin. Habitual grace is received through divine faith by Baptism and Penance, either sacramentally or through an implicit desire for the sacraments of Baptism and Penance in divine providence. Human persons often fall into mortal sin without losing their faith in God, and thus they seek to be reconciled to God. Infidelity is one kind of mortal sin, whereby faith itself is lost, but there are many other kinds of mortal sin.  

The very structure of faith in God is that of a divine call. Divine Revelation can be either public or private. According to Catholic doctrine, Jesus Christ is the divine Mediator and fulfillment of all divine Revelation. He is the eternal and incarnate Word of God, and through his incarnation God’s public Revelation has been completed. God became man in Christ and then founded and commissioned the Church to preserve and transmit his final and definitive public Revelation. Christ mystically and permanently united the Church to himself and gave her special authority and assistance to fulfill her divine mission on earth. The Church transmits divine Revelation by means of Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. The entire reality of Christianity—the whole way of life that divine Revelation generates—is thus transmitted. The social transmission of divine Revelation that we call Sacred Tradition is also a living reality in and through which Christ personally encounters individual persons in order to give them the opportunity to believe his divine teaching, to follow his supernatural way of life, and thus to be fully united to God. A living divine faith is produced by hearing and obeying the revealed word of God which Christ communicates through his Church. Faith is inherently communal. Through faith, individuals begin to participate in the divine knowledge possessed by Christ and the Church. The faith of the Church nurtures the faith of the individual and brings it to perfection.  

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6 Ocáriz and Blanco, *Fundamental Theology*, 45-58, 156-160.
Defining the Act of Divine Faith

St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 145-216) is the first Christian theologian to compose a treatise specifically on the nature of divine faith, and his theology is informed by Greek philosophy. Origen (c. 185-254), St. Basil the Great (330-379), St. Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390), St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394), and St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) continue the project to develop a comprehensive Christian theology of faith with the help of Greek philosophy. The formula used by St. Thomas Aquinas in analyzing the act of divine faith—\textit{Credere Deo, Credere Deum, Credere in Deum}—is taken from St. Augustine. The act of divine faith is divine in three of its essential aspects. God is the formal cause, the material cause, and the final cause of the act.

God is the formal cause of the act because his activity makes the act the kind of act that it is. He communicates divine truth in human terms and provides the actual graces that the human agent needs in order to make the act. He illuminates the agent’s intellect and inspires the agent’s will with temporary powers which transcend the agent’s nature, so that the agent can recognize the word as truly divine and believe it. The formal motive by which the agent believes God is the authority of God, who is omniscient. God’s infallible word is the means by which the act is made (\textit{fides qua creditur}). If the authority of God were not the formal motive of the act, then the act would not be an act of divine faith. And if the actual graces of illumination and inspiration were not provided by God, then the agent would not be able to make the act.

God is not only the formal cause of the act, he is also the material cause, in the sense that he is the reality known in the truth that is believed. The material object of the act is the content of the act (\textit{fides quae creditur}): the truth which is God himself, and the divine truths which he reveals (e.g. the Creed). The matter of the act, like its formal object, is one of its intrinsic causes and an essential

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9 Dulles, \textit{Assurance of Things Hoped For}, 35-36, 55-56.
component of its nature. In order to be an act of divine faith, the content believed must be God and truth revealed by God.\textsuperscript{10}

God is also the essential end of the act and thus its final cause and intrinsic purpose. We believe God for the sake of knowing God and the truth which he reveals in human terms. Illumined by actual grace, we form the desire and intention to know what God reveals, and thus we charitably take him at his word. Nevertheless, it is quite possible and perhaps even common to believe God without loving and obeying him as our ultimate perfection and happiness. It is even possible to believe God while intentionally thwarting the purpose of uniting with his will and doing good works. Intentionally or unintentionally, faith without works is dead, but it is still faith. For this reason, we must distinguish between divine faith that is directed toward divine charity (\textit{fides formata}) and divine faith that is not directed toward divine charity (\textit{fides informis}). In order to be actually salvific (not just potentially salvific), divine faith must actually be formed by divine charity.\textsuperscript{11}

**Human Agency and Divine Faith**

Since God is the formal cause, the material cause, and the final cause of the act of divine faith, it is not difficult to imagine that he is also the efficient cause of the act. This definition of faith is essentially the one that is advanced by Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564), but they do not recognize that the human soul by its very nature possesses freedom of the will. The Catholic definition of faith, by contrast, proposes that the human agent who believes God is the true immediate efficient cause of the act. This proposal is regarded as compatible with the doctrine that God is the ultimate source of all beings and their every virtue and perfection. God is certainly the efficient cause of the act of faith in the sense that he causes us to exist in such a way that we can be the real efficient causes of our own acts. God’s ultimate causality need not be understood as negating or violating the real causality of his creatures.

Every truly human act has knowledge, voluntariness, and freedom. A voluntary act is one which proceeds from the will with knowledge of the end. Freedom is the natural ability of a rational agent to choose to act or to refrain. The act of divine faith is both

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 54-58, 88.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 35-36, 50, 88.
truly human and truly divine. As the immediate efficient cause of the act, the human agent is truly cooperating with divine grace. “Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace.”12 This succinct definition offered by St. Thomas Aquinas should not be construed in a manner that would negate the free and voluntary submission of the human agent in faith to divine authority illumined and recognized by grace. As St. Thomas hastens to explain, the act of divine faith is meritorious precisely because it is freely made. For the same reason, the person who knowingly, voluntarily, and freely refuses to believe God is culpable for that refusal. Unbelief is objectively a grave offense against God because it rejects his invitation to personal communion, but only God knows whether and when an individual’s lack of faith is subjectively culpable.

Given that we theologically acknowledge that in the act of divine faith the human agent is the immediate efficient cause, we might be inclined to suggest, as Luis Molina, S.J. (1536-1600) and his many disciples do, that the human agent is thereby that which makes God’s grace efficacious. This suggestion is systematically opposed by the disciples of Domingo Bañez, O.P. (1528-1604) and most other Dominicans, who contend that God’s grace must be efficacious in itself. Since both of these theological positions are compatible with Catholic teaching, we need not for our purposes here survey the various attempts to resolve the dispute.13 It is historically significant, however, that Bañez was the beloved confessor and spiritual director of St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), and that Teresian Carmelites have generally defended his interpretation of the theology of St. Thomas.

The Certainty of Divine Faith

Divine faith is objectively certain, even though an occasional involuntary experience of doubt and hesitation is normal for most if not all who believe God. This experience often leads to some confusion about the certainty of divine faith. As Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, once emphasized on the occasion of a receiving one of his honorary doctorates in theology, divine faith is

12 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II.2.9. See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 153-165.
not a species of some imperfect or preliminary form of knowledge such as theory, opinion, conjecture, or supposition. Rather,

In reality, for the believing Christian the words “I believe” articulate a particular kind of certainty—one that is in many respects a higher degree of certainty than that of science, yet one that does indeed carry within it the dynamic of “shadow and image,” the dynamic of the “not yet.”

The particular kind of certainty carried by divine faith is different from the kind of certainty carried by reason and natural science, because it is based on the testimony of God, not on the objective evidence of the senses or the intellect. The certainty of divine faith is a personal and relational certainty that originates in the interaction between God and man, but we should not therefore construe it as something merely subjective. Both faith and reason involve thinking with assent, but the assent of reason comes from the intellect through evidence, while the assent of faith comes from the will through “the heart being touched by God.” The act of divine faith is one “in which all the spiritual powers of man are at work together” in the desire for complete and eternal happiness. Divine faith is what people most need in order to be truly happy, but the heart must draw the intellect into the joy of the divine encounter. The heart is captivated first and then knows what it needs, but the intellect is left without the benefit of its natural object. And some of the propositional content that is offered to the intellect by God transcends the intellect’s natural power of understanding. The content that is known by divine faith is thus absolutely certain, but it is also obscure. The act of believing God is therefore simultaneously reasonable and “a surrender of reason,” as Bl. John Henry Newman (1801-1890) calls it. Given that this is in fact the nature of divine faith, the existence of voluntary assent in the act is compatible with an experience of involuntary doubt.

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15 Ibid., pp. 20-25.
16 Ocáriz and Blanco, Fundamental Theology, 140-141.
Divine faith is a leap of the human intellect into a higher mode of knowing, but God does not leave the intellect in the dark when he invites it to transcend its own natural capacity. Besides the divine touch, divine illumination, and divine inspiration in the heart, God provides various motives of credibility which serve to confirm the divine authority of the teaching.

What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe “because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.” So “that the submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason, God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit.” Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth and holiness, and her fruitfulness and stability “are the most certain signs of divine Revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all”; they are “motives of credibility” (*motiva credibilitatis*), which show that the assent of faith is “by no means a blind impulse of the mind.” (Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, 3: DS 3008-3010)

A motive of credibility can either be public and generally known or be private and given to a single individual. These motives of credibility are not the foundation of divine faith, and they are not among the four causes of divine faith, but they do serve as the preamble to faith which prepares the intellect to follow the will into a new and higher domain of truth in the encounter with God. Every Catholic is called through the sacrament of Confirmation to be a credible witness, a motive of credibility for others, and a transmitter of the word of God. But there is only one proper motive of faith: the authority of God. God accompanies our word of testimony with signs of its divine origin, and each of us is a sign of its truth insofar as we are credible. Judgments of credibility may also be assisted and strengthened by actual graces, but they lie within the natural capacity and discernment of the human intellect. The unaided intellect can

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17 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 156.
recognize the reasonableness of Catholic doctrine, the possibility that it is true, the credibility of its witnesses, and even its divine origin, but the unaided intellect cannot fully understand the doctrine or determine whether it is actually true. The truth of the doctrine is known by the grace of divine faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, who elevates the intellect to the supernatural level, convincing sincere inquirers and enabling them to accept the authority of God revealing.

**Faith and Justification**

Adult converts typically become sympathetic to divine truth by means of credible witnesses and other motives of credibility and then receive the actual graces of illumination and inspiration that empower sympathizers to make the supernatural act of assent to the authority of God. Having assented to divine truth, they begin the process of justification which ordinarily leads to the reception of sanctifying grace in sacramental Baptism. Having thereby received the state of sanctifying grace, they begin the process of sanctification which in generous souls leads to the state of apostolic and contemplative perfection. The virtue of divine faith is the foundation of the developmental journey to the state of grace, as well as the developmental journey to the state of perfection that God offers to each of us in this life. The act of faith, like the full contemplative and apostolic union which perfects it, is both active and passive. It requires the consistent and habitual exercise of an infused divine potency.

Whenever someone believes Christ and becomes his disciple, the disciple is thereby placed in a covenantal relationship with God. This covenantal union with God is sustained and perfected by liturgical prayer and the sacraments of the Church, and the personal relationship bestows both blessings and obligations on those who enter into it. Every disciple of Christ is called to believe the Creeds, to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, and the Anointing of the Sick, to live a good moral life in accord with the natural moral law, and to grow in holiness and sacrificial love in accord with the purifying and sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit. These activities are essential aspects of the universal call to everlasting union with God in Christ, and they are basic requirements for the personal salvation of anyone who understands their necessity.
Growing in Faith

The person who has a living divine faith is someone who is seeking spiritual perfection through understanding and charity. Faith seeking understanding is the proper activity of theology. Faith seeking charity is the proper activity of contemplative prayer and apostolic work. Both kinds of activity are necessary for maturity in faith, but priority must be given to charity. Unfortunately it is possible to know a domain of truth objectively and yet subjectively fail to be transformed or guided by it. We can objectively know the nature of virtue and morality and yet subjectively fail to be virtuous and moral. We can objectively know the content of many philosophical theories and yet subjectively fail to be philosophers. And we can objectively know a great deal of divine Revelation and theology and yet subjectively have a very immature or dead faith.¹⁹

Like any other virtue, faith grows most when it is being actively exercised and put to the test. There are two stages in the life of prayer, parallel to the two stages in exercising the virtue of faith. Mental, active prayer corresponds to the conceptual, rational understanding of faith (theology). Contemplative, passive prayer corresponds to the living, supernatural knowledge of faith in love. In the first stage we have the duty of encouraging the intellect to work to study dogma, Scripture, Tradition, and the Catechism, and to pay attention to God persistently in active dialogue with him. Mental prayer essentially involves habitual meditation on God’s word (lectio divina) while making acts of faith, hope, and love.

In the second stage, which does not negate or suspend the first stage, we have duty to quiet the intellect and to surrender it to the interventions of God whenever he manifests himself to us obscurely and subjectively. The relationship between divine faith and infused contemplation has been thoroughly described by St. John of the Cross. When God in his mercy grants us the grace of contemplative prayer, he imparts to us by faith a more perfect knowledge of his presence in our souls. Humility and sacrificial love are the virtues which ordinarily obtain this favor. The grace of the second stage in the life of prayer increases the certitude of our knowledge of God by faith. Supernatural contemplative knowledge (faith perfected in love) is always obscure because it is infused in our souls below the limited access of our consciousness, but we do experience the

transforming effects of the spiritual union of our intellect with God’s intellect, and thus we acquire the mind and heart of Christ. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the perfect model of faith and prayer. The apostles and prophets are also models of faith and prayer. Faith becomes luminous as it is being perfected. We remain unable to grasp God by any natural means, yet supernaturally we know and love him to some degree as the Blessed Virgin Mary did, as we are lifted up as she was into the eternal knowledge and love within the Most Holy Trinity.20

The process of sanctification produces a more complete personal identification of the disciple with Christ. The Son of God became man so that man might become a son of God by entering into a personal communion with God in faith. The discovery of Christ in the soul is the soul’s highest and most delectable wisdom. This divine wisdom is the infused connatural knowledge which comes through the progressive perfection of faith and increasing similarity to Christ. The term “connatural” signifies the state of being born at the same time with and having a nature similar to some other reality subsisting in itself. Indeed, the term is related to the concept of being a twin. Its use is appropriate here because contemplative knowledge is born in the intellect implicitly at the same time as the grace of faith is infused in the soul. If treasured and nourished, this life of grace gradually produces a personal similarity to Christ, making the soul spiritually a twin of Christ, knowing what Christ knows and desiring what Christ desires. This likeness to Christ produces an intuitive wisdom in the intellect. Finding ourselves full of holy thoughts and desires, we have a sense of what God specifically wants of us. Thus we acquire an increasing capacity to judge what God wants of us, and an increasing propensity to do it. In the same way that a virtuous soul has an intuitive knowledge of what virtue is, simply because he or she is virtuous, the soul who has been purified and made holy by the Holy Spirit has an intuitive knowledge of what God wants, simply because he or she is holy and united with God through Christ.21

The Catholic Theology and Phenomenology of Faith

The Radiation of Faith

The Catholic understanding of the nature of faith has great clarity and beauty. It is attractive to those who have only a partial faith or still lack faith. But we must bear a credible witness to it. We should aspire to become personal motives of credibility for others through the exercise of understanding and charity. We have accepted this prophetic mission through the sacrament of Confirmation. If we risk a little rejection and ridicule and dare to communicate our Creed to others as divine truth, God will confirm our testimony with signs of its divine origin. The more we grow in faith through the practice of understanding and charity, the more credible our witness becomes to others. Our witness ought to include both the dogmatic truths of the faith and the lived experience of the faith. We should be able to manifest to others the peace, joy, happiness, meaning, purpose, mission, and transforming communion with God that the faith has given to us. Nothing has more energy than faith, and God has called us to radiate it to everyone we know.

The consolation of reason and philosophy is only the preamble to faith. The consolation of faith and theology is even greater. Just as every human person longs for natural truth and friendship, every human person longs for divine truth and communion with God. As a means to that end, reason is good, but faith is better. Reason is a natural power, but faith is a supernatural power. Reason reaches God slowly and laboriously, but faith reaches God quickly and directly. Reason is limited in what it can conclude and know about God, but faith accepts everything God has revealed, even truths which reason cannot fully understand. Most importantly, reason cannot merit eternal salvation, but a living and active faith merits eternal salvation.22

Faith is the secret path to perfect joy and happiness. It has a solid metaphysical dimension in human intellection and an attractive existential dimension in human experience. Etienne Gilson and many other Christian philosophers and theologians have proposed that we keep these two dimensions of faith united, without neglecting or eliminating either of them.

There is only one way to reach pure existence, and the mystics have always known it. It is not the way that leads,

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through the denial of essences, to the maddening experience of some existing nothingness, but the one that once led Augustine, Bonaventura and John of the Cross, through overcoming all essences without ever losing them, to reach their common source, itself beyond essences yet containing them all. Not despair, but perfect joy, is the reward of such an experience. It is true that philosophy alone cannot achieve it, but this is not the only case in which philosophy points out a goal which it itself is unable to reach.23

In the recent history of the Catholic Church, the First Vatican Council especially emphasized the metaphysical dimension of faith, and the Second Vatican Council especially emphasized the existential dimension of faith. Both emphases are essential. May God help us to emphasize the complementarity and continuity of these two co-essential paradigms in our understanding and propagation of the faith. And may God help us to live in accord with the faith which he has given us to profess. God has called us to offer the world nothing less than perfect truth, perfect joy, and perfect unity.

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23 Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, 208.
Blessed be the Church in the strength of the Lord, for through her has God destroyed the power of the evil one. Blessed be she for her faith and her liturgy dominate the earth like kings. And never should hymns to the honor of the Church fall silent on the lips of men.\(^1\)

In commenting on this passage, Hugo Rahner says, “So they sang a thousand years ago in the reign of the Carolingians. So sing we today.”\(^2\) The sense of the tremendous power of the tradition of the Church was a source of great confidence for the Fathers and Periti of the Second Vatican Council. They were not naïve; Rahner was to go on in this same article to lay bare an awareness of sin and failure within the Church, but never does he give evidence of a lack of a sense of greatness and of destiny. The absolute confidence in the triumph of Christ over the sinfulness of the world also revealed a deep sense of the sufferings of the Christ in the Church and gave impetus to a great desire to purify this Church and so alleviate the sufferings of the redeemer. Rahner continued, “Often she [the Church] has made compromises too early with a temporary situation, often she has understood the signs of the times too late. Always there have been small, narrow-minded, sinful men at work within her, leading but hindering, planning but foolishly. The Church is the tired dusty pilgrimess through the desert.”\(^3\)

This sense of the “dynamis” and “asthenia”\(^4\) as constant elements of the Church formed much of both the optimism and the urgency that were found at the beginning of the Council. Many of the scholarly articles written just before or during the Council express, in

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1 Hrabanus Maurus, *Commentary on the Book of Judith*, 13 (PL 109, 567.)
3 Ibid., 6-7
4 “power” and “weakness”
many different ways, the general consensus that the ability to face the weaknesses of the Church was a sign or a permission to eradicate the failures and weaknesses and build a new “purified” Church. This “new” Church would become a Mecca of sorts for the troubled peoples of the world. It would certainly be a response to the persistent dangers and anxiety visited upon humanity by the threats inherent in the “Cold War” as well as a healing event after the terrible aftermath of two World Wars with their accompanying horrors.

Theology itself seemed determined to reconstruct a belief in the ultimate goodness of human nature and return to humanity the heritage it had lost on the bloody battlefields and in the death camps of a ravaged century. Hugo Rahner’s brother, the more noted Karl Rahner, had created a theological synthesis that struggled to find a Christology, so firmly did he draw human transcendence out of the creation narrative. He seemed to be straining to integrate Jesus as redeemer into his vision of human possibility. By doing so, Karl Rahner laid the foundation of hope for the race firmly in the hands of the creator God. The ancient Catholic affirmation of the essential goodness of humanity, so rejected by the Reformers of the 16th century, returned to pick up the pieces of a shattered world and raise, once more, the eyes of believers and non-believers alike to the horizon of the transcendent possibilities of the created order of being. Seldom, it would seem, was the Church so positioned to grasp for a dream of a new age of peace, universal appeal and conversion. In time this optimism about human nature began to be criticized as dangerously skirting along the edges of Pelagianism. But in the 1960’s the buoyancy of hope was irrepressible and the marginalized voices of concern fell on inattentive ears.

Was the “Spirit of Vatican II” a New Discovery of a New Age?

Much of this optimism continued to motivate segments within the Church and became known as “The Spirit of Vatican II”. The “Spirit of Vatican II” seems to have been a sense that the council began something completely new and did not just address the great issues of its time from the vantage point of her own tradition. The ideas that seemed to be closely identified with the Spirit of Vatican II are those of a democratization of the Church, parliamentary government in the Church, “the People of God” as a code word for a search for communal based authority in both discipline and doctrine, a very American understanding of equality and the emphasis on
The Church: Power and Weakness Throughout the Ages

social action and political reform. All of these have a long history in the story of the Church. Justification for these movements has often turned for legitimacy to ancient or Utopian traditions, those far removed from the present time. The quest to resurrect a Golden Age is a repetitive theme in western reform movements. The Golden Age in the Reformation of the 16th century was the world of the Early Church. The medieval period seemed somewhat restless in its era and looked, not backward, but forward to the Second Coming of Christ with great anticipation but great fear as well. One has but to read and reflect on the great Sequence of the requiem mass, the Dies Irae, to grasp something of the medieval sense of the great and “terrible” day when Jesus would return. For later times the Golden Age always seemed almost present but ever elusive and became entangled with the philosophical adventures of a leveling sort found in the English Reformation and beyond. The problem with the Golden Age quest is that, in all truth, you can’t get there from here. I recall a lecture by Scripture scholar George Wolz of St. Charles College, Columbus, Ohio in which he reflected on the German rationalists’ search for the historical Jesus in the 18th and 19th centuries. He observed that, in the end, they discovered him to be a “pious Protestant preacher in a German provincial town”. Simply put, we cannot truly escape our present in our attempts to recreate the past or imagine the future. The closest we get in the confines of our finite nature is to share similar dreams when faced with similar problems.

To see the Second Vatican Council as an isolated event in the life of the Church would be to ignore the dynamic and organic life of Christ’s presence among his people throughout the ages. Only if we fail to see the Church as a living organism can we postulate a static institution, frozen in time and finally broken loose from its moorings by the power of the Holy Spirit newly arrived, it would seem, in the mid-twentieth century. As a truly living being, the Church has always been convulsed with revolution, reform and renewal in every age and in every place. It might be helpful to see some of those great historical moments as a way of developing a very useful hermeneutical tool for understanding the Second Vatican Council in the whole context of the life of the Church. What were some of these earlier revolutionary and reforming adventures? We could land just about anywhere in time, but the Middle Ages is a good place to look. A few significant events could possibly sharpen the picture for us.
1. Gregory VII had launched a virtual revolution in the 1070's by declaring the Church to be independent of the civil rulers, with special reference to the German Emperors. He saw the Church as not only independent of civil rulers but superior to them in the same way the soul is superior to the body. The German Bishops denounced Gregory and pledged their loyalty to the Emperor and a great armed struggle ensued. It was in this context that St. Thomas a' Becket gave his life for the principle of the freedom of the Church. The great exchange between the Pope, Gregory VII, and the Emperor Henry IV was sharp and dangerous. In a formal response to Gregory’s demand for the right of the Pope to name Bishops and his threat to excommunicate Henry, the Emperor responded: “...to Hildebrand (Gregory’s name before his election to the papacy) not Pope but false monk...I, Henry, king by the Grace of God, with all my Bishops, say to you, descend, descend and be damned throughout the ages.”

The principle of the two sword theory of Gelasius I (492 - 496), a civil and sacerdotal power within the one society with each sword wielded by the respective rulers, had a dramatic force in the reign of Gregory VII. He chose the higher sword and wielded it with great vigor. The story of the Investiture Controversy or Papal Revolution is familiar to any who have read medieval history and is the great interpretive tool for unraveling much of the confusing conflicts between Church and civil authority throughout the history of Europe. Interesting, however, the last vestige of the struggle was in 1903 when Emperor Franz Joseph exercised his imperial right to veto a papal election. The emperor vetoed the election of Cardinal Rampollo and Pope St. Pius X was chosen in his stead. Gregory VII’s 11th century struggle put the Church on a road to a sort of independence from civil authority. The gift of a hard won freedom served her well and protected her integrity when the West began to evolve from a Christian society into a society hostile to the Church and to the faith. No one could see that outcome in 1075 AD but we now experience, a thousand years later, the fruits of his vision and can see quite clearly the presence of the Holy Spirit in the 11th century Church.

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2. **The Decretals of Gratian**: Around 1150 a school of law developed at the new University of Bologna. The task of the school was to compile all the ecclesiastical documents of the past ages in order to bring some kind of order into the huge number of decrees and synodal regulations that had been amassed over the centuries of the Church’s history. Bologna established criteria for creating this synthesis which included giving priority to the antiquity and origin of the collected documents. In order to synthesize these, often seemingly incompatible sources, they needed a logical system of reasoned conclusions and thus was introduced into Western thought the famous scholastic syllogism. In addition to this exercise, the Justinian Code from the 6th century was rediscovered at the same time. Since this was an ancient text and had imperial origins so it too had to be included in the synthesizing process. Roman law was thereby interwoven into the synthesizing ecclesiastical process. The greatest impact of this was on the issues concerning the nature of a community or corporation.

Stanley Chodorow maintains that “in the earliest days of Christianity, the primitive community accepted the notion that the Church was a continuation of the Synagogue…St. Bernard considered the Jewish community to be a *figura* of the earthly Church.”6 This notion, argues Harold Berman in *Law and Revolution*, was also compatible with the cultural experience of the Germanic tribes that settled Europe from the first to the fifth centuries of the modern era. In this view, the community of believers formed an “organic” society which took its identity from the constituency that formed it.

In the Roman law of Justinian, the community was defined differently. It was an administrative entity and was defined, therefore, by its leadership. Chodorow follows Gratian’s struggle to retain the communal dimension of the Church but admits, in the end, the antiquity of the Justinian Code and its imperial origin gave great weight to the formation of an Ecclesiology in the Decretals that favored the Roman understanding of a corporation. The following centuries were filled with conflict and struggle between the Germanic and the Roman lands and peoples over the nature of the Church. The Northerners

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followed, what was for them, the more ancient concept of the organic whole, the Southerners adapted themselves to the Roman tradition and viewed the “Universitas” or community/corporation as an administrative structure. Marsiglio of Padua, in his *Defensor pacis* of 1324, articulated a radical form of the northern position when he maintained that all legitimate authority came from God directly to the People who then delegated both Civil and Ecclesiastical authority to rule over them but at the will of the people and not by divine right or divine authority. The push for a radical democratization of the Church has its formal roots in the early 14th century.

3. The Franciscan interventions in the 12th and 13th centuries: By the mid 13th century and even earlier during the life of St. Francis, his order, by whatever means, aligned itself primarily with the Germanic/synagogal understanding of the nature of a community and developed a theory that, like in the feudal world, vows were made “through a Lord but directly to God”. Peter Olivi (d. 1298) was to so argue that even if the Pope ordered the Franciscans to own property, they would have to refuse because they had made their vows of poverty to God and not to man. In his “Usus Pauper” treatise Olivi went on to argue that the local community was the guardian of the implementation of the vow of poverty and not the religious or ecclesiastical superiors. This was a direct rejection of the more “Roman” structure of the Church. The Franciscan notion of the nature of the organic community was to become explosive under John XXII and led to an outright persecution of the so called “spiritual Franciscans” including burning four of them at the stake in Marseilles. John XXII (1316-1334) excommunicated the Franciscan William of Ockham for escaping from prison when he was ordered not to and actively repressed the Franciscans of the northern bent. Ockham’s excommunication cast his idea of communal particularism (the Order consists in the sum of its members and not in its leadership structures) into the shadows of radical dissent. This did not eliminate but exacerbated the quest for a sort of parliamentary form of Church government which came to be called Conciliarism. In the great crises of the 14th century Church with multiple popes and terrible conflict with the kings

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and emperors of the North, Conciliarism gained momentum. The issue dominated the Council of Constance, gave birth to the troubled Councils of Basel and ended only when the ex-conciliarist Anneas Silvius Piccolomini who, as Pope Pius II, condemned Conciliarism in the Bull, *Execrabilis* (1460).

It is not difficult to see these struggles resurface in the 20th century and especially in the conciliar decrees *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*. The tension continues into the present time where much of the conflict within the Church over the Second Vatican Council comes from the persistent presence of fundamentally differing cultural and political models of the nature of a society or community. Piet Fransen, the Louvain theologian of the Council era, in an article published in 1964 used the Liturgy to outline the tensions over the nature and function of the Church in the mid-20th Century. His analysis captures the historical problems that have existed since earliest times. He said, “I shall underline two extreme positions which, in fact, in the teaching of theology and in learned reviews are susceptible of many nuances and intermediate attitudes.” Fransen then went on to explain the theological positions that center on the issues we have just discussed: “I shall underline two extreme positions…There is a conception of the Church which may be represented in the form of a pyramid… The other conception of the Church begins with the faithful.” 8 In the end, it is the ancient issue that persists through today - is the Church primarily local or universal and so, for Fransen, is the liturgy primarily local or universal? Cardinals Ratzinger and Kasper had a rather pointed discussion concerning this question from 1999 – 2001. The conciliar documents might give the impression that the Germanic tribes of the North prevailed, but, of course, that had happened before as well when Gregory VII was driven into exile by Henry IV; a closer examination may find the present victory not much more enduring.

**Theory and Praxis: The Church Cannot Live on Theory Alone**

Fr. Fransen was correct in focusing on the Liturgy as the flashpoint for the theological discussion of the nature of the Church. The Liturgy is where the Church lives in the midst of the world and

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who she is has an enormous impact on how she lives. Liturgical reform must always seek its explanation in the understanding of the nature of the Church. This it has certainly done in the last forty or so years. Behind every passionately held position on the sacred Liturgy is an ecclesiology that reflects the struggle of the ages. In the true Reformation spirit of a Golden Age, the early post-conciliar liturgists sought to return us to the small secret gatherings of the primitive Church. They then clung to the Abelardian principle, so intertwined with Luther, on the signifying power of the community. Soon there followed arguments for the universality of the power of confection and all the other strains of Marsiglio of Padua that would logically follow from his *Defensor pacis*. This was to be countered by those like Archbishop Lefebvre who strove to retain a resistance to the tribal notion of the Church and cling to its universal and hierarchical identity that oriented the life and worship of the Church upward toward the divine. The conflict endures to this day. In fact both positions have a history within the Church and Benedict XVI seems to have been well aware of this. He desired greatly to retain the whole living tradition even if it can be, at times, problematic and divisive. One of his great burdens was to know too much to be content with only part of the story.

Sensing a great shift of emphasis in ecclesiology, the spirit of hope and optimism went far beyond theological speculation. The reform of the Liturgy was a foundational anchor of change thrown down in the midst of the Church. In the beginning, there was a cautious embracing of the tradition with its disparate past. One of the greatest liturgical historians of the modern era and a primary architect of the decree on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, approved by the Council in 1962 was Fr. Josef Jungmann S.J. Two years after the decree, while the Council was still in session, Fr. Jungmann wrote an article on the liturgical changes envisioned by the Council, entitled, “The Council and Liturgical Reform”. The same Carolingian age (8th – 9th centuries) reference that we found in Hugo Rahner, we find also in Josef Jungmann. How interesting that the Holy Roman Empire of the Germans became a common reference point for the scholars of the North in the 1960’s in their understanding of the Church and her history:

The astonishing thing is that the liturgy, inherited from the Roman Church and received in the northern countries in the time of the Carolingian empire, was so faithfully retained and preserved as the uncontested standard even though there
was no written law to this effect. Naturally Bishops everywhere allowed various additions and accepted proven customs from other provinces, but awareness of solidarity prevented them from radical experimentation with the ancient foundations of the liturgy. Thus despite certain liberty, the text of the Canon of the Mass as well as that of the Mass prayers of Sundays and Holydays was preserved intact from the times of Gregory the Great (d. 604). We may feel confident that something of this respectful attitude toward tradition will influence future decisions as well.\(^9\)

Fr. Jungmann advocated many changes but circumscribed them throughout his reflections:

From the course of the discussion on language in the Aula Concilii, adequately described by the Catholic Press Office, one may well conclude that what is to remain in Latin is primarily the sacred prayer of the Mass, Preface and Canon. It is noteworthy that all discussions of possible reforms, especially in regard to language, centered about the Mass celebrated with the congregation, Sunday Mass above all. Obviously, no essential change in language is required for private Masses.\(^10\)

Father Jungmann continued:

Of this we can be certain: in the Church – which is not only Catholic, heartily welcoming all races, but also apostolic, surpassing all time – reverence for tradition will prove strong enough to insure respect for our sacred heritage and deliver it unadulterated to future generations, even in divine worship.\(^11\)

Jungmann walked the fine line between the great traditions of ecclesial understanding in these thoughts. He carried a deep sense of the antiquity of the Church and wanted to treat her history with a profound respect. His conviction that the tension between the

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\(^10\) Ibid., 161.

\(^11\) Ibid., 170.
differing traditions could be reconciled by the liturgy is found in the seemingly passing remark, “reverence for tradition will prove strong enough to insure respect for our sacred heritage and deliver it unadulterated to future generations, even in divine worship”. Jungmann died in 1975.

A Year of Faith

The tremendous heady optimism that launched much of the work of the Second Vatican Council eventually rammed into history and the process of reassembling a vision of the Church began, albeit painfully. There is disillusionment, frustration and some anger over this inevitable outcome of an age of enthusiasm and utopian dreams. But, neither God nor His Church lives only on dreams. Hugo Rahner’s “dusty pilgrimess of the desert” once more takes up the challenging journey to live fully and in Grace in the midst of the world. The Holy Father sees this and moves slowly toward reintegration and reconciliation among those who believe and those who could believe. It is here that his great focus on the Liturgy as the “place” where the Church lives in the world becomes comprehensible. For only in an encounter with and in God can the Church find its meaning and its wholeness. Only from there can it reach out to the world.

When Benedict XVI proclaimed a year of faith, a time to review and renew the power and place of faith in the God of Jesus Christ, Father, Son and Spirit, he seems to have known that through the centuries it has been the Church who has embodied the great struggles of the human person, who has given humanity an arena in which to explore and experiment with the wisdom of man as it harmonizes with or clashes with the Wisdom of God. Faith seems to be fragile and vulnerable in the modern world. Under the guise of a real concern for the well being of all humanity, modern culture seems to push forward aggressively to a world order that is faithless. Oblivious to history, the machinery of modern secular culture chooses to revisit the faithlessness of the recent past. We have, however, already seen the consequences of a lack of faith and a lack of contact with Christ in the world. The Soviet Union rejected faith in God and the world watched over 30,000,000 ordinary people perish from starvation and murder. The Third Reich tried to rebuild the old Christian Empire but without the Christ and over12,000,000 people died horrible deaths. World War I tried to settle the conflict between two great Protestant Empires whose god had become
Power, not Christ. Under President Wilson, our country fell victim to the World War I British propaganda machine and sacrificed the lives of thousands of our young men on the altars of progressive secular modernity. Untold numbers of European military personnel and civilians also died in that war only to plant the seeds of a deep discontent that erupted in horror a decade or so later. In our own time and our own country, over 50 million children have fallen victim to the abusive power of a self-absorbed and tyrannically secular culture which, like the judge in the Gospel, “fears neither God nor respects Man” (Luke 18:2). *Spiritus Mundi* offers only an illusion of freedom.

To borrow a phrase from Max Weber, the freedom the world offers will and has already, in many ways, become an “Iron Cage.”

Benedict XVI’s call for a “Year of Faith” was not just a call for a renewed fervor in the Church but an outreach to all humanity to come home to the God of Creation and His redeeming love. It will not resolve all of our human problems but it will give to all who listen and respond a place of clarity and a way to wisdom. Our alternative to faith is to remain in a culture that is self-destructive and nihilistic - a place in time where we are alienated from ourselves, our history, our world and our God, a dark and very lonely place indeed.
Is Evangelization Fundamental to the Ministry of Bishops and Priests?

Rev. Benedict D. O’Cinnsealaigh STD

A Crisis In and Out of the Church

Although it does not appear in any of his writings, the British politician, supposed statesman, and prime minister of Britain Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) has long been associated with the witticism: “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.” Even though they are always suspect, some recent statistics are both alarming and enlightening with regard to Church practice among Catholics and non-Catholics here in the United States and beyond.

A 2012 Gallop Poll shows that 92% of the US population believes in God; 55% of the population thinks that religion is very important in their lives; and a further 26% said it was important. But only 37% went to a religious service in the previous week and only 29% go regularly. 31% of Catholics attend Mass weekly.\(^1\) 71% of the population thinks that religion is losing influence in American society. Pew Research found that 83% of Americans claim religious belief; 1.6% describe themselves as atheists, 2.4% as agnostics and 12.1% have no religious affiliation at all. Concerning Catholic identity the Pew research found that 31% of Americans were raised Catholic but only 24% are affiliated with the Church today.

These losses would have been even more pronounced were it not for the offsetting impact of immigration. Approximately one-third of the survey respondents who say they were raised Catholic no longer describe themselves as Catholic. This means that roughly 10% of all Americans are former Catholics. These losses, however, have been partly offset by the number of people who have changed their affiliation to

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Catholicism (2.6% of the adult population) but more importantly by the disproportionately high number of Catholics among immigrants to the U.S. The result is that the overall percentage of the population that identifies as Catholic has remained fairly stable.²

The concept of “lapsed Catholics” is difficult to define as it can include both those who have simply stopped attending church because of personal issues like divorce, abuse, or disagreements with Church authorities or teachings, and those who have decidedly chosen to leave the Church as a deliberate act. Nevertheless, this group seems to be at least 11% -15% of the Catholic population.

Even more alarming are statistics from Ireland where the disaffection from the Church is even more striking. In 2011, 84.2% of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic, 2.6% less than 5 years earlier, although the number of Catholics increased by 179,889. A 1970s survey had indicated 91% Sunday Mass attendance. A 2012 survey of Irish Catholics undertaken by the Association of Catholic Priests found the weekly Mass attendance rate to be 35% on an all-island basis, while daily Mass attendance was reported at 3%. In 2011, it was reported that weekly Mass attendance in Dublin was on average 18%, with it being lower among younger generations and in some areas less than 2%. 47% of the population of Ireland no longer has any serious interest or confidence in religion.

Chancery figures indicate that there are 478,873 Catholics in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, with 170,728 registered households and 170,848 or 36% of Catholics attending Mass regularly. 64% of Catholics in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati don’t attend Mass regularly or at all.

These figures pale in comparison to the great numbers who do not attend any church or who are ignorant of the Gospel message. 22% of Americans are not affiliated with any church. If we count those who don’t go to church at all, along with those who have abandoned or don’t go regularly, the number of “un-churched” or loosely connected is beyond significant. The Church in Europe is in an even deadlier spiral of decline with only 15% attendance in France, 10% in England, 7.5% in Australia. 38% of Europeans never attend Church. “I don't go to church, and I don't know one person who does,” says Brian Kenny, 39, who is studying psychotherapy

Statistics, of course, are interpretations of certain data on a particular day, focused on a section of the population, and so are always tentative. Yet they do indicate that we should, at least, take notice of something that is becoming an unhappy and possibly a significant trend. From our own anecdotal experience we can see a downturn in parish Mass attendance, the fall in elementary and high school student enrolment and the decrease in offerings. Just before leaving Holy Angels in Sidney, Ohio, where I served three years as a parochial vicar, I recall at a ministerial meeting one of the Protestant ministers lamenting the fact that most of the people in Sidney didn’t go to any Church. To be quite frank and honest, we didn’t see those people and we didn’t serve those people. It took all our energy and time to take care of the people we had – we were flat out. Nevertheless, what was our mission as priests? Who was searching for the lost sheep and who was evangelizing those who had not heard or had forgotten? Did we have a duty to them? Ultimately the concern is not about numbers attending Church but the commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world so that people have an opportunity for a sanctified and fulfilled life – an opportunity for salvation.

The Great Abandonment

In recent years we have been very concerned with the decline in the number of priests and the slow pace of recovery in the number of seminarians. Yet, at the same time, the fall off in Mass attendance, the disaffiliation of the lapsed, those who have formally left, or those who simply are no longer engaged, has increased dramatically. A large number of the disaffected are those who have divorced and re-married. This group tends not to have rejected the Church or her teaching per se, rather, they find themselves in a type of limbo, desiring to be in communion with the Church but due to an irregular marriage unable to participate fully in the life of the Church. A more aggressive reality is the growing number of the disaffected who no longer accept Church teaching on a variety of issues, including contraception, homosexuality, and the ordination of women, and are choosing to leave. While many of us have been watching the altar, who has been watching the pew?

No doubt there are multiple reasons for the alienation of people from the Church, the fall off in Mass attendance and rejection of
Evangelization Fundamental to Ministry of Bishops and Priests?

In his recent book *The Evangelization Equation* (2011), Fr. James A. Wehner points to a cacophony of underlying philosophical influences including: modernism and post-modernism, Enlightenment views of the person and society, contemporary culture, secularism and materialism. We can add that internal conflict, upheaval, innovation, alienation, a loss of a sense of stability, the loss of prestige and a sense of direction within the Church, are also elements leading to a lack of confidence and security in the Church. Of course the clerical sex abuse crisis has been a major factor in the United States as well as Ireland and Europe.

These factors may explain why people are leaving the Church or feel alienated from the Church, and they may account for the large numbers who are disaffected or have simply lost engagement with the faith. A more pointed question needs to be raised: In the face of such alienation and an obvious need for a new evangelization, why don’t we see a widespread and aggressive campaign of evangelization as a general response to this incredible situation? What is our ecclesial response in the face of this great abandonment? This leads to the core question of this paper: What is the role of the clergy in evangelization today?

**The Unique Bishop**

In AD 428 Patrick landed in Ireland for a second time, but on this occasion he returned freely and as a Christian bishop. Patrick was neither the first Christian nor even the first bishop to minister in Ireland. There were a variety of Christians in Ireland, laity and clerics. Some were captured slaves from Britain and Gaul; others were Roman traders who had small settlements in Ireland; and some were Celtic Christian converts, natives of Ireland and the Celtic lands of Scotland, Wales, Brittany and Cornwall. There is evidence of bishops and priests such as Palladius, Ciaran (a native born clerk), Saighir the Elder, Auxilius, Secundinus and Iserminus, who was associated with the Uí Cheinnselaig clan in the province of Leinster, serving small Christian communities throughout Ireland. Like these bishops Patrick was sent as a bishop to preside over a particular Christian community probably based in the northwest of Ireland. Like these early bishops and Patrick. Patrick intended to be an apostolic witness – a missionary bishop.
Patrician scholars are aware from St. Patrick’s own authentic writing, the *Confessio*, that he was sent to Ireland and that later in life he had to answer charges from the commissioning Church back in Britain concerning his mission in Ireland. The nature of the charges against him is not clear, but one plausible scenario is that Patrick was accused of abandoning the Church he was sent to preside over. Patrick was sent as bishop to preside over a particular Christian community, but after a short time he began a new, personal, mission. Patrick began to preach the Gospel to the native pagan Irish.

In pursuing this unique and individual mission, he found himself in conflict with his home community in Britain and with the Church in general. The British Church had facilitated and financed his ecclesiastical appointment to a particular community of Christians in Ireland. He failed to realize their commission, or simply abandoned it for the sake of the bigger mission to convert the pagan Irish. In a wider context, when he began his apostolic or missionary journey to the pagans of Ireland, Patrick also came into conflict with episcopal norms. By the third century the Church had already settled into a monarchical episcopal model in which the bishop presided over a particular community of the faithful. Even at this stage such a community was identified territorially, and this model was supported by legislation and sanctions. The day of the missionary bishop was not absolutely extinct but it was not the norm.

Fundamentally, St. Patrick saw his personal and episcopal mission as one of evangelization – he was called to be a missionary. It is clear from his own writings that he understood his role as bishop to be related to the whole country and directed primarily to the pagans. His *Confessio*, expressing a deep sense of longing and love, reveals his desire for the salvation of his new flock. Patrick saw himself as an evangelizer in the school of the apostles. Patrick would have been aware of the Christian tradition that identified all the apostles as missionaries. As a successor to the Apostles he personally, as bishop, received the great apostolic commission: “go preach the good news to all nations”. Patrick captures the essence of his personal commission when he writes in his own *Confessio*:

I am greatly God's debtor, because he granted me so much grace, that through me many people would be reborn in God, and soon after confirmed, and that clergy would be ordained everywhere for them, the masses lately come to belief, whom the Lord drew from the ends of the earth, just as he once promised through his prophets: “To you shall the nations
come from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Our fathers have inherited naught but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit.” And again: “I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the uttermost ends of the earth.” And I wish to wait then for his promise which is never unfulfilled, just as it is promised in the Gospel: “Many shall come from east and west and shall sit at table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.” Just as we believe that believers will come from all the world. So for that reason one should, in fact, fish well and diligently, just as the Lord foretells and teaches, saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,” and again through the prophets: “Behold, I am sending forth many fishers and hunters, says the Lord,” et cetera. So it behooved us to spread our nets, that a vast multitude and throng might be caught for God, and so there might be clergy everywhere who baptized and exhorted a needy and desirous people (38-40).

Although the monarchical episcopal model had become the ecclesial norm and bishops were assigned a diocesan territory, it seems that Patrick was not unique in following an equally ancient and authentic, but more dynamic, evangelical model of apostleship. From time to time similar energetic missionary bishops have come forth such as St. Kilian (d. 689) and St. Boniface (d. 754).

The Middle Ages: Hopes not Realized

With the consolidation of the monarchical episcopal territorial model of apostleship, the role of the bishop gradually settled into one of governance and order. Although still the teacher and preacher, the bishop became less and less the evangelizer and missionary and more the guardian of orthodoxy with regard to doctrine and sacramental life. In the early middle ages the missionary activity of the Church was carried out through monastic communities engaging local populations and in the twelfth century, with the support of the Papacy and reformed-minded prelates, in particular Leo IX, Gregory VII, Nicholas II, Peter Damian, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bartholomew of Laon, and the Abbess, Hildegard of Bingen. The new wandering preacher and later mendicant movement took on the role of evangelizing both within the Church and in society in general. Of note are people like Robert of Arbrissel, St. Bruno, St. Norbert, St. Francis, and St. Dominic. The age of the missionary bishop
wandering vast territories preaching the Gospel for the sake of salvation, light and life is merely a pious memory if not a legend or even a myth.

Church authorities were aware of the importance of preaching as an aspect of the episcopal ministry, and as essential for priestly ministry in general, in order to provide orthodox and spiritual catechesis, to combat heresy and superstition. Councils and synods enacted legislation requiring both bishops and parish clergy to preach regularly; however, few did and most were woefully inadequate. In the face of inadequate catechetical formation supported by adequate preaching and missionary zeal, the way was left open for heretical movements to spring up and grow. Almost all of these movements began as reform-minded movements within the Church herself and almost all were some form of reaction to a highly institutionalized, sacramental and hierarchical ecclesiology which centered in particular on the nature of episcopal ministry.

**Vatican II: Bishops, Priests and Evangelization**

In proposing the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican Pope John XXIII called the Church to a new and renewed evangelization. It could be argued that the whole purpose of the Council was to focus the Church for such an endeavor. The renewal of the Church was to include a re-evangelization and deepening of the faith of Catholics, an outreach to the lapsed, and a renewal of missionary activity. Essential was the idea that all aspects of human society and culture should be transformed by the grace of God through the participation of Catholics in every aspect of human endeavor, society and culture. Key to this evangelical endeavor was the ministry of the bishop.

The Second Vatican Council’s decree on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, outlines a clear doctrinal, sacramental and pastoral understanding of the episcopal ministry of the bishop. The teaching on the hierarchical nature of the Church is especially important for the positions it takes on the sacramentality of the episcopacy and the collegial nature of the relationship between the bishops and the Office of Peter. It also outlines the pastoral dimension of the ministry of the bishop in its division of the three munera. The ministry of the bishop, and by extension that of presbyters, is priestly and sacrificial, shepherding or governance, and of fundamental importance is the role of the bishop as preacher and teacher:
Among the more important duties of bishops that of preaching the Gospel has pride of place. For the bishops are heralds of the faith, who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people assigned to them, the faith which is destined to inform their thinking and direct their conduct; and under the light of the Holy Spirit they make that faith shine forth, drawing from the storehouse of revelation new things and old (cf. Mt. 13:52); they make it bear fruit and with watchfulness they ward off whatever errors threaten their flock (cf. 2 Tim. 4-14) (*Lumen gentium* 25).

This was not a new development; the Council of Trent made the same statement some four hundred years before. Nevertheless, both the context and the language suggest a biblical reference for preaching which indicates that the central aspect of this preaching is evangelization. The teaching of *Lumen gentium* suffers not because it allows the bishop to “share” these ministries with others, but because it fails to insist on the personal commitment to evangelization (preaching) on the part of the bishop himself and by extension the presbyters.

Another unfortunate aspect of the discussion on the episcopacy was the fact that the Fathers of the Council spent a lot of energy pressing for a clearer and more aggressive doctrinal understanding of the governance prerogatives of bishops. In this way collegiality and the rights of the diocesan bishop, especially in relation to the governance of the papacy and the papal curia, became the central concern and theme when the role of bishops was discussed. This emphasis led, unfortunately, to what Joseph Ratzinger said was the Church bureaucracy’s preoccupation with itself rather than its effort of evangelization. A “rightly understood interest in the Church” he commented, “is primarily directed, not to the Church herself, but rather to that from which and for which she exists; in other words to ensure that the Word of God is proclaimed pure and unadulterated and that the liturgy is celebrated correctly….Ministry should operate as noiselessly as possible and should not be primarily concerned

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about itself.4 Ratzinger epitomizes this fear in the formula: ‘A Church that has people talking much too much about herself is not talking about what she should be talking about.’ Her duty is, rather, to talk about God, that is, ‘to make room for the One who is Alive and for his variety.’” Henri de Lubac, felt that such an approach “could end up with the positivism of a self-running ecclesial operation, behind which is hidden a basic loss of the faith.”5

Nevertheless, the Fathers understood that evangelization was so fundamentally related to apostolic ministry that the profile of the bishop could not be fully understood without at least some reference to it. The Second Vatican Council’s decree on the missionary mandate of the Church, Ad gentes divinitus (Divinely sent to the nations), clearly understands that the commission to evangelize belongs to the whole Church and all her members (cf. AG 6, 12). At the same time in the very first statement of the same decree it is evident that evangelization is a particular characteristic and duty of the apostolic ministry. In fact the Council sees the impetus and model of evangelization in the very mission of Christ, which is inherited by the apostles, their successors and the whole Church:

Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be “the universal sacrament of salvation,” the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder (Mk. 16:16) and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all people. The apostles, on whom the Church was founded, following the footsteps of Christ “preached the word of truth and begot churches.” It is the duty of their successors to carry on this work so that “the word of God may run and be glorified” (2 Th. 3:1), and the Kingdom of God proclaimed and renewed throughout the whole world (AG 1).

Let us be clear: the Church is brought into existence to continue the work of Christ which is universal salvation and this is the work of the whole Church (AG 2), its very raison d’être. Pope Paul VI emphasized this point in his post-synodal exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi, when he said: “The Church exists in order to evangelize. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church,

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5 Both quotations are found in Heim, Joseph Ratzinger, 386.
her deepest identity” (EN 14). While evangelization is directed toward the individual, it is not reserved to the realm of the interior and personal life of the believer or the community. Pope Paul VI sees an essential social and cultural dimension to evangelization which brings the Church into contact, dialogue, and conflict with the world:

Evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new. … This transformation reaches the depth of human culture. For the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation (EN 18-19).

Christ sent the Holy Spirit upon the Church and this same Holy Spirit endowed the Church with both hierarchical and charismatic gifts for the sake of the mission, evangelization for the sake of salvation (AG 4). The charismatic character of the missionary endeavor of the Church should not be underappreciated. It is clear that evangelization is not only the work of the bishops and clergy, however, because the principal character of apostolic ministry, and by extension that of priests, is evangelization, it must be, in particular, not only the concern but the work of the bishop.

The other duties of their office do not remove the participation and even the responsibility for evangelization from the bishops and their co-workers, the presbyters. In fact, the Council Fathers state that evangelization is “an obligation which the order of bishops inherited from the apostles, an obligation in discharge of which they are assisted by priests.” (AG 5) And further: “this task must be carried out by the order of bishops, under the leadership of Peter’s successor” (AG 6). There is no doubt that all baptized Christians are called to evangelize, and, I would argue, the laity are better placed and more numerous in order to carry out this particular work. At the same time the clergy are to form the laity and prepare them for this evangelical mission (AG 12). Early in his pontificate John Paul II said the clergy are “engaged in forming an increasing number of laity who are ready to collaborate effectively in the work of evangel-
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ization.” Yet, the clergy, by their share in the apostolic ministry cannot escape the fundamental orientation of their ministry of service which is evangelization – the preaching of the word in order to bring salvation to God’s People.

The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Ministry and Life of the Priests reminds them that as co-workers with the bishops “they also have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel of God to all. Thus they establish and build up the people of God” (article 4). Even the celebration of the Holy Eucharist is an act and consummation of evangelization:

The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests also sets the Eucharist in this pastoral context. The Eucharist is said to be the ‘source and apex of the whole work of the preaching of the Gospel’ (article five). We are told that “the faithful receive nourishment from God’s Word at the twofold table of sacred scripture and the Eucharist’ (article eight) It is in the mystery of the Eucharist that priests fulfill their primary duty to proclaim the Gospel of God (articles four, thirteen).

Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and New Evangelization

In Evangelii nuntiandi, Pope Paul VI, proposed that evangelization had three major areas of concern: 1. the proclamation of Christ to those who do not know Him; 2. the rooting of the Gospel in every sector of the human race so that it may enter into every heart and renew the human race; 3. bearing witness to the love of God for the human race as revealed through the Incarnate Word. Clearly a personal encounter with Christ leading to a personal conviction is a central aspect of this evangelization.

Blessed John Paul was particularly concerned for the pastoral issue concerning the falling away of Catholics from the faith. In his dialogues on the subject Pope John Paul II goes beyond the idea of a re-evangelization to what he called a ‘new evangelization’ for the entire Church. This new evangelization was to be “new in its ardor, method and expression.” Wehner says that this new evangelization was to be “new in its method not in its message.”

Evangelization Fundamental to Ministry of Bishops and Priests?

As well as the renewed enthusiasm and sense of urgency probably the most innovative aspect of Pope John Paul’s ‘new evangelization’ is the means the Holy Father suggests employing in addressing these groups: all forms of media and in particular the new media.

Pope Benedict XVI recognizes that any new evangelization of the Catholic people must, necessarily, involve a re-evangelizing of the culture in which they live, as the culture is one of the most formative influences on all people. Speaking to the Bishops of the United States during his 2008 visit, the Holy Father said such an evangelization necessitates: “Recapturing the Catholic vision of reality and presenting it in an engaging and imaginative way to a society which markets any number of recipes for human fulfillment.”

In spite of the Second Vatican Council’s insistence, priests have allowed themselves to become removed from their role as evangelizers. In this age of a new evangelization, priests need to be careful not to fall into the trap of “preaching only to the choir” and relying on hierarchical and sacramental forms to provide the methodology and tools for evangelization. Preaching to the faithful is a necessary work of evangelizing but it is not the whole work and it is not the fundamental work. The celebration of the Mass, sacraments, liturgy and devotions, the school system, the religious education programs for youth and adults, are good means of reaching an audience, but the audience is more diverse, distant, and tech-savvy. It should include the Catholics in the pew, but also those who have lapsed, the defected, the un-churched from all traditions and backgrounds including the secular, and much more widely we should be addressing those who have not heard the Gospel or have not had the opportunity to encounter Christ. Moving into the communications age, even beyond video and podcasts, has to become an aspect of our evangelization not simply to remain current but also relevant. The days of preaching almost exclusively to the choir have to be over.

Personal Conviction and Courage: Are the Lost Sheep Being Overlooked?

A few years ago I was travelling to a conference with two seminarians. The journey took two days by car so we stopped overnight at a rectory which had a large inner-city church. The Catholic population that lives around the church had, over the years, moved away; the local area was in decline and housing had been
demolished. Not far from the Church, however, there was a large Section eight housing development. Before setting off the next morning I was lamenting to one of the seminarians what a pity it was that there was such a beautiful old church going to waste because there were no people. I will never forget his response: “Father, there are people alright but we just don’t see them.” He was referring to the large community of people living just a few steps away in the Section eight housing. Sure enough, there had never been a canvass of that housing area and there had never been an attempt to invite or evangelize that community. Do we see what is in front of us?

Evangelization, of course, requires a certain conviction and courage, and this also presents an issue for all Christians including clergy. Faced with a hostile environment, forced into a position of being “counter-cultural” and having been undermined by generations of education that finds its roots in the skeptical soil of the Enlightenment, depressed and maligned because of a variety of crisis in the Church including the abuse crisis, confidence has waned in the idea that the Gospel offers a message of freedom, dignity, and truth. Many of us have lost personal confidence that the Gospel is the instrument of life and we find ourselves hiding behind the hierarchical, administrative, sacramental forms which offer a protective barrier between us and the proclamation of “good news” to a skeptical or hostile audience. Part of the issue is that many of us no longer believe that the Gospel gives life, frees from slavery, or provides light in darkness. If we did, surely we would be anxious, even zealous, in bring that news to those who need it, are desperate for it; those to resent us and hate us because of it and yet need that Word in order to have life. Part of the new evangelization is for Christians, laity and clergy to take the Lord Jesus seriously; to wake up, have courage, to die to ourselves, leave all behind, take nothing for the journey, empty ourselves, and go into the world proclaiming the Good News.

There is no silver bullet or easy way to engage in evangelization. There are no ready made programs that easily fit every parish situation or formation and education program that prepares outstanding evangelizers for every age, social, or target group. Yet, the onus is on those who have been given the ‘order’ which fundamentally calls them to be first evangelizers. Bishops and priests must find a way to lead, not from behind, but truly lead a new age of evangelization with a renewed sense of purpose and conviction, a new sense of confidence in the gospel message, a new drive to draw ‘the many’ into the liberating light and life of Christ.
Evangelization Fundamental to Ministry of Bishops and Priests?

Practical Resources for Evangelization


Totus Tuus, Diocese of Wichita, http://catholicdioceseofwichita.org/totus-tuus/totus-tuus-home
Venerable Frederic Baraga: Our Future Saint?

Rev. David J. Endres PhD

Since 1829, Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary of the West has educated thousands of priests. Dozens of them have been elevated to the episcopacy, but none have become saints – at least not officially canonized ones – and at least not until now. Frederic Baraga, an immigrant from Slovenia who had briefly served as a priest in Cincinnati and studied at Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary, was declared “venerable” (a step along the path to sainthood) by Pope Benedict XVI on May 10, 2012. The pope’s announcement followed the determination of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints that Baraga exhibited “heroic virtue.”

It seems appropriate during this “Year of Faith” when we are invited to reflect on the holy men and women that have gone before us to consider one of our own – a priest and missionary with ties to Cincinnati and Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary.

A Vocation Inspired by a Saint

Frederic Baraga was born in 1797 in Slovenia, a land disputed by the French and Austrian governments. Living at the convergence of the Romance, Germanic and Slavic language traditions, Baraga was by his teenage years fluent in Slovenian, German, and French and went on to study Latin, Greek, and English. While he had planned to be a lawyer and was for a time engaged to be married to one of his law professor’s daughters, the possibility of a call to the priesthood lingered in his mind.

While studying at the University of Vienna, he became acquainted with the Redemptorist Fathers. For three years the Redemptorist Clement Hofbauer (known as the “Apostle of Vienna” and canonized a saint in 1909) served as Baraga’s confessor, helping him to discern a call to the priesthood. He broke off his engagement and entered the seminary at Ljubljana and was ordained in 1823. His first years of priesthood were spent in parish ministry. He became known as a good confessor and for persuasively preaching and teaching the faith in simple and clear ways.
In 1828, Father Frederic Rese, Vicar General for the Diocese of Cincinnati arrived in Vienna, seeking money and manpower for Cincinnati’s mission territories which then stretched beyond Ohio to include Michigan and Wisconsin and the native peoples living there. Upon hearing of Rese’s plea, Baraga sought permission to serve as a missionary in America.

To Cincinnati

Baraga arrived in Cincinnati in 1831. He sought out Bishop Edward D. Fenwick who he was told lived at Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary. When he found the seminary, he judged it to be unimpressive – small, old, and dilapidated – unlike what he had known in Europe. But while unimpressed with the seminary building, he was edified by the five priests and four seminarians. In particular, Baraga found himself greatly inspired by Fenwick: “I always had a high idea of the piety, amiability, and humility of this bishop, but the gratification of his presence soon convinced me how weak were my ideas of his virtue.”

While living with Fenwick, he served the city’s German immigrant population, though it seems that from the time of his arrival in Cincinnati, he made known his desire to be a missionary to the native peoples. Fenwick wrote that Baraga “was full of zeal and full of energy to go and work with the natives. He gives the impression of being a good missionary.” Fenwick was eager to send him among the Native Americans. Baraga wrote his sister that Fenwick’s agreement to send him to the Indians “cheered [him] very extraordinarily.”

While Baraga had already been ordained before his immigration to America, still his time at the seminary was one of study and preparation for his future ministry. He sought to improve his English as well as learn the language of the Ottawa, the native peoples he would soon serve. When Baraga arrived, he found two Ottawa preparing for the priesthood at Mt. St. Mary’s: William Maccatebinessi (also known as “Petawwanequot” – “Black Bird”) and Augustin Hamelin (also known as “Kanapima” – “He who is talked about”). As fifteen year olds in the fall of 1829 they had entered the seminary in Cincinnati to begin learning English. Fenwick called the two men “the first fruits of all the Indians of these United States offered to the priesthood,” but neither was ordained. Both were sent in 1832 to the Collegio Urbano, Rome’s missionary
seminary, to continue their studies, but William died there before he reached ordination and Augustin returned to his home and became a leader of the Ottawa tribe (later assisting Baraga at the mission in L’Arbre Croche, Michigan).

The two seminarians served as teachers and tutors to the young priest Baraga. Though he considered himself to be excellent at learning languages, he found the Ottawas’ native tongue to be difficult. Still at the very least, he was equipped with the basics of the language. His stay in Cincinnati was only for three months, but it was formative for his future ministry.

To the Ottawa and Chippewa

Within a year of immigrating to America, Baraga was sent to minister to the Ottawa Indians of L’Arbre Croche (Harbor Springs, Michigan) on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. All of Michigan was then part of the Cincinnati Diocese (the Diocese of Detroit was created soon after in 1833). Baraga was not the first missionary to the Ottawa. By the time of Baraga’s arrival, Fenwick’s priests had been laboring there for nearly a decade. Fenwick himself took Baraga to see his new mission. Both were greatly impressed with the faith of the natives. The bishop wrote, “I believe there was more piety, faith, and veneration as have ever been seen in similar cases among American Catholics. . . I would gladly exchange my home in Cincinnati and all my honors, for a cabin to aid these good Indians.” Baraga fell in love, too, for he asked Fenwick “to grant him the grace of never recalling him” from among the Ottawa.

Often the only priest serving in upper Michigan, Baraga travelled widely among the Native Americans, earning him the nickname “the snowshoe priest.” The harsh winters made it difficult to walk the long distances needed to care for his scattered flock. In the winter of 1849 on a long trek, his snowshoes failed and he almost perished. Eventually he became so adept at travelling with snowshoes that he gained the ability to run in them. In extreme conditions, he found it necessary to walk up to twenty-four hours at a time. He served missions at Grand River (now Grand Rapids, Michigan), La Pointe, Wisconsin, and L’Anse, Michigan (near Baraga, the town named for him). By one estimate, during his 37 years as a missionary in the Great Lakes, his ministry spanned an area of 80,000 square miles, encompassing parts of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Canada.
While not all were receptive to him, Baraga’s missionary efforts were successful. He established a vigorous schedule of religious activities among the Indians: morning prayer, beginning at 5 AM, followed by Mass, plus evening services that included prayers, songs, and instruction in the catechism. He was zealous in promoting and offering confession, once recording that in a single day he spent ten hours hearing them. In his two years at L’Arbre Croche, he baptized over 500 Indians. In only three weeks, he baptized nearly 100 at Grand River. At La Pointe he boasted of nearly 1,000 converts.

In Their Native Tongue

Baraga continued his studies of native languages after he left Cincinnati. He understood that the key to the Catholic evangelization effort among Native Americans was the ability for priests to preach and teach in the natives’ languages and also for prayers, hymns, and catechetical works to be translated into a language the natives could understand. Baraga wrote, “Indian education has to begin in the native tongue.” As a means to learning the native languages himself, he began compiling a list of grammatical rules and a dictionary of common words (his work was eventually published as the Dictionary of the Otchipwe Language and the Theoretical Grammar of the Otchipwe Language). Baraga immersed himself in the language of his people, even attempting to use their language in his private prayers.

He gained such a proficiency that he wrote an impressive number of religious texts for the Ottawa and Chippewa. Within a year of arriving, he published his first book for the Indians, a children’s book for the Ottawa. His most significant works include his Ottawa prayer book, a life of Christ, an Ottawa sermon book, and a book of instructions on the sacraments and the Ten Commandments. In addition to the books’ role in religious education and in fostering prayer, they served to preserve in written form the language of the Ottawa and Chippewa. His work remains an indispensable source for linguists and historians.

As Bishop

In 1853, Baraga was consecrated the first bishop of upper Michigan (the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie, later relocated to
Marquette). He was consecrated by Archbishop John B. Purcell in Cincinnati (and administered confirmation for the first time at nearby St. Philomena’s in Stonelick, Ohio). As a bishop he made frequent trips to Cincinnati to meet with other bishops, to beg for funds, and to have additional copies of his many publications printed.

Shortly after being named bishop, he wrote a pastoral letter to his people in both English and Chippewa, signally clearly that both the natives and the settlers were his spiritual children. His pastoral was on the topic, “But one thing is necessary: love and serve God well.” He encouraged his people to remain faithful to the true religion, warning especially that renouncing baptism and returning to native religions offended God. He exhorted them to frequent prayer: “pray well, morning and evening.”

As a bishop, he continued to travel widely, often providing the sacraments to communities that lacked a priest. He traversed his diocese, visiting the various missions, checking in on his priests, and, of course, administering confirmation as well as confessions, first communions, and catechetical sessions. It was claimed that between all of his trips, the longest consecutive period of time he spent at his residence was two weeks.

As a priority for his missionary diocese, he worked to recruit priests to work among the Native Americans and settlers. Though he travelled to Europe to find men willing to serve as missionaries, he was disappointed with the results. Some of the volunteers were unsuitable; others upon reaching America refused to travel to the Indian missions, and those that did go to the Great Lakes often succumbed to the harsh environment. Still by the time of his death, his diocese had twenty-one priests, including at least five attending to the spiritual needs of the Native Americans. He had also successfully recruited the Ursuline sisters and many committed lay people to teach in his diocese’s Catholic schools.

The Diary: Glimpses into the Life of Baraga

Baraga’s diary spans ten years of his life as a bishop, providing glimpses of his life and ministry. He awoke each morning at 2 or 3 AM for meditation, sometimes praying for up to three hours. Once when accidentally “sleeping in” till 5 AM, he considered it a spiritual disaster! Wishing to spiritually nourish as many as possible, he often preached his Sunday sermon in English, French, and the natives’ language, but lamented that the length of his preaching “makes the
people bored and annoyed” including the religious sisters! Still he believed it was the only way to reach all of his people. He once reflected in his diary that “to preach is easy, but to convert is hard.” He often lamented the people’s lack of zeal for the faith and their poor attendance at Mass.

Baraga labored zealously for the people he was asked to shepherd, sometimes travelling in dangerous weather to reach the sick and dying. In his diary he humbly confessed that one trip went awry: “I got lost in the woods and had to spend the night out in the open without fire, without blankets. It was my own fault.” In another case, he was angry to find out that he had not been notified that someone was near death because the family doubted he would have “gone out at midnight.” Often Baraga labored in the midst of extreme cold and deep snow, but other times it was the heat, having written: “I heard confessions for two days in such terrible heat that the candles in the church melted.”

Baraga lived simply. He spent his own money sparingly and gave to others generously, refusing, for instance, to travel to the dedication of the cathedral in Detroit because the funds could be used instead to build a home for a family that had recently converted. A shepherd of souls more than an administrator, Baraga lamented the role he had in raising money, writing in his diary that it was “very distasteful” having to remind congregants to pay their “pew rent.”

His Final Days

In 1866, the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, a meeting of the country’s bishops, was held. Though his health was failing and he could have been excused, Baraga felt it necessary to attend. On the third day of the council, Baraga suffered a near-fatal stroke. Though not recovered, Baraga desired to return to upper Michigan, saying: “I must return to my diocese. Even if I die on the way, I must try.” Though he survived the trip, he never regained his strength. During his last year he was not able to say Mass. He died in 1868 at the age of 70, having served more than forty years as a priest, fourteen of which were spent as bishop of Marquette-Sault Ste. Marie.

His eulogist summed up his life this way: “Thus ended a man whose purity of soul and singleness of purpose, whose mortified life and burning zeal, joined to uncommon talents and acquirements, [were] faithfully and successfully employed in the service of God.”
The Saint?

Baraga’s “cause” for canonization was opened in 1972. In addition to the virtue he showed during his life, to be canonized two miracles must be attributed to Baraga’s intercession. In past decades, many favors attributed to Baraga have been reported. Currently the Church is investigating a possible healing in which a person with liver cancer sought his intercession and was touched with the stole of Baraga. Though the cancer had been detected through CT scan and ultrasound, later tests did not reveal the existence of cancer. If the alleged miracle is accepted, Baraga will be beatified and known as a “blessed,” one step closer to sainthood.

Whether Baraga is a saint, we leave to the judgment of the Church; yet it is certainly possible that one day in the future we might be able to say: “St. Frederic Baraga, pray for us!”

Prayer for the Intercession of Venerable Frederic Baraga

“Heavenly Father, your servant Bishop Frederic Baraga desired to live out a total commitment to your Son Jesus Christ, Our Lord. He dedicated himself completely to missionary activity to make you known, loved, and served by the original peoples in the land of the Great Lakes. Grant me as well the grace to dedicate myself to you, Father. Help me to be more concerned for the needy and those who suffer discrimination.

Bishop Baraga brought peace and love wherever he traveled. Teach me to spread peace and love in our human family. Fill me with the spirit of prayer which was so much a part of his life and which drew him into an intimate union with Jesus Christ, your Son. Help me to accept the hardships of this life as willingly as he did and thereby die to self that I may rise with Christ in glory.

Grant that your servant, Frederic Baraga may be raised to the honors of the altar and through his intercession grant the graces and favors for which I now pray. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How do we recognize holiness in our midst? Do we have family or friends, priests, deacons, or sisters, married or single people in our lives who show marks of holiness?
2. How do we “translate” the message of the Gospel to various kinds of people – youth and young adults, families, single people, seniors, lapsed Catholics, and non-Christians?

3. How do we look to the example of the saints and other holy men and women for guidance? For emulation? For intercession?
Faith in *Fides et Ratio*

David Ruel Foster PhD

The 1998 encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, may be the Everest in the lofty chain of encyclicals left to us by Pope John Paul II. It is certainly the most complete and current statement of the Church on the relationship between faith and reason. During our current Year of Faith, it is fitting for us to return to this document to aid our understanding of the theological virtue of faith.

Three things surprise the reader of *Fides et Ratio*. First, that it does not try to make the case for the compatibility of science and religion. Second, that the encyclical does not accept the common distinction between reason as a source of knowledge and faith as a source of belief. Third, that the encyclical does not accept the separation of reason and faith into different parts of our life, or a polite agreement to disagree, but makes the claim that faith and reason need one another.

The first surprise is perhaps a surprise only for those casually acquainted with Church teaching. Those casually aware of the encyclical assume that it addresses an ongoing dispute between science and religion – the supposed hostility of the different worlds of reason and faith. Those familiar with Church teaching should not be surprised that John Paul II assumes the compatibility of science and religion as an established part of Church teaching. Equally surprising to some is to find that in an era when the postmodern critique frequently calls into question the possibility of knowing the truth about anything, the Church is the most vocal defender of human reason and its ability to know the truth, even if only in part.

How Faith is Knowledge

The second surprise is that *Fides et Ratio* understands faith as knowledge, not as the opposite of knowledge. The encyclical understands faith knowledge as a different type of knowledge than that produced by scientific reasoning, but as still a valid way of knowing. This is contrary to the distinction frequently made in academic circles between reason that leads to knowledge and faith
Faith in Fides et Ratio

that leads to something else; perhaps opinion or belief but not knowledge.

Chapters 2 and 3 of Fides et Ratio approach the topic in complementary ways. Chapter 2, Credo ut Intelligam (I believe in order that I may understand) considers the contribution of faith to the human search for wisdom. Chapter 3, Intellego ut Credam (I understand in order that I may believe) considers the contribution of reason to the human search for ultimate truth. In section 31 of Chapter 3 the Pope is developing the understanding of faith in an entirely human context. The Pope points out that as human beings we live by faith in many ways. We are born into a family from which we take many things based on a trust in our parents. Some of these things may need later to be personally explored and either reaffirmed or abandoned.

... there are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification. Who, for instance, could assess critically the countless scientific findings upon which modern life is based? Who could personally examine the flow of information which comes day after day from all parts of the world and which is generally accepted as true? Who in the end could forge anew the paths of experience and thought which have yielded the treasures of human wisdom and religion? This means that the human being—the one who seeks the truth—is also the one who lives by belief(31).

Most of us must trust the credibility of others in order to know the distance from the earth to the sun, how our GPS system works, and how our computer is programmed. We give a level of trust to the sources that bring us news from around the world. Most of all, our friendships and our marriages depend upon a knowing by relation, an entrusting of ourselves. While this knowing through relationship has a basis in reason and evidence, it goes beyond what can be known scientifically.

Faith operates in our relationship with God in much the same way as it operates in human relationships. Thus Fides et Ratio believes there is the basis for an analogy that can help us understand how Divine faith is a way of knowing. The encyclical first describes faith in a simply human context.

In the quotation that follows, Fides et Ratio points to this important tension that exists in the nature of faith knowledge: faith is
less perfect in one way, more perfect in another. It is less perfect in that it lacks those characteristics of science and needs to be perfected by more evidence (we are speaking of human faith). Faith is richer in that it gives us the truth about persons. It allows us to trust a friend, to be confident in advice, to know the love of a spouse. It is not scientific knowledge, but it is a way that we learn important things and on the basis of which we make important decisions.

In believing, we entrust ourselves to the knowledge acquired by other people. This suggests an important tension. On the one hand, the knowledge acquired through belief can seem an imperfect form of knowledge, to be perfected gradually through personal accumulation of evidence; on the other hand, belief is often humanly richer than mere evidence, because it involves an interpersonal relationship and brings into play not only a person’s capacity to know but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others, to enter into a relationship with them which is intimate and enduring (32).

The encyclical admits that knowing by faith is in some sense less perfect than knowing by reason; but it also shows how knowing by faith gives us a type of knowledge that we could not get through reason. On the one hand, the clearest example of knowledge by reason is that characterized by the scientific method including observable data, measurable results, and repeatable confirmation. On the other hand, knowledge by faith is knowledge that comes from our relationship with another who we judge to be a reliable witness. Faith is based on trusting another and entrusting ourselves to another. Faith knowledge is not devoid of reason, in fact it builds upon a reasonable foundation, but it goes beyond the reach of reason. A distinctive feature of knowledge by faith is that it is, above all, our means of knowing another person. It allows us to know the truth about persons.

It should be stressed that the truths sought in this interpersonal relationship are not primarily empirical or philosophical. Rather, what is sought is the truth of the person—what the person is and what the person reveals from deep within. Human perfection, then, consists not simply in acquiring an abstract knowledge of the truth, but in a dynamic relationship of faithful self-giving with others (32).
The third surprise is the relationship of mutual support that the encyclical proposes for faith and reason. This is arguably the central affirmation of *Fides et Ratio*: that faith and reason are rightly understood in a relation of mutual support and that, if separated, both are enfeebled.

It is also perhaps the most challenging claim of the encyclical because it is counter to much of the current cultural beliefs. Certainly many contemporary thinkers reject any role for faith in the life of an educated person. Other thinkers, perhaps with a feeling of generosity, allow a role for faith in human life but not in relation to reason. Rather faith has its part in an isolated sphere of life along with other matters of imagination and personal fancy.

All the more surprising then is the countercultural position of the encyclical: that faith and reason both provide the other with something necessary to the healthy life of the other.

Of the two parts of this teaching, let us first examine how faith is helped by reason, since it is perhaps easier to illustrate. In the quotation below note how the encyclical envisions reason as a sort of foundation upon which faith is built and not something to be abandoned.

But this does not mean that the link between faith and reason as it now stands does not need to be carefully examined, because each without the other is impoverished and enfeebled. . . . Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so runs the risk of no longer being a universal proposition. It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to weak reasoning, might be more penetrating; on the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition (48).

Faith coupled with weak reason is in danger. It can be misled. It may begin to look upon prayer or sacramental actions as magical actions dependent upon the right formula, or the person of weak reason may look upon faith as a source of secret knowledge intended only for the few (Gnosticism). Faith without reason risks becoming superstition.

Reason provides the foundation for the act of faith; both human faith and Divine faith. God, who reveals Himself to us in Jesus, does so in a manner suitable to His rational creature. God,
above all, knows the ways that human reason prepares us for the reception of His revelation. First, it is to the rational creature that God reveals Himself. Second, while the revelation of God reveals things that go beyond our reason’s ability to verify, still reason can verify that the content of revelation is not contrary to reason. Third, once we as rational creatures reflect on the content of revelation, we recognize that it fills a gap in our knowledge. It reveals what we long to know about. Fourth, reason is at work in our judgment of the sources as worthy of our trust or not. In the case of Divine revelation, there are several sorts of witnesses: human, angelic, and Divine. Ultimately, we must judge whether God is the source of the revelation. It may be, however, that it is through another person that God reveals Himself, it may be the community of the Church, or it may be the direct working of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, in each case, our response is an act of entrusting ourselves to another person.

Next, let us examine how reason is served by faith. In one sense we have already alluded to it: that it is by faith that reason sees what it wants to know most of all. We, by reason, desire to know the ultimate meaning of life, yet this is not available to reason alone. Faith gives reason its knowledge of its ultimate goal. We, as rational beings, have long recognized our desire for the good, the true, and the beautiful. And certainly as far back as Plato, we recognized intellectually, that the good, the true, and the beautiful, were also a One. What the Greeks were seeking by their philosophy; we recognize as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Deprived of what Revelation offers, reason has taken side-tracks which expose it to the danger of losing sight of its final goal. . . . By the same token, reason which is unrelated to an adult faith is not prompted to turn its gaze to the newness and radicality of being (48).

Reason without faith can lose sight of its final goal. The goal of knowing the fullness of truth, goodness, and beauty is understood first by faith. Faith helps reason grasp those truths that may be difficult at first, e.g., the dignity and value of all persons even if they are physically or mentally handicapped. Faith sustains friendships; and friendships are important to the progress of reason. Faith by opening our eyes to eternal life, gives us a new look at this life.
Faith in Fides et Ratio

In Summary

_Fides et Ratio_, full of insight and surprise, has much to teach us in this Year of Faith. Three things, however, should no longer be a surprise to us. First, that the Church has long affirmed the compatibility of faith and reason and likewise that of science and the Christian religion. Second, that faith, rightly understood, is a type of knowledge based in relationships and is the primary source of our knowledge of persons. Third, that faith and reason need one another for the full realization of their gifts, and conversely that they are each enfeebled by isolation.
Reflections in the Year of Faith
on Giving unto Caesar and Following Jesus Christ

Rev. Michael A. Seger STD

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Caesar

They sent some Pharisees and Herodians to him to ensnare him in his speech. They came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion. You do not regard a person’s status but teach the word of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or should we not pay?” Knowing their hypocrisy he said to them, “Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at.” They brought one to him and he said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They replied to him, “Caesar’s.” So Jesus said to them, “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” They were utterly amazed at him.1

From the earliest moments of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God tense questions surfaced about the relationship between the earthly kingdom, so to speak, and the advent of the Kingdom of God. Living in the highly charged first century atmosphere of the Roman occupation of Jewish lands pushed this tension to center stage. The question wrapped itself around the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ: “We have no King but Caesar” (John 19:15).

The tension, anger and confusion shaping the crowd in Pilate’s courtyard emerge in our own time. Today, questioning of the legal status of religious conscience, using tax revenues to support social services antithetical to the values of a significant number of voters as well as mandating insurance coverage of acts abhorrent to the

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religiously-grounded institutions providing the insurance raise the question of Caesar and Christ anew: the question of Christian faith and its relationship to political power.

Gospel Compassion and Reweaving the Fabric of Society

These reflections on the Catholic social tradition and its teaching bring the dynamic of Christian faith to the role and limit of government power in social life. These comments approach the topic both thematically and historically. We begin with a brief discussion of the meaning of a moral principle and the philosophical foundation for human rights. These fundamentals are essential to Roman Catholic social doctrine which reflects the Catholic moral tradition and the moral principles this tradition demands.

In Principio—the Rock-Solid Starting Place: Values Articulated in Terms of Behavior

Moral principles give us primary rules of action or conduct that shape reflection and likewise establish a test for measuring, regulating or guiding conduct. Principles, however, do not drop out of the thin air, but are clear articulations of profound values that need to be encouraged and to be protected. Importantly, the concept of “values” cannot be underestimated, so we sketch a working definition: a value is a good worth pursing, worth committing oneself to, worth passing on to another generation. As our Lord teaches: “For where you treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Matt 6:21). To explore values is to unlock the treasures of our hearts and souls—as individuals and as a community.

Ideally, principles shape value-driven conduct that encourages authentic human flourishing—what Aristotle would call ‘happiness.’ Rights flow from basic human values integral to human development. Basic human rights prove integral to reasonable striving for human flourishing or happiness.

A Traditional Natural Law Foundation to Human Rights

Once characterized as ‘nonsense on stilts,’ rights have become a bulwark of much of modern ethical reflection. Different moral methodologies employ different reasoning processes to support rights. The Catholic moral tradition employs natural law moral
reasoning to support rights and their concomitant duties. Focusing on the topic at hand—the role of government in Catholic moral doctrine—the rational foundation of human rights rests in the basic needs of the human person to realize authentic human flourishing. This flourishing takes its cue and trajectory from both the natural inclinations rooted in human nature and the ability of the human person to explore—via reason—the rational way to achieve morally acceptable development—hence, natural law.²

Realizing these natural inclinations brings into bold relief the authentic good of the human person. The ‘right’ to education, for instance, rests upon the basic ‘inclination’ or ‘drive’ of the human person to seek truth—to explore one’s world. This need to seek and to explore is an innate inclination of the nature of the human person. This inclination seeks to fulfill its goal or end—igniting human striving. Respecting this natural inclination toward humane development accords the human person one’s dignity.

We witness respecting the innate need to know the truth early on. “Baby-proofing” a home, for example, to keep the newly-mobile toddler explorer safe proves a practical example of encountering this inclination. Seen against the broad social horizon, the right for a humane education fundamental to human development calls forth the duty of the body politic to develop—and to fund—a school system marked by justice, dedication to truth and untrammeled access. Similar observations about the right to life and, logically, basic medical care, humane housing, environmental justice and access to basic food and water, for example, flow from the human inclination to self-preservation. Here discovered is a central mechanism of natural law moral reasoning; rational realization of authentic human needs.

² Ethical reasoning that denies the reality of human nature must seek its grounding elsewhere. The Roman Catholic moral tradition, however, sees nature as revealing a normative system of morality. Add to this the revealed truth that nature reflects the ineffable Wisdom of Almighty God and natural law moral reasoning commands respectful reflection in the realm of conscience formation.
Historically, the beginning of modern social teaching rests in the world of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903). Pope Leo faced a world in turmoil. Steel begins setting about rebuilding the modern world; huge factories and assembly lines start replacing skilled hand work; countrysides begin losing population as young people flock to cities to seek work—all these elements heralded changes in the fabric of society itself.

Pope Leo XIII spoke out for the human dignity of the hourly-wage worker. Reading the signs of the time, Pope Leo—like Saint Paul—is urged on by the charity of Christ: “In fact new developments in industry, new techniques striking out on new paths, changed relations of employer and employee, abounding wealth among a very small number and destitution among the masses, increasing self reliance on the part of workers as well as closer bonds of union with one another, in addition to all this, a decline in morals have caused conflict to break forth” (RN 1). Pope Leo writes to clarify the Church’s social doctrine and to “refute erroneous opinions” (RN 3).

From the 1800s forward an opinion consistently challenging the Gospel vision for modern society—one needing refutation—has been Marxist Socialism. In his opposition to Socialism (RN 7 ff.), Pope Leo explores and defends—among other rights—the right to private property, the right for government to intervene for the common good, the right to a just wage and the right to free association. Pope Leo mounts his defense built upon the foundation of Natural Law morality. For example, he defends the right to association (churches, unions etc):

For man is permitted by a right of nature to form private societies; the State, on the other hand, has been instituted to protect and not to destroy natural right, and if it should

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4 *Compendium* 106.

forbid citizens to enter into association, it would clearly do something contradictory to itself because both the State itself and private associations are begotten of one and the same principle, namely, that men are by nature inclined to associate (RN 51).

Crucial to this position is the right of religious association, rooted in the same natural inclination to associate. Pope Leo points to the fruits of religious association in the institutions “that the authority of the Church and the piety of Christians have brought into being,” noting that “history, down to our own times, speaks of the wonderful benefit they have been to the human race” (RN 53). Pope Leo XIII in the late 1900s would have had in mind many of the same institutions that would come to mind of insightful women and men of the 21st century. The modern person need only view the social impact of religion-based institutions to grasp Pope Leo’s point: hospitals, educational institutions, orphanages and special needs facilities as well as incalculable work in countries struggling to realize the basic human rights of education, self governance, medical care, protection from arbitrary violence based on gender or race: in short, all social elements supporting a humane quality of life. These rights—among others—form the bedrock of modern Western thought on human dignity.

Natural Law and Human Rights

The social oversight of these basic rights and their concomitant duties forms an essential element of the Principle of the Common Good.6 Indeed, the government’s—the body politic’s—ethical raison d’être is to support and to protect the common good. Moreover, this duty includes providing ready access to the common good—to deny such access reveals the essence of social injustice. Pope Leo XIII states it squarely:

… those who govern must see that they protect the community, because nature has entrusted its safeguarding to the sovereign power in the State to such an extent that the protection of the public welfare is not only the supreme law, but is the entire cause and reason for sovereignty; …that the

administration of the State has from nature as its purpose, not the benefit of those to whom it has been entrusted, but the benefit of those who have been entrusted to it (RN 35).

Pope Leo XIII draws out the principle that “If, therefore, any injury has been done to or threatens either the common good or the interests of individual groups, which injury cannot in any other way be repaired or prevented, it is necessary for public authority to intervene” (RN 36). The government has the duty and right to intervene for the common good; however, we shall see that some forty years later, Pope Pius XI articulates an important caveat to both governmental rights and duties—and the limits to government intervention. Discussing the limits of government is a sine qua non to public harmony. After all, debating the scope and depth of government intervention for the common good, sparks donnybrooks from taverns to town hall meetings.

Civil Society: Government’s Duties and Boundaries

Forty years after Pope Leo XIII confronted the social challenges of rapid industrialization, Pope Pius XI in the early 1930s faced the ravages of a world-wide economic depression. Seemingly, the engines of social wealth had ground to a halt. Bread lines replaced assembly lines. Writing to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum, Pope Pius XI acknowledges the fundamental insights of his predecessor. Importantly, however, Pope Pius XI expands on the intricacies of government intervention for the common good.

In Quadragesimo Anno (1931), Pope Pius XI sets a rational limit to government intervention without vitiating governmental duty to the common good. Pope Pius XI teaches that the government exists and exercises sovereignty (power) to promote the common good and to assure individuals and associations access to the common good—but government does not have the mandate to absorb the individual persons or civil groups. This absorption is the hallmark of materialistic socialism. The specter of socialism haunted Pope Leo XIII in the 1890s and elicited a response from Pope Pius XI some forty years later.
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The Principle of Subsidiarity and Human Dignity

This fundamental principle governing this relationship of the State to the individual and social associations is called the Principle of Subsidiarity. Simply put, the larger structures of governance (e.g. Federal, State and Local) should be ready to help (subsidium) but not to absorb lower structures. This caveat—this boundary—protects what Catholic social doctrine identifies as civil society.

It is impossible to promote the dignity of the person without showing concern for the family, groups, associations, local territorial realities; in short, for that aggregate of economic, social, cultural, sports-oriented, recreational, professional and political expressions to which people spontaneously give life and which make it possible for them to achieve effective social growth. This is the realm of civil society, understood as the sum of the relationships between individuals and intermediate social groupings, which are the first relationships to arise and which come about thanks to “the creative subjectivity of the citizen”. This network of relationships strengthens the social fabric and constitutes the basis of a true community of persons, making possible the recognition of higher forms of social activity.7

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2005) echoes both Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI when it identifies the epicenter of Catholic moral teaching as the dignity of the human person. This epicenter takes shape in the Principle of the Dignity of the Human Person. Catholic social doctrine rejects categorically the person—and family—being absorbed by the State. Such an attack on the status of the individual person forfeits the foundation of human dignity created in the image and likeness of God—viz. intellect and free will—“creative subjectivity.”

Civil society acts as the buffer zone, so to speak, between the power of the State and the “creative subjectivity of the citizen”—of the person and family. In the realm of business—and economics—this creative subjectivity characterizes the entrepreneur, the long-shot Silicon Valley “start-up”, the local civic organization that explores creative ways to finance and to encourage equity building in the housing market as well as charitable civic organizations that seek to

7 Compendium 185, emphasis added.
serve those who face hardships. The role of the State is, hypothetically, to offer grants or organization (subsidium) to get the civic association “off the ground;” but, once launched and independent, the larger entity needs to have a clear exit strategy. Said in slogan form: “If it can be done locally, do it locally.”

The Principle of Solidarity and Human Dignity

But the Principle of Subsidiary does not stand alone among moral principles shaping Catholic doctrine on society. Pope Pius XI likewise critiques unbridled greed manifest in reckless laissez-faire capitalism as well as materialistic socialism. Recall, that Pope Pius XI looked out over a world ravaged by the economic collapse of poorly regulated markets. Granted, modern economic theory would look askance at a variety of Pope Pius XI’s Depression-era suggestions, but modern economics cast in the Roman Catholic tradition would be guilty of culpable naïveté to dismiss the government’s role in economic life. The Tradition is crystal clear: Economic life forms a fundamental element of the common good. The Catholic moral tradition of social doctrine, as we have seen, places the support and the development of the common good as the rational foundation for both the existence of, and exercise of, governmental power.

The length and depth of intervention becomes the fodder of political campaigns. The Catholic faith speaks out for the poor and the marginalized and critiques the shredding of the fabric of the common good, but does not claim competence in the intricacies of socio-economic ideology. Catholic social doctrine takes great care to make clear its area of concern and to make clear its freedom from entanglement with any one political ideology.

The Principle of Solidarity underscores this duty of the civil society and political entities to attend to the human dignity of each of its citizens. Subsidiarity does not license limited concern or even indifference. The different elements of socio-political life need to work together so that all may flourish. Roman Catholic social doctrine categorically rejects what Pope Pius XI calls the “reefs of individualism and collectivism.” Either extreme threatens to shred the fabric of society. Logically, then, any relationship between the State and the individual/family whose principle is either extreme (individualism or collectivism) endangers if not destroys the

8 Cf. QA 105 ff.
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development of the common good: “The public institutions themselves, of peoples, moreover, ought to make all human society conform to the needs of the common good; that is, to the norm of social justice. If this is done, that most important division of social life, namely, economic activity, cannot fail likewise to return to right and sound order.”

The Compendium underscores the concept of Solidarity within the context of an ever-expanding interdependence\textsuperscript{10} woven into the social fabric of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century socio-economic world:

The new relationships of interdependence between individuals and peoples, which are \textit{de facto} forms of solidarity, have to be transformed into relationships tending towards genuine ethical-social solidarity. This is a moral requirement inherent within all human relationships. Solidarity is seen therefore under two complementary aspects: that of a social principle and that of a moral virtue.\textsuperscript{11}

Referencing Pope John-Paul II’s 1988 encyclical \textit{Sollicitudo Rei Socialis}, written to commemorate Pope Paul VI’s apostolic letter treating world solidarity \textit{Octogesima Adveniens} (1971), the Compendium quotes Pope John-Paul II: “Solidarity is also an authentic moral virtue, not a “feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”

The Compendium echoes Pope John-Paul II’s Roman Catholic vision that \textit{mutual interdependence} is more than a sociological

\textsuperscript{9} QA 110.
\textsuperscript{10} N.B. The Compendium references three major social doctrine texts under the concept of \textit{interdependence}: Pope John XXIII’s \textit{Mater et Magistra} (1961) 415-417; Second Vatican Council \textit{Gaudium et spes} (1966) 42; and Pope John-Paul II’s \textit{Laborem Exercens} (1981) 14-15. The concept of \textit{interdependence} “can be associated...to the classical theme of socialization” (Compendium 413).
\textsuperscript{11} Compendium 193.
\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Pope John-Paul II’s \textit{Sollicitudo Rei Socialis} 38.
datum: it marks the need to accept the duty of mutual responsibility—love of neighbor within the civil society:

Solidarity rises to the rank of fundamental social virtue since it places itself in the sphere of justice. It is a virtue directed par excellence to the common good, and is found in “a commitment to the good of one’s neighbor with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to ‘serve him’ instead of oppressing him for one’s own advantage (cf. Mt 10:40-42, 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27).13

Subsidiarity and Solidarity: Standing Guard over the Dignity of the Human Person

Since the advent of modern Roman Catholic social doctrine with Rerum Novarum (1891) the Church’s Magisterium has put forward various moral principles as guideposts. Beginning with the Principle of the Dignity of the Human Person, these remarks highlight three principles: Principle of the Common Good; Principle of Subsidiarity and Principle of Solidarity. Together these principles guard the epicenter of Catholic social morality: the dignity of the human person made in God’s Holy Image. Together these principles shed light on contemporary concerns about State intervention, on the one hand, and a deepening moral poverty regarding the poor, on the other hand. Recalling Pope Pius XI’s words—we must steer clear of “the reefs of individualism or collectivism.”

A Balance between Caesar and the Kingdom of God: Compassionate Civil Society

During this Year of Faith, the faithful Catholic needs to reflect upon the relationship of the State to the Individual. When casual social gatherings turn into heated political discussion: what principles and vision shape my Catholic stance? These reflections suggest that Roman Catholic social doctrine strikes a balanced middle ground in the relationship between Caesar and the Kingdom of God—the State and the individual in civil society. Neither the

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extreme of indifferent laissez-faire capitalism nor the extreme of all-consuming socialism gains support from the moral tradition of Catholic social doctrine. In this Year of Faith we are well-served to pray and to reflect upon the crucial area of human development—civil society—as the centerpiece of Catholic life in community.
The Impact of Fulfilled In Your Hearing on Catholic Preaching: Then and Now

Deacon David J. Shea DMin

It was 1969, four years following the end of the Second Vatican Council, when Pope Paul VI issued a revision to the Roman Missal for the celebration of Mass. In the introduction of his Apostolic Constitution, Missale Romanum, he wrote, “Also, ‘other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the earlier norm of the Holy Fathers:’ for example, the homily.”1 This unusual reference to the Sunday homily as one victim of the Catholic tradition that had suffered injury was the Pope’s way of underscoring the degree to which the Catholic homily was going to change as a consequence of the liturgical reforms of the Council.

“Generally speaking, although the homily was an ancient practice in the early Church—with its roots in Jewish liturgical tradition—until fairly recently most preaching in the post-Reformation Catholic Church had been doctrinal in nature, typically focused on a particular topic or theme, but one that was unlikely chosen from or influenced by Scripture.”2 Pope Paul VI’s reference to the homily as one of the things injured by “accidents of history,” related to the fundamental nature of Catholic preaching dating back to the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther had been critical of Catholic preaching, and some of his assessments were accurate and deserving of consideration. Luther asserted that Catholic preaching had become fundamentally deductive and argumentative, and that sermons were overly catechetical and insufficiently biblical. He wanted Scripture to be a more prominent feature in the liturgy and in

the pulpit, not merely to be used as exhortation, but rather as an invitation to faith. The split between the Catholics and the Protestants led, in a very real sense, to a fateful property settlement, with the Protestants receiving the Word and the Catholics receiving the sacraments, an unfortunate consequence of the Reformation. Protestant preaching followed Luther’s guidelines with its primary emphasis on Scripture while Catholic preaching went in an almost opposite direction for nearly 450 years with its focus on doctrine, teaching and exhortation.

Many of us who grew up in the pre-Vatican II Church have recollections of our experiences of Sunday preaching and undoubtedly remember the priest stepping down from the altar, sometimes removing his chasuble, then ascending into the pulpit and beginning and ending his sermon with the sign of the cross as if to almost bracket his preaching and set it apart from the rest of Mass. In this era, the sermon was anything but liturgical—“In the years that followed the Reformation . . . only saw an increase in doctrinal, theological arguments, catechetical sermons, and practical rhetorical guides that would benefit greatly from argumentation by deduction.” Catholic preachers intentionally moved in a direction as far away from the Reformers as they could.

There has always been a fundamental difference between teaching and preaching. While teaching or catechesis can be, and often is, one element of the Sunday homily, it is not the exclusive purpose of the homily. Catechetical instruction provides information on the doctrine and teachings of the Church. By contrast, the homily—derived from the Greek term *homilia*, meaning conversation or personal exchange—“was originally meant to be an informal, oral exposition of the text of scripture, an act of interpretation whose primary function was to illumine the passage.”

Second Vatican Council Reformed Liturgy and Restored Preaching

With the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, many elements of Catholic worship were revised to enable fuller participation by the assembly. Within the Mass, a more prominent Liturgy of the Word was restored which resulted in the homily serving as a more integral component of the Mass.

4 Ibid., 10.
The move to restore the homily, however, was not without issue. Despite the work that had taken place prior to the Council, some unsettled business and disagreement among the bishops remained. There were those who felt that the doctrinal ignorance of their people demanded that Sunday preaching continue to be primarily catechetical. Others felt that the homily, “should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources, and its character should be that of a proclamation of God’s wonderful works in the history of salvation, the mystery of Christ, ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy.” In the end, it is clear that the bishops intended the Church to nourish, strengthen, and encourage the People of God through the homily. The homily is supposed to bring people closer to Christ by leading them into the mystery of Christ. Making use of the inductive method to present the Scriptures and Traditions of the faith allows the faithful to participate in the liturgy more fully, actively, and consciously and to live out the message of the homily in their daily lives.

**Fulfilled In Your Hearing**

While it had been more than fourteen years since the close of the Council, the restoration of the homily to what it had once been had yet to be undertaken in the US Church. It wasn’t until 1979 when the Committee on Priestly Life & Ministry of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops began to address the question of preaching in the context of the Sunday assembly. A writing team was appointed and worked from 1979 until 1982 to prepare and finalize, *Fulfilled In Your Hearing, The Homily in the Sunday Assembly (FIYH)*.

The forward of the document put forth the reasons behind the USCCB’s reason for addressing the question of preaching. Undergirding the action of the bishops was the consistently poor assessments that Catholic preaching was receiving among those in the pews. Other objectives cited in the forward included: bringing attention to the need for programs that emphasize homily preparation

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and delivery and providing recommendations for improving the quality of preaching. The ideas outlined in the document were so radically different from what was being preached during Sunday Mass, that the bishops decided to launch it with 4-day retreats, diocese-by-diocese. During these retreats, priests preached to each other (and some to their bishops, who participated in the retreats) in what was experienced by many as traumatizing. The retreats addressed four topics: the historical critical method, exegesis of assembly, the spirituality of the preacher and the method for preparing homilies.

The Table of Contents, the basic structure of the document, proclaims a theology of preaching in itself: It begins, not with the homily, nor with the Scriptures, but with The Assembly, the people for whom the homily is being prepared and preached. It then moves on to The Preacher, The Homily and finally, The Homiletic Method.

There are a number of significant contributions that FIFIY made to the understanding of Catholic preaching in restoring it to the place it once had in the early Church. It gave the Assembly a position of importance and established it as the starting point for the homily. It stressed the relationship between the Assembly and the preacher and it presumed that that relationship was one that was built upon a foundation of knowledge and experience. It provided a definition for the Assembly as differing individuals coming together to form a worshiping and listening congregation comprising varied communities necessitating exegesis in the same manner that the Scriptural texts require exegesis. FIFIY proposed a new identity for the preacher as a mediator of meaning, where the preacher stands in tension between the community and the Lord, representing both, “engaging in conversation with the Scriptures and the community.” FIFIY presented a new way for preachers to view the homily and the ministry of preaching. In stressing that the homily is not so much on the Scriptures as from and through the Scriptures, FIFIY redefined the role of the homilist: “the preacher does not so much attempt to

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explain the Scriptures as to interpret the human situation through the Scriptures.”\(^8\) In its pastoral commentary on *FIYH*, the Catholic Association of Teachers of Homiletics (CATH) affirmed the importance that the homily flows from the Scriptures and . . . is one of the characteristics of the homily that is non-negotiable.\(^9\) The task of the preacher is not one of dealing with topics or themes but rather looking at the lives of the listeners for meaning. The importance of relevance is underscored in the chapter of the document on The Homily where it is stressed that the homily must apply directly and personally to people’s lives and that an essential attribute of a homily is that it begin with human experience and show how Christ is present in that experience.

Under the heading of The Limits and Possibilities of Liturgical Preaching, *FIYH* raises a number of challenging questions pertaining to the catechetical needs of the people. It acknowledges the very issues that divided the bishops during the Second Vatican Council—“Doesn’t regular Sunday preaching have to take into account the ignorance of the Scriptures on the part of large numbers of Catholics . . . Is there not a crying need for regular and sustained teaching about the moral imperatives that flow from an acceptance of the Good News?”\(^10\) In responding to these critical questions, while reminding preachers that doctrinal instruction and moral exhortation do have a place in the liturgical homily, *FIYH* asserts that, “the oral presentation of a single individual is not a particularly effective way to impart new information or to bring about a change in attitude or behavior.”\(^11\)

*Fulfilled In Your Hearing* concludes with a Homiletic Method, a process that begins early each week and uses the entire week for the development of the Sunday Homily. Such tasks as personal reflection and interpretation are given prominence in the process and the steps of drafting, revising and practicing out loud are proposed as vital elements of the weeklong method.

As fundamental as some of these subjects may seem, they were anything but that when they were first introduced back in 1982. Priests had to fundamentally rethink their entire theology of preaching while developing new approaches and methodologies for preparing and preaching their homilies. These were no small

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\(^8\) *Fulfilled In Your Hearing* 20.
\(^10\) *Fulfilled In Your Hearing* 25.
\(^11\) Ibid., 26.
challenges and for some the challenges and level of difficulty were impossible. While there are certainly gaps in particular areas of *FIYH*, it remains a seminal document, and in the assessment of CATH, there are elements “worthy of continued notice and celebration.” For certain, it still warrants a revered place in the homiletics classroom.

**Unfinished Business**

Thirty years ago, a survey on Catholic preaching motivated the US Bishops to initiate action and ultimately publish *FIYH*. Early in 2012, another kind of survey was commissioned by Bishop David O’Connell of the Diocese of Trenton, NJ to study former parishioners. Contact, in the form of exit interviews, was made with more than 300 Catholics ranging in age from 16 to 90. Among the reasons cited for leaving a parish and leaving the Church was that of poor preaching. The authors of the study indicated that there were many complaints about the quality of homilies and the quality of preaching. Despite everything that *FIYH* attempted to accomplish in 1982 by way of providing a homily form, stressing the importance of the assembly and the need to exegete the assembly along with the Scriptural text, underscoring the role of the preacher and putting forth a method for developing homilies; despite the emphasis that homiletics is receiving in our seminaries, Catholic homilies and Catholic preaching appear to be still falling short of people’s needs.

Last June, the University of Notre Dame hosted a conference on preaching—We Preach Christ Crucified: A Conference on Catholic Preaching. The highly successful event was attended by approximately 350 individuals, including archbishops, bishops, priests, seminary professors, and other individuals, all concerned about Catholic preaching. Archbishop Robert Carlson, the chair of the USCCB’s Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, in his keynote address at the conference, talked about “Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily,” a new document on preaching that was approved by the U.S. bishops at their annual fall meeting on November 12-15, 2012. That document was in its fourth draft when Archbishop Carlson addressed the conference. He explained that while there will be echoes of *Fulfilled In Your Hearing* in the document, it will address certain new topics most notably an explanation of the proper way for Catholic preachers

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The Impact of Fulfilled in Your Hearing on Catholic Preaching

to enunciate moral judgment, navigating the delicate balance between loving people and drawing lines, using Christ as the model and master for how this should be accomplished in the context of the Sunday homily—“The time has come to do an equally good job of convincing people that being Catholic does make a difference in how they think and act.” Archbishop Carlson underscored the reality that we live in a culture that is sometimes actively hostile to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that preachers have to be able to point to issues where our values make us think and act differently—“If the world isn’t aware of a number of issues in which our [Catholic] values make us think and act differently, then we have to ask ourselves how effectively we are proclaiming the Gospel to all.”

“Preaching the Mystery of Faith” appears to be strongly informed by Vatican II thinking and has as its intended audience, priests, deacons and lay preachers in addition to teachers of homiletics. In contrast to FIYH which begins with the assembly, “Preaching the Mystery of Faith” begins with the homily and it is viewed through a biblical, theological and Christological lens with the Paschal Mystery at its center. While the focus of the document is liturgical preaching, it identifies catechesis and doctrine as ways of dealing with the problems of the Church stressing that, “Catechetical preaching should not include moralizing or trite expressions of faith, but be intended to deepen the faith of the hearers.”

The new document raises a number of questions and issues that will be addressed in the months to come and will be the focus of a conference that will be convened by the USCCB for homiletics educators at Notre Dame in late June 2013. For certain, “Preaching the Mystery of Faith” will become a vital text in the homiletics classroom and will be used as a primary resource alongside Fulfilled In Your Hearing in the formation of future Catholic homilists.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. Why, in general, isn’t Catholic preaching improving? Why does Sunday preaching continue to fail to meet the needs of the Sunday worshipers?

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2. How can the Catholic Sunday homilist—priest and deacon—create a shared responsibility with the assembly for the quality of preaching? How can we motivate our parishioners to get involved in providing both input and feedback to improve the quality of the Sunday homily? How can we give permission to our parishioners to provide us with quality feedback on our preaching especially when they are critical of a given homily? What mechanisms and systems can we put in place to gather that feedback?

3. If catechesis and doctrine are to become vital elements of the Sunday homily, how can the inductive form of the homily—which gives a priority to the listener and makes him a co-participant in the unfolding movement of the homily and is so essential for engaging the Sunday assembly—be preserved?
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