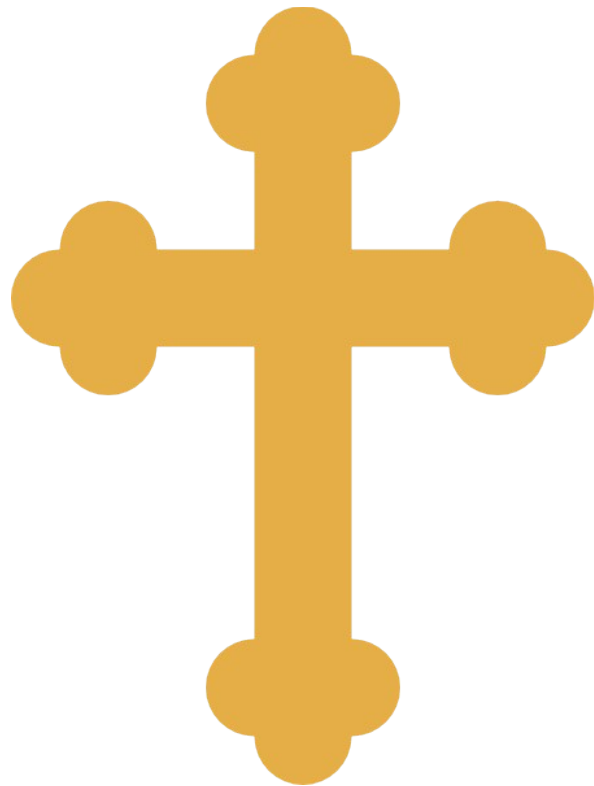


An Ecumenical Catholic Catechism



Preface

For centuries the tradition of a catechism has been a help to Christians. Many religious leaders produced such books – usually in a question and answer format. This format continues on most websites as “Frequently Asked Questions.” This book continues the same “Q and A” format.

With the formation of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), an opportunity arose to publish a catechism that could speak to those who are members of a newly formed Church body. The ECC is progressive, and its policies are more inclusive – such as the ordination of women, married clergy and the inclusion of LGBT people. However, its most central focus is not the policy changes just mentioned, but rather its sense of inclusion of the voices of laity and clergy in the discernment of the Church. While the bishops are still the governors, chief teachers and chief sacramental celebrants of the ECC, the people (laity and clergy) participate in the process of its polity (its canon law) through a synod that includes a House of Laity and House of Pastors. The people elect their bishops, who are affirmed and consecrated by the other bishops of the ECC. And bishops, while permanently retaining holy orders, serve as the head of a diocese, or Presiding Bishop, for a term of office. Together they seek God’s will.

Yet the catechism is not simply meant for the people of the ECC. Its description of Catholic faith is shared by many who embrace the vision of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962-1965). The central change of Vatican II was that of moving from defense to dialogue. Many Christian Churches have been moving in the same direction. This is a dialogue with other Christian Churches, and with other religions. It is also a dialogue with science and society. Dialogues are good because conversation requires both listening and speaking. Christian history is filled with experiences of the hierarchical Church seeming to speak without listening. This was not the manner of the Lord Jesus, who invited his followers to “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7) We can rejoice when the followers of Christ open doors, ask for continuing conversation, and seek peace within themselves and with all peoples who pursue wisdom.

Long before the ECC, catechisms or Church councils, Jesus proclaimed: “I am the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) His declaration reminds us that words and ideas are useful descriptions of faith – required for authentic guidance. But they cannot substitute for the encounter with Christ. He does not simply teach ideas, but dwells in us, as we dwell in him. We are invited to become like his followers in Emmaus, who broke bread with an unknown stranger, only to discover that he was their Risen Master (Luke 24:13-35). The hope is that this catechism might be bread for the mind and heart – so that in breaking open the meaning of faith, the presence of Christ is discovered, and our hearts burn with love and joy, like the astonished disciples of Emmaus.

Table of Catechism Questions

1. The Human Experience (total 8 pages)

A. A worldwide experience of joy and suffering (2)

Why do we need religion? Can't we all just be good people and try to get along?

Do we suffer in order to learn something?

B. Evolution and human development (2)

What role has religion served in the human experience?

C. Notions of sin and liberation in the cultures of the world (4)

How is the modern perspective on religion different from earlier perspectives?

Do we have to use the word "sin" in explaining our faith?

How is Christianity similar to other religions in answering questions about human suffering, human failure and human freedom?

Where does love fit into our faith?

2. The Coming of Jesus, the Christ (total 24 pages)

A. The experience of ancient Israel (3)

How did the experience of the people of ancient Israel contribute to our modern religious approach to faith?

B. The evolution of the mystery of God (3)

How has our Christian understanding of God changed from that of the people of ancient Israel? Are we still connected to their experience?

What is revelation, and does it mean that God is too far above us to encounter as a normal part of life?

Do non-Christians know God? If so, how does revelation change anything for them?

- C. The historical setting of the Life of Jesus (4)

Jesus was a Jew. What were the traditions that formed his expression of the Gospel?

- D. The teaching of Jesus (4)

What is the heart of the message of Jesus?

Is the message of the Church the same as the message of Jesus?

Why is Jesus the center of the Gospel?

- E. The miracles and healings of Jesus (3)

Are the miracles and healings of Jesus meant to show us that he is God?

How do the miracles and healings of Jesus relate to his teachings?

- F. The death and resurrection of Jesus (4)

Did the early Church see a special significance in the death and resurrection of Jesus?

How does his death and resurrection affect us?

Does Jesus save us from sin?

- G. The revelation of the Trinity, the core of Catholic faith (3)

How do the life, death and resurrection of Jesus reveal the Trinity?

The Trinity is hard to understand, so is it really important for the Christian faith?

What do the gospels and the other New Testament writings reveal about the Father? The Son? The Holy Spirit? The unity of the Trinity?

3. The Early Church and the Gospel (total 18 pages)

A. The Acts of the Apostles (4)

What does the Acts of the Apostles show us about the early Church?

Does Acts of the Apostles define the meaning of Catholic faith?

Weren't some of the doctrines and structure of the Church developed after the time of the Apostles?

B. The writings of Paul and other New Testament authors (4)

Some people say that Saint Paul is really the one who formed the Christian faith. Is this true?

What are the principle contributions of Saint Paul to the structure and teachings of the Church?

C. The perspective of early Christian writers on Christ, the faith and the Church (4)

What role does the Bible play in Catholic faith and doctrine?

Does the New Testament play a special role for Catholic faith and doctrine?

What do the early Christian writers contribute to our understanding of Catholic faith?

What forms of Christianity were competing with Catholicism?

D. The emergence of the creeds and the sacraments (6)

Are creeds necessary? Aren't they legalistic and too old to apply to modern life?

When were the first creeds developed and how did the Nicene Creed become such a standard for the Church?

Why are the creeds are written in a Trinitarian structure?

What is the Catholic understanding of each member of the Trinity – what are their roles and how do they relate to one another?

What is the meaning of sacrament?

Did the Church develop the sacraments as rituals after the time of Jesus?

Can we find evidence of every sacrament in the writings of the New Testament?

4. The Church in Catholic Tradition (total 14 pages)

A. The organization of the early Church (3)

Was there a confusion about the structure of the early Church and its ministries?

What was the structure of the early Church, and how is it a model for synodal polity?

When did priests and bishops emerge as leaders and teachers?

Aren't lay people allowed to teach or to lead public worship?

B. Ecclesiology and the meaning of the Church (4)

What are some models of the Church? Is one of these models better than the others?

When is the Church really complete as the Body of Christ and the People of God?

Why is Mary called the Mother of the Church, and what is her special relationship with the Church?

C. Church and sacraments (4)

How is the Church itself a sacrament?

How does each sacrament relate to the Church?

D. Church leadership and apostolic succession (3)

Does the entire Church inherit the Catholic faith, and how does this apply to each person who is a baptized Christian?

How are bishops the successors of the apostles, and why is this so important for Catholic faith?

What is synodal polity and why is it the basis of the structure of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion?

How is synodal polity a reflection of the Holy Trinity?

How does the meaning of the Church relate to the role of the bishop?

What is the difference between consecration as a bishop and jurisdiction as an ordinary of a diocese, or as the Presiding Bishop?

What is the difference between a suffragan bishop and a bishop who is a diocesan ordinary?

- E. The Ecumenical Catholic Communion in the Catholic tradition

How is the Ecumenical Catholic Communion authentically Catholic?

5. The Sacramental Life of the Church (total 12 pages)

- A. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (2)

What is the meaning of “*lex orandi, lex credendi*,” and how does this understanding guide the doctrine and structure of the Church?

- B. History and theology of the sacraments (8)

Are there really only seven sacraments, and aren't some more important than others?

What are the basic teachings regarding each sacrament, and how did each of the sacraments develop over the centuries?

What is the meaning of “grace” in the celebration of the sacraments?

- C. The Church as minister and guardian of the sacraments (2)

How does the Church minister the sacraments?

Must a priest be the minister of the sacraments?

Can laypeople administer the sacraments?

How is the Church the guardian of the sacraments?

6. The Creed as Guardian and Guide (total 17 pages)

A. Early creeds (4)

Besides the Nicene Creed, are there other authentic creeds of the Catholic faith?

Did early Christians follow a creed? Wasn't the Church more unregulated at that time?

B. The creed and the life of faith (6)

How is the structure of the Church guided by the official creeds?

How is each individual's life of faith guided by the creed?

Do I have to believe the entire creed, and what if I don't accept some of it?

C. The creed as guardian of orthodoxy (4)

What is meant by "orthodoxy," and why is it important?

How does the creed guarantee orthodoxy?

D. The creed as guide for the life of faith and the encounter with God (3)

My relationship with God is very personal; why is the creed important for my personal spiritual life?

Isn't it enough just to follow the two great commandments of Jesus to love God and love my neighbor?

E. The Creed and the Ecumenical Catholic Communion

How does the Ecumenical Catholic Communion interpret the creed for our own times?

7. Catholic Devotional Life (total 22 pages)

A. Public prayer and private prayer (3)

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the public and private prayer of the Church?

I think I encounter God when I pray alone. Do I have to go to Church to find God?

What is the difference between private prayer and the public prayer of the Church?

B. The centrality of the Eucharist in devotional life (3)

Does “Eucharist” mean taking Holy Communion?

What is the role of the Holy Trinity in the Eucharist?

Why is the Eucharist so important to the life of faith?

Is it important to believe that we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion?

C. The special place of the icon in Christian devotion (2)

Why are icons very different from Western religious art?

D. Private devotion: *lectio divina*, scriptural study, written prayers (4)

What is *lectio divina*, and is it different from bible study?

What is historical criticism of the bible? Will it help my relationship with God?

What are the traditional ways of interpreting the bible?

Do written prayers help my relationship with God? Do they limit my spiritual life?

E. Private devotion: The rosary, novenas, the Jesus prayer, meditation (6)

Some people say that the rosary is just a superstitious repetition of prayers, so why is it important?

What is the best way to pray the rosary?

What is “the Jesus Prayer,” and how does it help my spiritual life?

What is meditation, and how is it different from prayer?

Why do some people say that meditation is wrong because it is really non-Christian?

F. Pilgrimages, retreats, and spiritual direction (4)

What is a pilgrimage, and how does it help my life of faith in God?

What is a retreat, and why is it important for my life of faith?

What is spiritual direction, and how can I find a good spiritual director?

8. Catholic Doctrine and Moral Practice (total 14 pages)

A. Theology and Catholic faith (6)

What are the guiding lights or principles of Catholic Christian faith?

Sometimes the bible seems to be different from the teachings of the Church. Doesn't this cause some confusion?

Who are the primary teachers of Catholic faith?

How does doctrine and worship relate to authentic moral behavior?

What are the different kinds of theology, and what is systematic theology?

B. The sources of Catholic moral theology (4)

What are the sources of moral theology?

How has the moral stance of the Church developed over the years?

C. The authority of the Church (4)

How is the authority of the Church understood in its early history?

9. The Lives of the Saints as Witness of the Gospel (total 12 pages)

A. Learning from the great saints (4)

Why are the saints so important in the witness of the Church?

Who are some of the great saints who give this kind of witness?

B. What the saints teach about doctrine, faith and devotion (4)

What do the great saints have to teach us about Catholic faith?

Are there specific devotions that the saints have fostered?

How do the saints witness to authentic Catholic teaching?

Why does the Virgin Mary have a special place of devotion in the Catholic tradition?

Why is Mary honored as the Mother of God? Why is she honored as our Mother?

C. What do the saints teach about the shortcomings of the Church as organization (4)

Are there examples of saints who have led the reform movements of the Church?

What do the saints have to teach about reforming the Church?

Are there saints who have been mistaken about the faith? What does this teach us?

10. The Development of Doctrine and the Historical Perspective in Catholic Faith (total 19 pages)

A. Doctrinal controversies in the early Church (2)

What are some of the doctrinal controversies of the early Church?

How were these controversies resolved? Are they still controversial issues?

- B. The wisdom of restraint in doctrinal pronouncements (2)

How do the bishops of the Church contribute to authentic Catholic teaching?

Why do the bishops sometimes take a more passive approach to controversy?

- C. Cardinal John Henry Newman and the development of doctrine (3)

What is the development of doctrine, and who were the pioneers of this understanding of the authentic development of the teaching of the Church?

How did Cardinal John Henry Newman contribute to the understanding of the development of doctrine?

Doesn't the development of doctrine mean that truth is relative?

- D. Cardinal Newman and the witness of the laity (*sensus fidelium*) (4)

What is the specific understanding of the term *sensus fidelium*?

How is this relevant to the authentic teaching of the Church?

How do we know what teaching will remain authentic?

- E. Doctrine and controversy in the Church today (4)

- F. **What are the values that guide the understanding of authentic doctrine?**

Does this mean that there are right and wrong understandings of Catholic faith?

- G. The historical unfolding of specific doctrine (4)

Can you give some examples of the development of doctrine over the centuries?

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the authentic teaching of the Church?

11. Catholic Identity in a Pluralistic and Global Society (total 14 pages)

A. The Holy Spirit and the world (4)

How is God present in the world? How are we aware of that presence?

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the world?

How does the Holy Spirit speak to people who are not Christian?

B. Catholic and Protestant perspectives (4)

Are there various kinds of Catholics?

Are there various kinds of Protestants?

What are some of the main similarities and differences between Catholic and Protestant understandings of Christian faith?

C. The witness of the Eastern Church (2)

What do the Eastern Churches share with Catholicism in terms of the elements of faith?

How are Eastern Churches different in terms of their understanding and practice of Christian faith and practice?

D. Christians and non-Christians (4)

What is the general Catholic attitude toward non-Christian religions?

Do Catholics share some beliefs or practices with other religions of the world?

How can we utilize the wisdom we find in other religions in our own practice of Christian faith?

12. Catholic Prayers (total 12 pages)

13. Appendix #1 Sample Class Outlines for clergy and lay catechists

Chapter One: The Human Experience (total 8 pages)

A worldwide experience of joy and suffering (2)

Why do we need religion? Can't we all just be good people and try to get along?

Religion arose as a part of the human experience. It begins with the wonder of existence itself. This sense of wonder brought humanity to fields of inquiry like science, art, music, and also religion. The humanities serve this sense of wonder through such endeavors as poetry, which celebrates this wonder; and through history, which describes the development of these various human endeavors.

All great religions address the question of why we suffer. It is a central question of every religion – the mystery of suffering is a troubling aspect of the mystery of life.

- ❖ The ancient sages of India tells us that life is a continual cycle of birth and death, and the great yoga masters urge us to seek the true self – which is beyond change. That self is a reflection of the great Self of reality – the unexplainable mystery that we call God, beyond name and description.
- ❖ Buddhists say that suffering comes from our desire to control our lives – not realizing that all things are impermanent. They urge us to live in the moment, and to realize that

no pain or pleasure will last. They call us to live by our intentions, and not by the outcome of the events of our lives.

The religious thought of Asia is as old as the roots of Judaism, and pre-dates the other major religions of the West. The monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam all speak of “sin” as a source of suffering, but have different ideas of what this means.

In the modern world many people have intentionally or casually discontinued their religious faith and practice. Some say that religion is meaningless to them. Others say that it gives simplistic answers to the profound questions of life, or that it gives unsatisfying answers. Still others really don't think about such issues as suffering, or say that such pursuits are a waste of time.

Yet our hearts are drawn to religion in one way or another. Some may be attracted by the beauty of religious ceremonies, great religious architecture, or sacred music. Some are drawn by its ethical teaching. Many, however, never pursue the serious answers that religions have given to the mystery of life. They have a surface experience of religion, through contact with the monks, nuns, priests, teachers and other leaders of the various faiths. Yet religion, like all human experience, can be known at various levels. For example, all food is not the same. Food can be badly prepared, tasteless and have little nourishment. Or food can be fresh and carefully prepared, with proper seasoning to bring out the best taste. All food is not the same, and all religious experience is not the same. The Hebrew Scriptures use this analogy, and invite us to a good experience of God with the words: “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.” (Psalm 34:8)

Do we suffer in order to learn something?

Some say that we suffer in order to learn from our suffering. For the Catholic Christian, this is both true and untrue. Suffering is an inexplicable part of life that brings us alienation from the world around us, and a feeling of dissatisfaction with our own lives. (This alienation is understood as “original sin” in the Catholic tradition.) Catholics do not believe that God sends suffering to teach us a lesson. However, suffering can become a lesson to change our thinking and behavior – a way of transforming our lives. The suffering of Jesus is even understood as the ultimate means to end the alienation that we experience as human beings (explained later in this catechism).

What can we learn from suffering? One answer comes from Dr. Martin Luther King, who wrote these words about his own suffering:

My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my

situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course. Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it a virtue. If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation which now obtains. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive.

There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, and others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So like the Apostle Paul I can now humbly yet proudly say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The suffering and agonizing moments through which I have passed over the last few years have also drawn me closer to God. More than ever before I am convinced of the reality of a personal God.¹

Suffering has no final answer in logical terms. The answer that Catholic Christians give is the powerful life of Jesus, and its effect upon the all else.

A. Evolution and human development (2)

What role has religion served in the human experience?

Religion means many things. It can refer to the institutions and organizations that have promoted religious doctrine. It can mean the personal devotion of each individual. It can also mean the teachings, observance and rituals a religious tradition. When looking at the Christian faith, it is important to specify three different meanings of religion:

- ❖ Christianity is a set of traditions about Jesus Christ, and his meaning for the world. It has various doctrines and religious observances about Jesus and about those who have faith in Jesus.
- ❖ Christendom refers to culture made up of the institutions and organizations which promote a specific world view, and are often engaged in political efforts to support that world view.
- ❖ Christians are individuals – and corporately understood as the Church – who are devoted to Christ and his teachings – each to some degree of commitment and understanding of the person and meaning of Christ.

¹ PD. *Christian Century* 77 (27 April 1960):510.

Religion has both a light and dark side, like all human experiences. Some have used religion to accumulate power, while others have been transformed by religion, and gave themselves over to a life of deep reflection or service of others. Religion has fueled the efforts of great wars, and great movements of human liberation. Catholics and Protestants battled each other in the 17th century, destroying much of Europe in the name of their particular form of the faith – although political power aligned itself with both sides, using religion for its own ends. Yet the religious impulse also fueled the effort in Europe and America to end slavery in the 19th century. Thus we see the rigidity of religion, as well as its compassion and service.

Religion inspired the building of millions of hospitals and schools around the world. It gave a sense of dignity to downtrodden people throughout history. Yet it was used to justify the Inquisition in Europe, and the subjugation of the native peoples of the Americas and Africa.

Perhaps it is helpful to view religion as part of the development of human consciousness, in the great unfolding of human evolution. Many people ask this question of the usefulness of religious faith for the process of evolution. However, it is important to ask that question from within the practice of a religious faith. To look from the outside of faith at the meaning and purpose of religion is to have presuppositions as to what believers think and feel about their religious faith.

This is like asking about the purpose of democracy while always living under a totalitarian government. We come to understand the meaning of a democracy when we live within it. We may believe that democracy gives everyone equal access to the government, equal opportunity for social betterment, and a strong safety net during sickness or old age. Yet those who live in a democracy can find that such expectations may not be met. Still others, who have the opportunity to participate in the democracy through such experiences as voting, may not make use of that opportunity.

It is the same for religious faith. Each person who believes is different. Some may have casual belief, while others are intense in their dedication. All people have various understandings of the meaning of faith.

Catholic Christians generally understand religion as a structure to foster the destiny of humanity. That destiny is the gradual movement toward awareness of the heart of the human character. We are called to know ourselves, and in the process to realize that God is at the heart of our human identity. All human development moves toward this discovery of our true identity.

Science discovers that life emerged from seemingly inanimate matter, and humanity emerged from the life of the earth. Christian faith does not contradict science, but affirms it by saying that the process is not yet complete. Within the heart of the process is a Holy Presence which

continually moves us toward full awareness of our identity. So often the image of God is outside the universe. However, in the Christian tradition, God is neither inside nor outside – God is always fully present.

The Book of Genesis declares: “God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) This tells us that the very Presence – called God – which moves this process from beginning to fulfillment is reflected in each of us. We have come from God and return to God, and our deepest identity reflects God. Religion is not some icing on the cake of life. Rather, at its best, it is a profound quest for our truest self – our identity in God.

Saint Paul wrote about identity as the focus of faith: “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1Corinthians 13:12) The coming of Jesus affirms this quest with a revelation about the Holy Presence that we know as God. His life, death and resurrection tells us that God is intimate – that there is no “big” or “little” in the universe, but that every life is important. This revelation not only gives an answer to the human quest for identity, but also gives the path to discovery it – the path of love. The New Testament says it well: “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” (1John 4:16)

B. Notions of sin and liberation in the cultures of the world (4)

How is the modern perspective on religion different from earlier perspectives?

In much of the history of religion, the quest for God was treated as a search for God as “outside the universe.” God became an object of discussion. In our present day, people in secular culture seem to be less interested in religion that talks about God “out there.” The quest for understanding “myself” is wrapped up with the quest for God.

Actually, this is not so new. Saint Paul centers on the confusion over his own conduct as a source of his religious journey: “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:18-19) Likewise, Saint Augustine, in his 4th century autobiography, wrote: “Seek for yourself, O man; search for your true self. He who seeks shall find himself in God.” (Confessions)

Around the world, the sages and philosophers of many ages have come to the conclusion that the true quest of life is centered on self-knowledge. In ancient China, 2500 years ago, Lao Tzu, in his book, *Tao Te Ching*, wrote, "Knowing others is wisdom. Knowing the self is enlightenment. Mastering others requires force. Mastering the self requires strength." Yet the

Buddha, around the same time period, cautioned all seekers that the self can be an illusion, saying that there is no fixed “self,” but that the self is interconnected with all things, and so is fluid. He urged his followers to seek a path of emptiness, in which there is no object to find – nothing permanent, but only the process of detachment from everything that seems permanent.

In Christian history, seeking God through the quest for “the self” can be found in the writings of the saints. However, the saints also caution that the search for the self can lead to promoting an illusory ego-driven “self” that will not fulfill the desires of our hearts. Only when the self leads to identification with Christ, will our hearts be fulfilled.

This leads to the second change in perspective of modern religion – the quest for love. Society seeks love as the fulfillment of our hopes and dreams. This is true, as long as we realize that “love” should focus on our efforts to love, and not to find the “right person” to love us. Love is not simply finding the right marriage partner. Love is special with a life partner, but is based on an attitude of the heart. It is passion, but also hard work.

Christianity promotes love as the great and powerful channel of finding God, recalling these words of the New Testament: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:7-8).

Do we have to use the word “sin” in explaining our faith?

It is common for people to object to the use of the word “sin.” They have usually had negative experiences with religious people who use this word. However, sin is a term that has many meanings. In common usage it means personal failure. However, this is not the most important meaning of sin in the Christian tradition.

Sin is an English translation of many different words in the Hebrew Scriptures. These words can mean “rebellion,” “deviation” or “missing the goal.” Sometimes sin is called folly, and the sinner is called a fool. In the time of Jesus, sin often meant a personal failure, and people were concerned about God’s punishment for their personal sins because the common meaning of sin was the violation of the will and law of God.

Saint Paul, in his letters to the Christian communities, develops a clear understanding of the meaning of sin. He refers to sin as a personal failure, but gives a deeper explanation of the meaning of sin as a state or condition of existence. In Paul’s writings, sin is the translation of the Greek word, *hamartia*, which means “missing the mark.” (In ancient Greek literature before the time of Saint Paul, it could also mean a tragic flaw in character.) Paul writes at length about sin, saying that knowing what is good is insufficient for achieving what is good. In

the Letter to the Romans, Paul says that the commandments given to Moses by God are a monitor of sin, which alerts us to our failure, but does not have the power to overcome our failure. He further states that sin is something within the fabric of our character, and even within the fabric of existence:

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. (Romans 7:18-23)

For Catholic Christians, it is important not to react to the word “sin,” but to understand what it refers to. Sin is a state of existence, called “original sin,” which is understood as that tragic flaw of life into which we are born. Even our own behavior disappoints us, and our faulty thinking and actions in trying to control others for our own benefit. This leads us to our personal failing, which we often call “sin” – that even when we try to act with the best intentions, we sometimes fail because something in our character overcomes our intentions. The poetic story of Adam and Eve, in Genesis, describes just such a state. They try to advance themselves by their actions, only to be disappointed by their faulty choices.

Perhaps we react to the word “sin” because our religious teachers have emphasized the avoidance of sin, rather than the practice of virtue, and the grace of Christ which lifts us in that practice. We now have an opportunity to develop such an attitude.

How is Christianity similar to other religions in answering questions about human suffering, human failure and human freedom?

The concept of a tragic flaw in life itself is found in many religions. The ancient sages of India taught that we are born into *avidya*, a Sanskrit word meaning ignorance. They pointed out we seek happiness, only to be disappointed when depending upon anything or anyone to find it. We find peace by learning not to depend upon the pleasure of life, nor fearing its suffering. In Buddhist teaching, life is *maya*, another Sanskrit word that means illusion, and refers to the impermanent state of all things. When we try to find satisfaction from any situation, we will quickly discover that such satisfaction cannot be sustained. Thus life is not satisfying, and falls short of our expectations.

Some religious questions are basic to human thinking. References to the dissatisfaction with life are a key element to the religious quest. Despite our best efforts, life comes up short in providing lasting happiness and peace. Christianity has no advantage in asking these questions. It parallels other religions in its view that life is full of suffering, and that suffering is often

caused by human struggle. Yet, nature itself has two faces – one that is full of beauty and nourishment, and the other that leads to suffering and death.

Christianity has used much of the wisdom of the world to explain its own doctrines. It was born in the Jewish culture of Roman occupied Palestine, but began to use Greek philosophy to define itself. In 325, at the Council of Nicaea, the Christian Church developed a creed that utilized Greek philosophical terms to explain the meaning of Christ. In the Middle Ages, Saint Thomas Aquinas used Greek philosophy to develop his own thinking – a systematic theology that became the official standard for the Roman Catholic Church for centuries. Now Christian scholars are attempting to use other systems of thought to explain the teachings of Christianity.

While the questions are similar, the answers given by the Christian faith are different. Christianity does embrace specific traditions of conduct and prayer, but focuses upon the person of Jesus as its answer to the troubles of life. Saint Paul says it well:

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. (Romans 13:12-14)

Yet, Saint Paul also urged the use of the wisdom of the world in our pursuit of conforming our lives to Christ. He wrote: “And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.” (Philippians 4:8)

Where does love fit into our faith?

The most common reading for weddings in America comes from Saint Paul:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

In a way, this is the guidepost of the Christian life. To become one with Jesus is not to be the smartest person, nor to achieve anything of importance in society, but to pour out one's life in love. This is the example of Jesus, as he reflects the source of life itself.

Jesus called God "Our Father." Christians believe that the Father poured out his life into the universe through Jesus Christ, his Son – an act of perfect love. In Christ, we participate in this outpouring of love. This is the meaning of the conclusion of the Eucharistic prayer at Mass: **"Through him, and with him, and in him,** in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever."

In 1 John 4: 7-8, we read these words: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." This challenges us to move beyond identifying faith as conformity to rules, or simply an intellectual assent to truth.

Finally, love is the antidote for our anxiety about life. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18) Love is trust and hope for people of faith.

Chapter Two: The Coming of Jesus, the Christ (total 24 pages)

A. The experience of ancient Israel (3)

How did the experience of the people of ancient Israel contribute to our modern religious approach to faith?

The people of ancient Israel began their quest for God long before there was a unified Israel. Their traditions trace their roots to the time of Abraham – about 1700 years before Jesus. Their understandings of God began with a variety of experiences. For example, the ancestors of the Hebrew people worshipped other gods from the God of Abraham. But a specific deity was worshipped by Abraham, called El Elyon (“The Most High”) or El Shaddai (“The Almighty”).

The stories of Abraham, and God’s visitations to him, can be found in the Book of Genesis. These stories involved awe and reverence for God, God’s promises to Abraham to provide him with a nation of offspring, and miraculous stories of God’s providence for Abraham – such as blessing his older wife, Sara, with a child.

The story continues, in the Book of Exodus, through the generations after Abraham, and lead to the captivity of his descendents in Egypt. There, a young Moses was called by God to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. He does lead them from Egypt, and has an encounter with god on the way to the Promised Land – a territory that God gives to the Hebrew people for their homeland. Moses revealed a covenant made with God to the Hebrew people. He promises to remain faithful to them, and requires the same of them.

From there, the Hebrew Scriptures trace a history of kings and priests dedicated to God. Also chronicled are the failures of the Hebrew people, their kings and their priests. They were traditionally divided into 12 tribes. The identity of each specific tribe becomes muddled in the process of history. And the failures of the Jewish leaders are severely criticized by prophets, who are called by God to bring a message of repentance and reconciliation with God. Much of this message is not only devotion to the one God, but also to the cause of justice for the weak and marginalized of the nation – such as widows and orphans.

By the time of Jesus, there are two focal points of Jewish practice. One was the worship in the Jerusalem temple, and the other was the study and prayer in the local synagogue. The temple in Jerusalem was a unifying factor in Jewish life, and the local synagogue was also unifying, but allowed the local Jewish community to be formed in any location. This is how the Jewish people encountered God at the time of Jesus.

What do we know about the experience of God in the Jewish community at the time of Jesus? We can be assured of these factors:

- ❖ The Jewish experience of God was generally not speculative. Instead, it was historical. That is, it is based upon the remembrance of past generations' encounter with God, and the trust that God is still with the Jewish people, despite the troubles of any age. The writings of the Hebrew attest to this fact, by reminding the people of God's faithfulness in the past, rather than trying to give a philosophical explanation of the faith. This is affirmed to this day in the prayers of the Jewish rituals.

- ❖ The encounter with God was described differently in each era. While the accounts of Abraham say that he was even visited by God – in the company of three human visitors (Genesis 18) – God also came to Abraham through angels and voices that he heard. God came to others in dreams and voices throughout the Hebrew Scriptures of Genesis and Exodus.

- ❖ The Hebrew Scriptures say that God came to Moses through a mystical encounter on a mountain (Exodus 3). Moses became God's spokesman to the people, and the advocate of the people to God.
- ❖ In the time of the Prophets of Israel the encounters with God often came through mystical experiences and through symbols of nature and life. Thus, Isaiah had a mystical experience of God and the angels (Isaiah 6). But he also found the "Word of the Lord" through the events in the life of the Jewish king, such as the birth of a child (described in Isaiah 7). This even included the enemies of the Jewish nation, who became the instruments of God's plan (Jeremiah 1). Thus God is revealed in the events of history.

As Judaism developed over the centuries, four things emerge as important aspects:

- ❖ The observance of the Law seems to be more important than the specific interpretation of doctrines about the nature of God. This means that keeping the observances of the Law of Moses is the path of the Jewish faith.
- ❖ God remains outside the realm of human perception, but not outside human awareness. God is transcendent – beyond comprehension or description. However, God breaks into the realm of everyday human life, intervening in human history. Isaiah 55:8-9 expresses this transcendence:

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the LORD.*

*"As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

- ❖ God cannot be contained by the universe, but is not simply a force. God has a relationship with the earth, and humanity, caring about the creatures he created.

- ❖ God cannot be identified with any name or form, so Judaism prohibits the use of the name of God given in its Scriptures, and forbids the use of any image to represent God. This is for the sake of ensuring our perception of God as “the other” – outside human comprehension, but continually speaking to people.

The Jewish understanding of God has profoundly influenced the Western mind and culture. It has provided a sense of connection with the transcendent, so that we are not simply functioning within an impersonal universe, but also functioning within the care of One who created us and sustains us. At its best, this inspires us to care about the same universe that God cares about. At its worst, this legacy is misinterpreted as describing God like a big human in the sky – complete with prejudices and tantrums.

Modern Jewish thought continues the important dialogue which is the hallmark of the Jewish tradition. This dialogue is called *midrash*, and characterizes the Jewish answer to theology. It is the continuous conversation about God and the Jewish tradition. It does not end because it is the heart of Jewish spirituality – to end it would be very un-Jewish. It is vibrant and open to conversing with others. Indeed it converses with the opinions of the past, which are regarded with respect and valued for their authentic authority. An old joke about this beloved conversation is that wherever you find four rabbis, you will find five opinions.

The Jewish experience of God set the stage for the Christian experience of God. Its history formed the initial history of Christianity – the foundational story that is the setting for the life of Jesus, and the context of his life and teachings. The Church too, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, begins as a Jewish story, and expands beyond Judaism to the peoples of the Roman Empire (and quickly beyond).

B. *The evolution of the mystery of God (3)*

How has our Christian understanding of God changed from that of the people of ancient Israel? Are we still connected to their experience?

The people of Israel had a long tradition of expecting the liberation of Israel through the messiah. The messiah is the one who brings the presence of God to history and to the Jewish people – one “anointed” by God (in Greek, *Christos*). The followers of Jesus saw this identity in him. They said that he is the fulfillment of the Jewish tradition, and Jewish hopes. He would

also speak to the world, in the fulfillment of the Jewish scriptural verse, Isaiah 2:2, which proclaims:

*The mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.*

The majority of Jewish people in the land of Palestine (roughly the modern nation of Israel and the Palestinian territories), at the time of Jesus, did not follow Jesus as the messiah. But the popularity of Christianity was remarkable in the nations around the Mediterranean, and to the East – eventually even to India.

The principle difference between the traditional Jewish expectations of a messiah and the Christian understanding of Jesus is the divinity of Christ. Christians insisted on Jesus being the Son of God – coming from the Father, but also “one in substance” with the Father. For Christians, Jesus is God. This challenging interpretation of the life and role of Jesus introduced the Trinity as the central doctrine of Christian faith – setting it apart from the absolute transcendence of God, which Jews espoused.

While Jews believe that God is as close as our hearts or our breath, they find it hard to accept the Incarnation – that God became human in Jesus Christ. Christians believe that this Incarnation is also shared with all, so that we are transformed in the divinity of Christ. Jews have no difficulty accepting that every human life contains the presence of God, but they do find it difficult to believe that one individual could be the incarnate presence of God – truly human and truly divine.

This Christian understanding of Jesus Christ is captured in the Gospel of John. Here Jesus does not say, “I teach the way, the truth and the life.” Instead, he says, “I **am** the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) Thus Christians are urged by Saint Paul to “put on the Lord Jesus” (Romans 13:14), and Paul further states, “I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20) Catholic Christians celebrate this Incarnational understanding of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, where they are joined to his life, death and resurrection, and receive consecrated bread and wine – believing that these elements are now fully and completely Christ: his body, blood, soul and divinity.

What is revelation, and does it mean that God is too far above us to encounter as a normal part of life?

The teaching on revelation should begin with the verse from Colossians 1:24-27.

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This passage is a profound teaching on the meaning of revelation. The meaning of revelation is not simply that religious doctrines are revealed from outside the realms of the universe. Instead, the meaning of revelation comes from the heart of the experience of life – the heart of the universe. It arises from the mystery of our own suffering because we search with confusion for an answer to the pain we experience as human beings and as creatures of the universe.

Second, it is something that we do not achieve because the revelation of the answer to our suffering is hidden from even the most learned people. It is a mystery hidden in every age and generation but revealed by God – not from outside the universe, but within human life itself – culminating in the life of Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God.

Revelation began with the story of the earth and the ancient Hebrew people. In their history we find the revelation that the universe is not simply a cold reality, but imbued with the presence of God, who is in relationship with all he created, and in dialogue with his people. He is present with them. This culminates in one life – the life of Jesus, who is the fullness of revelation, but then transforms all else in fulfillment of Jesus' words in John 12:32, "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."

Revelation is not simply a verbal message from God, but is the Word of God (Logos) made flesh – Jesus Christ. It is not simply a set of teachings, but rather a transformation in the life of God. It is chronicled in the sacred Scriptures – called the Word of God, but revelation is lived in the life of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Do non-Christians know God? If so, how does revelation change anything for them?

God is present at all times and in all places – in every heart. Jesus acknowledged this during his ministry. For example, he spoke with a Roman centurion, who asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus praised the centurion's faith – even though the centurion was of another religion and culture. (Matthew 8:5-13) Jesus also healed a Syro-Phoenician woman (who lived in ancient Palestine, but was not Jewish):

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard

about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. (Mk. 7:24-30)

We cannot deny that God speaks to every human being. God is love – a love much greater than we can imagine. 1 John 3:20 tells us, "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything." God is beyond our dualistic categories of right and wrong, good and bad, for God makes all things move toward the good. This is what we are called to believe every day, and with every prayer. (Romans 8:28)

What then is the purpose of Christian faith? Why do we preach to those who are not yet Christian? We preach because we are commanded to do so – by Jesus after his resurrection, as he was returning to the Father:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:17-20)

We preach because it is good news – news of acceptance and liberation, reconciliation and purpose, love and joy. If this is not the heart of the message we preach, then it is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the heart of this message is the teaching of the cross and resurrection. This is the message that our suffering is to be united to the suffering of Jesus. And his promise is that the suffering will be transformed into new life, by his resurrection. This is the mystery hidden in our hearts, and revealed by Jesus to the world. It is revealed to each heart by the Holy Spirit. This Gospel is within us, but unknown to us until we receive the gift of faith.

There are many great religions in the world. They cannot be categorized as wrong, for they all contain wisdom – some have deeper wisdom than others. Saint Paul reminds us to find wisdom wherever it can be found: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

If we say that they are wrong and Christianity is right, we short-change Christianity. We make it into a lesson to be learned – like the right answer in algebra. Christian faith is "right" because it fulfills the desire for liberation and peace that is found in every religion. It is not opposed to other religions. Instead, Christian faith is like finding a soul partner: we encounter many who are beautiful, but one fulfills our hearts completely.

This is not a matter of right or wrong, but of profound identity. Our deepest identity is Christ. We keep this in mind, so that we are not trying to convince people to become Christians, but are sharing our own stories of finding our deepest identity. Christian faith is a matter of

attraction, not persuasion. Again, Saint Paul reminds us: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.” (1 Corinthians 2:4)

Faith is a gift, given in the heart, witnessed and developed in the community of faith, and nourished through the sacraments and personal devotion to God. It is in Christ, and through Christ and with Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit.

C. The historical setting of the life of Jesus (4)

Jesus was a Jew. What were the traditions that formed his expression of the Gospel?

This is an important question because it points to one of the principles that guide the Catholic understanding of the faith. This is an historical approach to the expression of the faith – especially as chronicled in the documents of each age. The sacred Scriptures express the Word of God, but are written in the language of their day, with all the historical influences of each era. Here were some of the historical factors at the time of Jesus, which influenced the writers of the New Testament

- ❖ Men and women were in fixed roles. Men were completely dominant, and women were given the tasks of the home. Even women who were married to men of power had to observe limitations on their own roles – exhibiting covert power through influence on family members and friends. Poor women relied on the generosity of family or could only beg for assistance. Sometimes women were prostitutes, and were thus marginalized from all others in society. Women had few rights, and could be punished severely for violating the strictures of society. For example, a woman could be stoned to death for adultery.

When a man divorced a woman, she was only able to return to financial stability through another marriage. An example of this is seen in John 4, when Jesus speaks to the woman at a well in the district of Samaria. He says to her that she has been married five times, and is living with a man who is not her husband. Such a woman would be marginalized by others in the society. This is evidenced in the story by her coming to the well in the heat of the day, while it was a custom for women to go to the well in the morning to gather water for the day's work.

- ❖ The faith and the family were at the heart of life for the Jews in ancient Palestine. Jewish people prayed daily at fixed times, and while performing various daily tasks. The extended family was very important – so much the case that there is not a clear distinction between “cousin” and “brethren.” The family is the social unit in times of trouble or need, since there is no social safety net; and when a member of the family is disgraced or honored, the entire family joins in the results. The family could often be punished for the wrongdoing of one member.

Added to this was the tight identification with one’s ethnic and religious group. Those outside the group were untrusted or hated. For example, Samaritans were Jews of another denomination. Jews and Samaritans were so divided that they would not even talk to one another. The woman at the well in Samaria (chapter 4) was surprised that Jesus spoke to her because she was a Samaritan. (She was also a woman, and thus there were two prohibitions that Jesus violated – since an unrelated young rabbi would not be allowed to speak with her.)

- ❖ Farming and fishing were two principle occupations of Jesus’ time. This is evident in the parables of Jesus, who compares the Kingdom of God to experiences of farmers and fishermen (see Matthew 13). In the stories of Jesus’ birth shepherds play a significant role, as they do in Matthew 25, when Jesus gives another parable (describing God’s judgment based upon our response to those in need) in terms of separating sheep and goats. There are other occupations as well – such as trades people – and Jesus himself was a carpenter.
- ❖ The Roman occupation of ancient Palestine was an ever present irritation to the population of the area. The Jewish authorities were under the rule of the Romans. They could exercise their religious faith, as long as they observed Rome as the superior civil authority. This gave rise to political intrigue and a number of rebel groups which aimed at overthrowing the rule of the Roman Empire. Ultimately, it was a Roman military governor – Pontius Pilate - who gave the order for Jesus’ execution.

It is important to read all the material of the New Testament in the light of the domination of the Romans. For Jews, the Romans were the corrupt society with values

contrary to those of the Jewish people. They had other gods and practiced a morality that included a looser understanding of sexual behavior. This led to conflicts with the Romans for many years.

- ❖ The Greek world too was a challenge for the Jewish people. The term, “the Greeks” eventually came to mean those who were not Jewish. The Greek culture permeated the Eastern Mediterranean, and Greek was a common language of trade. (The New Testament was written in Greek, and one Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures became the standard – the Septuagint.) When non-Jewish people became interested in becoming Christians, it presented a problem for the Jewish Christians. Many Jewish Christians wanted the non-Jews to adopt the religious practices of Judaism, such as circumcision of men and dietary laws. This became a great controversy in the early Church.

Additionally, the other religions and philosophies of the region were a challenge to the Christian population. Many Christians tended to tolerate local customs which honored the gods of the area. Others objected to this toleration. In the end, the Church became fractured over the various approaches to Christianity, but the Catholic faith evolved as the standard – though this took many centuries.

- ❖ The worldview of ancient Palestine was one of conflict with the surrounding culture. The Jewish people always saw their call from God in terms of distinction of purpose and character. They were a prophetic voice to the world of the sovereignty of God. This was expressed in the Psalms, such as this passage from Psalm 2: 1-6.

*Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,
“Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”*

*The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*

*“I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain.”*

- ❖ The story is the medium of truth in ancient Israel, and this carried over to the time of Jesus in Roman occupied Palestine. This approach to truth began in the history of the Hebrew people, with the great story of Moses and the journey of the Hebrews to the Promised Land of Israel. As generations continued in Israel, each recalled the story of this liberation, as well as the more ancient stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from the Book of Genesis.

These stories tell of the encounter with God by a great leader, the call of the people to a covenant with God, and God’s faithfulness to the people. They are stories of how the people would drift from remembrance of their relationship with God, and how God would call them back. They include stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Cain and Able. They are stories of war and enslavement, trouble and doubt, redemption and peace. Both the darkness and light of the journey are told in these stories – reflecting the darkness and light of the human story.

For the Jewish people, the truth was not something to be found by philosophical systems of thought, but by recalling their own history. In looking at their history, they found the meaning of struggle, faithfulness and peace. These were discovered when they returned to the covenant with God – their primary identity as a people. The covenant has been their truth, and their shelter in all the circumstances of life.

D. The teaching of Jesus (4)

What is the heart of the message of Jesus?

The heart of the message of Jesus is a call to that relationship with God. However, with Jesus, the call is found in the present moment, and the identity of those called does not depend upon ethnic or religious affiliation. Anyone can encounter God, and all are called to do so. Jesus calls this encounter “The Kingdom of God.” [In Matthew’s gospel, this is the Kingdom of Heaven because of the special reverence of the Jewish people for the name of God.] Jesus says these things about the Kingdom:

- ❖ *Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21)*

This is also translated as "...the Kingdom of God is within you." Thus, the Kingdom of God does not happen in calendar time or geographical place, but in our everyday lives – it is present to us in each moment, if we are aware.

- ❖ *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6: 31-34)*

We are called to seek the Kingdom as the entry into every moment. Too often we see professional and family pursuits as separate from religious faith. Jesus calls us to seek this sense of faith as the immediate path for every other need in life.

- ❖ In Matthew 13, Jesus compares the Kingdom to a farmer who sows seeds many kinds of soil. Some seed sprouts in abundance and some do not. This is only sorted out at the harvest. He compares the Kingdom to a mustard seed, which is tiny, but grows into a huge plant. He compares the Kingdom to a treasure discovered in a field, for which all else is sold to purchase that field. He makes the same comparison of an expensive pearl, for which the one who makes the discovery sells all possessions to buy the pearl. And he compares the Kingdom to a fishing net that catches many kinds of fish – some which can be used, and some which must be thrown back into the sea. All these comparisons speak of the Kingdom as the ultimate value.
- ❖ In the following passage, Jesus criticizes the rigidity of the religious authorities of his day, saying that their religious authority did not guarantee them an entrance into the Kingdom of God:

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. (Matthew 21:28-31)

- ❖ In Matthew 5:3, Jesus identifies the Kingdom of God with the poor and marginalized: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

- ❖ Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God, but also embodied the Kingdom. When Pontius Pilate asked about this kingdom, Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) His followers came to understand this identification of the Kingdom of God with the person of Jesus, especially in his giving of himself in the Eucharist, at his last supper with his disciples:

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:19-20)

Is the message of the Church the same as the message of Jesus?

The heart of the message of Jesus is the message of the Church. This is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. However, the Church holds to the relational belief that the Kingdom of God is not found through philosophical speculation or simple obedience to the Law, but rather by identification with Jesus Christ. We are called by the prayer of Jesus for his disciples, before his death:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

This oneness with Christ – is proclaimed at the end of the Eucharistic prayer: “Through him and with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father,

forever and ever.” This prayer teaches us the meaning of Christian faith: We are in Christ, and Christ is in us. We again learn this from the act of taking Holy Communion, when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. We receive the whole Christ, and Christ receives each of us. And finally, all are made one in Christ, in fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus that was just quoted above.

In this meditation, Saint Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) gives another perspective on this very understanding of our identity in Christ:

*Christ has no body now on earth , but yours,
No hands but yours,
No feet but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ’s compassion to the world;
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now. Amen.*

Unfortunately, some members of the Church do not realize that this identification with Christ is the heart of the Gospel, the proclamation of the Church. Sometimes these members are also leaders of the Church. They may, therefore, become legalistic in their approach to faith, or too centered on obedience to the Church’s laws as the core value of the Christian life. They may become sidetracked by money or power, like leaders in any institution. This may scandalize other people in the Church, and threaten their faith.

It is good to remember that the Holy Spirit purifies the Church from time to time. Such purification comes through reform movements, like the Franciscan movement in the early 13th century. Even the troubles of the Protestant Reformation created reform efforts within the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant Churches also experience reform efforts from time to time.

The Church often becomes controlled by powerful groups that seek to have it serve a political agenda, often for the suppression of vocal minorities. This is when the Church is in need of reform, so that it realizes its mission is again: to clothe itself with Christ, and speak the Gospel in his holy name. In this way, the message of the Church is the same as the message of Christ, in fulfillment of Jesus words in Luke 10:16, “Whoever hears you hears me.”

Why is Jesus the center of the Gospel?

Saint Augustine of Hippo struggled with conversion to Christianity in the 4th century. He was a philosopher who tried to understand Christianity from the viewpoint of a system of beliefs – religious principles that would guide one’s life. This had been his experience with previous belief systems. He came to realize that Christian faith is not fulfilled through right principles,

but through taking on the identity of Christ – we share the very divinity of Christ through grace. This is called deification or divinization in the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Christianity.

We now face the same issue of the meaning of Christianity. While correct doctrine is very important, it is insufficient for true Christian faith. Faith is more than right thinking about the doctrines of the Church. It is about a mystical encounter with the Living Christ, which transforms us to the depths of our identity. This is best understood in the act of receiving Holy Communion, when we partake in the Body and Blood of Christ. We are made one with Christ, and thus one with each other.

Some people would like to make Christ into a super teacher, giving a systematic set of beliefs and principles for life. This is not the image of Christ found in the gospels. Jesus has no systematic philosophy to teach. He teaches the immediate encounter with God in the proclamation of the Kingdom. We find the Kingdom of God primarily in the person of Jesus Christ. Several great spiritual writers, such as Saint Catherine of Siena and Blessed Henry Suso address the need for a second conversion. Father Louis Lallemont wrote of this in the early 17th century, identifying this as a conversion to the person of Jesus – beyond simply conforming to a set of beliefs and behaviors expounded by the Church. While this is often considered the realm of Christian mystics, it really should be understood as the norm for all Christians. Everyone is called to encounter Christ and take on the identity of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). We are to put on the mind of Christ, and become his presence in the world.

In John 15:4-5, Jesus gives a great teaching about the nature, and the meaning, of Christian faith:

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus teaches, in the same chapter, that we are to love one another with his love:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. (John 15:9-12)

These verses from the Gospel of John demonstrate the unique call of Christian faith: to take on the Lord Jesus as our own identity. Thus, we understand Jesus as “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Jesus Christ is the message of Christianity. This is confirmed in the sacramental life,

which involves the words of prayer and creed, but centers on a transformation in Christ that exceeds any description.

E. The miracles and healings of Jesus (3)

Are the miracles and healings of Jesus meant to show us that he is God?

Catholic faith has always involved the whole person, not simply the assent to doctrinal statements. It involves sacraments in which water is poured (e.g. Baptism), holy oil is used for anointing (e.g. Confirmation and Ordination), and bread and wine are consecrated (at the Eucharist). Catholic practice involves such bodily things as the gestures of genuflecting, making the sign of the cross, fasting, and receiving Holy Communion. All this reflects the wholeness of the Gospel, and can be seen in the healings and miracles of Jesus.

Jesus did not perform miracles to prove that he is divine. The reason for his healings and miracles was to minister to people, body and soul. The miracles and healings are just as much the revelation of the Kingdom of God as his teaching. The miracles and healings teach the nature of the Kingdom, and are an essential part of the Gospel – the proclamation of the Good News of God’s presence and power. Yet, we must also read the passages that describe these miraculous events with eyes of discernment. We can see various levels of meaning in these passages

For example, in this particular passage of the Gospel of John (John 6:1-15), the writer’s intentions are at many levels:

- ❖ The miracle of the multiplication of fish and bread (John 6:1-15) was to feed the hungry. There is concern for the people and compassion for their hunger.
- ❖ The passage is also an image of the Kingdom of God, in which every tear is wiped away and every hunger is fulfilled. This is the hope that we long for when we are all united with Jesus, and “God is all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:28)
- ❖ The passage also recalls images of the Eucharist, in which bread is also transformed, as well as wine. The Eucharist is a return to the past, in which Jesus commands us to remember him, and his sacrifice, with the bread of life and cup of salvation (the Body and Blood of Christ). Yet it is also a time to anticipate the coming of the Kingdom in its

fullness. (Remember the acclamation after the consecration at Mass: “When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory!”)

It is important to see these levels in every passage of the gospels that describes a miracle. For example:

- ❖ In John 9, Jesus heals a man who had been blind from birth. This is an act of compassion and reveals Jesus’ power to heal, as the Son of God. Yet the passage also refers to the spiritual blindness of his critics, who speak against Jesus despite his wisdom and power to heal. On a literal level, we examine the text that speaks of blindness and healing. On another level, we compare the man born blind to the spiritual blindness of the religious authorities – who refuse to be healed of their blindness.
- ❖ In Mark 4:35-41, we read of Jesus calming the storm at sea. His disciples are terrified by the storming, for they are in a boat being tossed by the waves. Jesus awakens from sleep and calms the storm. In the literal reading of this passage, Jesus manifests power over nature – the power of God. Yet, reading this passage at another level allows us to understand the disciples of Jesus in a boat to symbolize the Church. Sometimes the Church is like a boat being tossed about by the waves (as it was in the early days of Christianity, under many persecutions). Jesus seems absent or asleep under such times of trouble for the Church – yet he is ever present in the boat of the Church. We trust that he will calm every storm.
- ❖ In Matthew 8:5-13, Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion. At one level, this reveals Jesus’ power over disease, as the Son of God. Still, at another level, we can understand the passage as affirming the faith of anyone who believes. In Jesus’ time and culture, the Romans were considered morally loose and spiritually wrong – pagans who were violating the faith of the Jewish people. Yet, Jesus praises the faith of a Roman soldier as stronger than the faith of many of his own Jewish people. The passage affirms the faith of anyone who trusts in Jesus, and calls upon his saving power.

How do the miracles and healings of Jesus relate to his teachings?

In Chapters 5-7 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are blessings upon the poor, lowly and marginalized people of society – the poor, the mourning, the peacemakers, those who seek justice, etc. His Gospel is especially powerful, not for the mighty and powerful of the land, but especially for the powerless. Jesus also performs miracles and heals the sick – who are powerless against disease, against economic downturns, and against the ravages of war and occupation. He has come to heal at every level.

In the gospels, Jesus heals families and communities by his lessons on forgiveness and compassion (such as the Good Samaritan of Luke 10:29-37). He also heals bodies and souls. He teaches on the forgiveness of sins, but restores health to a paralytic by pronouncing his sins as forgiven (Mark 2:1-5). The message of Jesus is restoration of health – for the individual and society, as well as health of body, mind and heart.

The miracles of Jesus are not just “extras added to the Gospel.” They are the Gospel – the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus heals the spiritual and physical suffering of the people who come to him in hope and trust. Yet he also participates fully in human suffering. He is emotionally overwhelmed on the night before he dies, and suffers brutal torture on the cross. His resurrection is the transformation of that suffering – which, in turn, transforms our own suffering into the abundance of life in the Kingdom of God.

The greatest healing of Jesus is found in the story of the raising of Lazarus from death, in John 11. In verse after verse of this passage, Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God – and his identification with the Kingdom. If we carefully read this chapter of the Gospel of John, we will find the following:

- ❖ Jesus is very human in this passage. He risks his life to return to Jerusalem for his friends: Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He weeps at the graveside of Lazarus. These elements of the passage are meant to speak to the reader about Jesus’ identification with humanity. He is a brother human, knowing the human condition and the sorrow of life.

- ❖ Yet the divinity of Jesus is revealed in this passage as well. We often think of Martha as the busy sister who bustles around the house serving guests; while Mary is one who listens attentively to his teaching (Luke 10:38-42). Yet, John’s gospel gives this exchange between Martha and Jesus (John 11:20-27):

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Martha is the one who fully proclaims Jesus’ identity. She is the model of discipleship – trusting Jesus even in the face of the death of her brother.

- ❖ The whole miracle passage is a great reminder of Jesus’ own death and resurrection. As he overcomes death in the story of Lazarus, he also overcomes death in his own life. “By the will of the Father, and the work of the Holy Spirit,” [Communion prayer at Mass] Jesus restores his own life and the life of everyone who becomes his follower.

F. *The death and resurrection of Jesus (4)*

Did the early Church see a special significance in the death and resurrection of Jesus?

From the beginning of Christianity, the Church and its writers have understood the death and resurrection of Jesus to be more than a miracle proving his divinity. For the early Church, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the focal point of his ministry. It is the revelation of the meaning and direction of existence itself. John 1:1-4 is a good beginning for the interpretation of the death and resurrection of Jesus:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind.

This passage tells of the Incarnation – God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ. The passage is fulfilled in verse 14: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Thus, in Christ, God is united with humanity in all its pain and suffering, joy and hope. In the death of Jesus, the pain and suffering are overcome, and the hope is fulfilled in the joy of the resurrection. This is the significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: uniting all creation in Christ to overcome death and reconcile all in God. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria sums it up in this quote: “He became what we are so that he might make us what he is.”

It is important to see the death and resurrection of Jesus in the context of his whole life and ministry. From the start, in the stories of Jesus’ infancy, we read of a human being enduring

suffering and social strife. (He was born in a manger and persecuted by the authorities, according to the stories in Matthew's and Luke's gospels.) Jesus grows into a young man who is called to preach the coming of the Kingdom. Yet, his disciples soon realize that he is more than just a prophet: he is the expected Messiah and the Son of God. Still, they are confused about this identity, since he ultimately suffers and dies on the cross. The resurrection of Jesus reveals that his suffering and death are part of the great work of salvation. [An example of this confusion and realization can be found in the story of the disciples walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Though they do not recognize him, the risen Jesus Christ explains: "Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" They still do not understand fully until they awaken to his presence "at the breaking of the bread" that evening. Then he is suddenly gone. Like the disciples of Emmaus, the early Church has a glimpse of Christ and his significance in sharing the Eucharist. The Eucharist reveals more about Christ and his salvation than any speculation. This is the early sacramental proclamation of the Gospel.

The original Christian community made a great spiritual journey from interpreting Jesus as the Jewish Messiah to understanding the meaning of Christ – his life, death and resurrection – in terms of the entire universe:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

How does his death and resurrection affect us?

With time, the followers of Jesus' life, death and resurrection are cosmic. His life affects all lives, and indeed all creation. This is not simply a divine forgiveness of sin. It is a renewal of all creation. All that is headed toward death is now renewed, and will be revealed as such in the course of time:

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his

feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

The death and resurrection of Jesus affects us in many ways. First, we are given hope about our suffering and death. We are not in a meaningless universe that is simply caught up in the endless cycle of birth and death. Our own lives have meaning because of the life of Jesus – fulfilled in his death and resurrection. We are moving toward God, even when we suffer. Saint Paul even urges us to intentionally unite our suffering to that of Jesus, so that we also join in this transformation of the universe which is brought about by his resurrection:

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:24-27)

Second, the death and resurrection unites all humanity as one, so that we are a new people together in Christ. This allows us to form an identity that is not based upon gender, ethnicity or geography. It is said very well in these quotes from 1 Peter:

As you come to him, the living Stone —rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2: 4-5)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2: 9-10)

The meaning and purpose of Jesus is the revelation that all is moving toward God. Each of us and all of us are part of that movement from death to life in God. It is interesting that science tells us that we are in a developmental change, called evolution. While this is not the same as Christian belief, it parallels Christianity in understanding that all is in flux. For those who believe in Christ, this is a transformation from suffering which ends in death, to life which is beyond all that we can imagine:

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Does Jesus save us from sin?

Sin is a term that gives some people shudders. Some despise the term because it is loaded with emotional baggage – often from troubling religious experiences in childhood. Yet “sin” is a word used by many religions. It means different things to different religious traditions, and to each individual.

The greatest confusion about sin comes from not examining its use in the Christian tradition, beginning with the New Testament. Saint Paul uses the Greek word *hamartia*, which we translate as “sin.” For Paul, the word means “missing the mark.” This is like shooting the arrow, but seeing that it falls short of the target. He says that we are all in a condition of falling short of the target – it is the condition of human life.

Other religions give similar commentary about human life. Buddhists say that life is *dukkha* – literally meaning that life is “out of joint.” For Buddhists, life is somehow always unsatisfying, incomplete and stressful. Life is suffering caused by the lack of fulfillment of our goals. For Hindu devotees, life is illusory because it is unstable – it is not permanent. What seems to be fixed is an illusion in constant flux.

The Christian teaching of original sin reflects this condition of trouble at the heart of human life. Original sin means that life is flawed, despite our intentions and efforts. When people ask how a child can “have original sin,” they are thinking of personal faults. But the teaching of original sin is that each child is born into this flawed experience of life. Personal sin is a participation in the flaw and illusory state of life. Personal sin is an attempt to control life, despite the harm it does to others and ourselves. Saint Paul’s words are a good description of this human condition called sin:

I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Romans 7: 18-20)

Jesus does save us from sin, just as he saves us from death. The life, death and resurrection of Christ transform this condition of sin in four ways:

1. Jesus is the one through whom the clear light of God shines. This light of truth is the most basic principle of existence: life is an outpouring of life and goodness that will not be stopped by death. Jesus so clearly revealed this that even his initial followers called him divine: the Son of God. Yet, he is not a divine apparition, different from the rest of humanity. Instead, he is truly human and truly divine. Thus, we who embrace him as savior come to share his divinity, and find that same clear light of God in ourselves (called *theosis* or “divinization”). Faith in Christ reveals the truth of that light to us.
2. His life and teaching (and selfless death) have opened our hearts to forgiveness and compassion. We don’t need to struggle in desperation, for his death and resurrection has given us hope, and revealed the nature of life itself as a process of transformation and a journey into God. Humanity was unaware of this Gospel until it was revealed in Christ (Colossians 1:26-27). Jesus teaches his followers not to struggle against evil as if it has the last word (Matthew 5:38-42). Even violence and death are not the last word, for God is the reconciliation of all injustice and misfortune (Matthew 5:3-12).
3. The Church itself is the community of reconciliation – the Body of Christ. It celebrates the equanimity of life in the Eucharist, where all come to the table to receive the same Christ – regardless of merit or status. We proclaim this reconciliation as central to the Eucharist, with the words: “This is my body which will be given for you...This is the cup of my blood...which will be shed for the forgiveness of sin...” The word forgiveness is but one word for reconciliation or healing. In the Eastern Orthodox liturgy the phrase used instead of “the forgiveness of sin” is “the remission of sin.” Perhaps this is a more helpful translation because it reflects the dissolution of all aspects of the realm of sin, and those personal faults that come from living according to the illusory realm of sin.
4. Through his death, Jesus rose beyond the confines of his historic life –beyond space and time, and beyond the duality of “self” and “other.” (This disconnection between “self” and “other” is the opposite of what we call “communion.”) Thus, we say that we are “in Christ” and that Christ dwells in us. We are called to adjust our vision. If we continue to understand “sin” as referring primarily to individual faults, then we will seek a remedy that retains our individualistic self as “forgiven.” This is not a helpful view. Redemption is dying to this limited “self” (imitating the self-giving of Jesus) and embracing the identity of the resurrected Christ. This is what we do at the Eucharist. “One Bread, One

Body, One Lord of All, One cup of blessing...,” proclaims this one identity with Christ, who has overcome the separation called “sin” and its final alienation which is “death.”

Jesus saves us from “sin” because sin involves the limited realm of dissatisfaction and disappointment, a self-seeking behavior that tries to hold on to what can never satisfy. To become one with Christ is to leave behind the identification with the separate self: *“I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.”* (Galatians 2:19-20)

The English Catholic writer, G.K. Chesterton, cleverly said that original sin is the only Church doctrine for which we have empirical evidence. His point was that selfishness and maliciousness seem ever present, despite our efforts. (Even young children manifest selfish behavior.) For Catholics, “original sin” is a defect in the human character – a flaw that damages the reflection of God in every human being, the *imago dei*. Jesus Christ restores that image by his life, death and resurrection. Corinthians 5:17 reminds us: “Therefore, anyone who is in Christ is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

G. The revelation of the Trinity, the core of Catholic faith (3)

How do the life, death and resurrection of Jesus reveal the Trinity?

Jesus’ experience of God is Trinitarian. This is how we come to our understanding of God. This is evident through specific passages from the gospels:

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9)

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (John 1:18)

Jesus’ disciples discovered a profound depth in him, and realized his divinity. Yet, they could not reconcile his divinity with their traditional Jewish faith. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they came to the knowledge of the Holy Trinity. Jesus would often speak of the Father, yet also manifested his divine identity. The disciples came to affirm that he is truly man, and truly God. Jesus would also speak of sending another Advocate – the one who would console and guide the followers of Jesus:

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father —the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. (John 15:26)

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” (John 16: 13-15)

Jesus’ experience of the Father, and his promise to send the Holy Spirit, give us an insight into the life of the Trinity – the life of God. That life is hidden, and yet it is ever-present in the very fabric of the universe. The Trinitarian image of God is clouded in mystery: Three and One, Three and One – on and on we attempt to grasp the mystery of God. How can this be, multiplicity and absolute unity? As Trinity, the image seems abstract. As Father-Son-Holy Spirit, the images seem relational and dynamic. The profound truth is that God is more an encounter, for our own existence is part of the existence of God.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 28: 19 are: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” These are surely words of the early Church – the commission of Jesus made into an iconic instruction for those who follow Christ. It is a commission to bring the encounter – the Trinitarian experience of Jesus – to the world.

The Trinity is hard to understand, so is it really important for the Christian faith?

Saint Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are made for you, O God. They shall not rest until they rest in you.” He was convinced that nothing could satisfy the human heart except the quest for God, and the discovery of God in Jesus Christ. This was his own experience. In the process of a philosophical quest for God, Augustine realized that he needed to encounter God – not just satisfy his mind with philosophical propositions about God. The final point of Augustine’s search for God was to realize that the experience of Jesus could be his own – a Trinitarian experience of Father-Son-Holy Spirit. This was fulfilled in his conversion, in which he read the verse from Romans 13:14, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ...” It is in this moment that the meaning of the Trinity was revealed to Saint Augustine – not in ideas about God, but in the experience of Jesus Christ. Augustine saw that conversion focused on the Christ experience.

If we rely on a fixed and traditional image of God beyond the universe, or even an image of God in the heart, we will be ultimately dissatisfied. God cannot be limited to transcendence or immanence – to being “out there” or “in here.” The Trinity teaches us that God is beyond our grasp, yet closer than our very selves. God cannot be defined, yet can be known in the self – we can “know God even as we are known by God.” (1 Corinthians 3:12) This is not fully

possible in this earthly life, but we can experience the life of God by abiding in Christ, and through the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit.

This is why the Holy Trinity is at the heart of Christian faith. It is the way we believe in God. God is not an old man in the sky, but God is also not some force in the universe. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that God is beyond these categories. In the writings of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite we read that “God is all things in everything, and nothing in anything.” What this means is that God is beyond our categories. God is encountered, yet we can describe this encounter as Trinity, for that is the experience of Jesus. His life and teaching give us this understanding of God. His grace gives us this very experience of Trinity – his own experience.

This is so profound that it cannot simply be captured in the words of doctrine, but must be found in the experience of the sacraments. In these sacred mysteries, we find the encounter with God that is Jesus’ experience of God. We are “in Christ” through these sacraments, and we affirm the experience through our creeds and daily life of service and devotion. Thus, the sacramental life is extended into our daily lives. We live “in Christ,” and this is life in the Trinity. We celebrate this at Mass in the prayer before Holy Communion, when we pray “Lord Jesus Christ, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, your death brought life to the world. By your Holy Body and Blood, free me from all my sins and from every evil, keep me faithful to your teaching, and never let me be parted from you.”

What do the gospels and the other New Testament writings reveal about the Father? The Son? The Holy Spirit? The unity of the Trinity?

The Gospel of John begins with well-known words of the New Testament:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

This passage tells us much of our understanding of the Trinity. We understand that the Word (Logos) was God, and proceeded from God– we express this as the Son proceeding from the Father, but equal to the Father. Thus the Father is the Source of all, but the Son was not created by the Father, yet proceeded from the Father. While this is technical language, it is important, for it tells us about our understanding of God.

All things were made in and through the Word. Later, in the passage we read, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) This tells us of the

“Incarnation” of the Son – the Son became human in Jesus Christ. This is important because it is the Son who is incarnated, not the Father or Holy Spirit.

1 John 2, we are told that we “have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” We are also told that we have another advocate, in John 14:16, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth.” Jesus is seen as an advocate before the Father, but the Spirit is called “the Comforter.” This is advocacy that moves us toward the Father, the Source of our being. This is better understood by examining the words of Saint Paul:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:22-23)

Later, in the same chapter (Romans 8:26-27), we read:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

What we realize through such passages is that the work of the Spirit is developmental – an energy of movement. The dynamism of the Holy Spirit seems to move the entirety of Creation – and also the Church, the People of God – into the future, a journey into God.

In 2 Corinthians 13:14, we read a phrase that is often used as the first greeting at Mass. It is a teaching of the unity of the Trinity, yet gives us an insight into the roles of each Person of the Trinity: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.” In this phrase we see the outpouring of love by the Father. It is this love that is the Source of our being. The incarnation of that love is in Jesus Christ, who was sent for our redemption – that we might not feel an alienation from our lives, but find ourselves in God. We are filled with that love by the Holy Spirit – in a “communion” of love.

This quote from 2 Corinthians can be interpreted as an interesting answer to a basic question of human life. That question was spoken very well by Albert Einstein, when he was asked, “What is the basic question of the universe?” Einstein answered, “Is it friendly?” Is life based upon benevolence or is it indifferent to our hopes? The Christian answer is that life itself is built upon the love of God – the God who cannot be seen, but is closer than our very thoughts. We recall the words of Meister Eckhart (14th century): “Between God and me there is no between.”

In Christian spirituality, the Trinity speaks a profound truth: we are a reflection of God, who is a “communion of persons.” We are called by Christian faith to live in relationship to “persons.” People are not things, just as God is not just an impersonal force. God is in relationship. We are in relationship with all we meet. The lesson is here spoken well, not by a Christian, but by a cousin in the faith – a Jew. Martin Buber asked us to have an “I-Thou” relationship with the world, and not an “I-It” relationship that makes people into objects. This is a modern echo of the teaching of Jesus – by a prophetic voice from the faith that gave us Jesus.²

Chapter Three: The Early Church and the Gospel (total 18 pages)

A. The Acts of the Apostles (4)

What does the Acts of the Apostles show us about the early Church?

The structure of the Church in the Acts of the Apostles shows that there was a division of roles. The apostles of Jesus were seen as the teachers and leaders of the community. Their authority came from being chosen by Jesus as the Twelve Apostles. In the first chapter of Acts, the process is described for adding new apostles to their number. The gathering of about 120 disciples nominated two individuals to replace Judas, and then entered a time of prayer. Then the two nominees drew lots, and one was chosen. In chapter 6, we find a parallel process for the choice of deacons, who were nominated by the community, and presented to the apostles for prayer and the “laying on of hands.” Deacons had the specific ministry of food distribution, presumably to widows of the community. The apostles concentrated on preaching and teaching. This two part process of nomination by the community and “the laying on of hands” by the apostles seems standard for the Church of Acts.

This division of roles is affirmed by the writings of Saint Paul (Ephesians 4:11-13):

Christ himself gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

² *I and Thou*, Martin Buber, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937.

This is confirmed by Titus 1: 5-9, where Paul also outlines the qualities of a bishop:

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Acts also refers to the disciples of Paul, who were very protective of him. In Acts 14: 23, we read about his care (along with Barnabas) for the Christian communities he founded, “In each church they installed presbyters and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith.”

The roles of bishop and presbyter are not clearly differentiated in Acts of the Apostles. This will be seen in the writings of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, in the early 2nd century.

Does Acts of the Apostles define the meaning of Catholic faith?

The Acts of the Apostles and the rest of the New Testament are the sacred foundation to the Catholic Christian tradition. The seeds of all Catholic doctrine and celebration are in the New Testament, and foreshadowed in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, we must be cautious not to believe that the Bible has produced the Church. Rather, the bible is the sacred writing of the Church, and foundational to the Catholic tradition.

For example, we do not celebrate the Eucharist because we read about it in the New Testament. We celebrate the Eucharist because it is given by Christ to the Church, as witnessed in the New Testament – the sacred record of the beginning of our Catholic tradition. All the New Testament is one measure of authentic Catholic faith, just as another measure is the continuous celebration of the Eucharist from its institution by Jesus Christ. The bible is part of the tradition of the Church

Weren't some of the doctrines and structure of the Church developed after the time of the Apostles?

All the doctrines of the Church were developed over time, as well as the structure of the Church. However, the solidification of these doctrines was rapid. For instance, during the time of the apostles, the divinity of Christ was firmly established as normative for the Catholic faith,

as was the Eucharist, the sacrament of Baptism, the sacrament of holy orders, the veneration of Mary, and many other doctrines and practices of the Church. Other sacraments and doctrines took longer for definition and formulation. One example is the sacrament of marriage. It has been regarded as a sacrament in some form throughout the Christian tradition, but was not fully defined by the Church as a sacrament until the 16th century.

The doctrines, sacraments and structures of the Church are developmental – they depend on the foundation of the past, but extend into the significance for each age. Thus, the meaning of Christ is expressed immediately in the history of the Church, but the full significance of Christ is reflected in the advancements of the society engaged with Christian faith.

An example of this is the significance of Christ to Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French paleontologist who examined the evolution of the human race, but could not help but see love at the heart of the process. He saw the presence of Christ, pushing forward through the ages, bringing forth human consciousness, and culminating in the realization of God. While this is not the public doctrine of the Church, it is an example of how the ancient Christian faith could speak to people of this scientific age.

More appropriately, the official teaching of the Church has engaged with such areas as human rights. The individual right of religious freedom is absolute, and proclaimed in the name of Christ by such documents as the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) at the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church:

The act of faith is of its very nature a free act. Man, redeemed by Christ the Savior and through Christ Jesus called to be God's adopted son,(9) cannot give his adherence to God revealing Himself unless, under the drawing of the Father,(10) he offers to God the reasonable and free submission of faith. It is therefore completely in accord with the nature of faith that in matters religious every manner of coercion on the part of men should be excluded. (Article 10)

During previous centuries, Catholics went to war over religion. However, the seed of religious freedom grew through the centuries, and blossomed late in the Christian tradition. Other doctrinal and devotional seeds blossomed much earlier, so that the faith in its fullness unfolded in each age. Thus, Christian positions on slavery, the role of women in society and the Church, and on war took a long time to come to fruition, and are still being developed.

Church structure, on the other hand, developed almost immediately. We can read in Philippians 1:1, the following sentence: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with bishops and deacons.” One may look at this and wonder how the structure of bishop-presbyter-deacon came about. However, within the first century of Christianity, that structure emerged as normative. Even in Rome, where there is

evidence of the church authority being a council of presbyters, the three-part structure of ordained leadership emerged as official.

It is important to keep in mind the thread of continuity that emerges in the development of the Church. We can see a continuous faith in the doctrines of the Church, as they are developed and maintained throughout the course of history. The same can be said of the sacraments, which may have been celebrated differently throughout history, but maintain the same intentions and common understanding of their theology.

For example, the Sacrament of Baptism is always understood as forming a new character in the person baptized, filled with the presence of the Trinity; joining her or him to Christ, and to all others in the Church, as a new creation, cleansing of sin, and healing all alienation from God. Baptism was always done with water, and anointing with oil, but the manner of administering the water may have been different: immersion, pouring on the head, or sprinkling.

Likewise, we can see the Church's development as a continuous line that contains specific elements of the ordained leadership of the three orders – bishop, presbyter and deacon. Likewise, there are lay ministries, such as catechist, throughout the history of the Church. There have also been religious orders in the Church's history.

B. The writings of Paul and other New Testament authors (4)

Some people say that Saint Paul is really the one who formed the Christian faith. Is this true?

Saint Paul did not “invent” Christianity. The Christian faith had its beginnings in Jewish faith – in the God of Abraham and his descendents, the covenant of Moses, and the Jewish people. Jesus Christ fulfilled the promise of a Messiah for Judaism, and for the world. Saint Paul was instrumental in revealing the meaning of Christ, not only as a Jewish Messiah, but also as the universal Savior. His writings are considered sacred Scripture for Christians.

Some criticism of Saint Paul has arisen in recent years, for his specific understanding of women, and their place in society, and his views on sexuality. However, Paul's writings must be taken in their historical context, even if they are sacred Scripture.

He is actually progressive in his advancement of the role of women in the Church. The following passage shows that Paul rose above the common prejudice of his day in addressing the equality of women with men:

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)

Even the passage that asks wives to be obedient to their husbands is tempered by other elements that ask husbands to love their wives as they love their own bodies. Paul also begins the passage with words that are startling for his day, since men were so dominant in ancient society. He asks for mutual submission of both spouses to each other:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For, the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body. (Ephesians 5: 21-30)

What are the principle contributions of Saint Paul to the structure and teachings of the Church?

The principle teaching of Paul is the understanding of the meaning of being a Christian. It is so powerful that it changed the life of Saint Augustine, in the 4th century, the dominant theologian of the first millennium of Western Christianity. This understanding is summarized in the phrases of being “in Christ,” and “putting on Christ.” It is identification with Jesus Christ by his followers, and not simply the acceptance of a philosophy or law of faith. To be “in Christ” changes not only one’s identity, but the significance of all things:

- ❖ Those “in Christ” are like a corporate Self, which the Letter to the Romans describes as “one body in Christ.” (Romans 12:5) They have a new consciousness about themselves and the world around them.

- ❖ People who are in this new consciousness have an intuitive “wisdom” that is different from the common “wisdom” of the world. This wisdom comes from the encounter of

Jesus through the Church – the sacraments, the community of faith and personal devotion. This intuitive wisdom arising from being “in Christ” is also sometimes honored by secular society, but also sometimes disdained by society (1Corinthians 4:10)

- ❖ Being “in Christ” is like being in a different world – a “new creation”- in that dualistic ideas of right and wrong are transcended by a call to make peace with those who are at odds with us or differ from our way of thinking. This approach extends to all creation – even beyond human relationships – so that Christians are called to bring peace into every moment and every interaction. Every situation becomes an encounter with the divine because it is the divine working within and through the human life of everyone who is “in Christ.” The consciousness, which so clearly shines forth in the life and teachings of Jesus, is now evident in all who have awakened “in Christ.” Paul calls this a “ministry of reconciliation” in which peace and unity is the mission of those “in Christ,” and their very existence is a part of a developmental process bringing all to this peace. (2 Corinthians 5:11-21, and 1 Corinthians 15:22-28)

- ❖ The effect of being “in Christ” is not limited to human consciousness, but is a part of the very principle of existence – the foundation and most integral part of the universe. It is the divine presence in all reality, but made conscious within human consciousness. (Ephesians 1:23)

- ❖ Christ is the most basic reality, and is characterized as goodness and love – God’s outpouring. Nothing can separate this basic structure of love from the universe, for it is the foundation of all that exists. Thus, reality is basically relational, and all that exists is related to all else that exists. Everything exists in a love/consciousness connection with everything else. (Romans 8:35-39)

- ❖ Being “in Christ” is beyond human comprehension, but brings intuitive knowledge to humanity by revelation on the nature of both consciousness and reality. It leads individuals and the entire human race to a developing relationship with divine consciousness itself (the Spirit of God), and it brings a sense of liberation to all creation – freedom from the anguish of disintegration of our relationship to nature, to each other and to our own life.

This new consciousness “in Christ” develops by stages in both individuals and the human race as a whole. Yet, consciousness is not something that is achieved, rather it is realized, so that we awaken to its reality step by step. Therefore, there is no reason for individuals or groups to pride themselves on their level of consciousness – or “boast,” as Paul puts it. This awareness in Christ is developmental and evolutionary, and is a part of the fabric of reality of which we are all a part. (Romans 8:18-27 and Ephesians 2:8-10)

- ❖ Christ is the reality that has always been a part of the fabric of creation, but is now revealed to us. Its revelation gives meaning to all suffering because it is by the struggle of each generation that the consciousness (the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God) slowly emerges and builds a new sense of the divine reality, to be further realized by coming generations.

Saint Paul says that he “fills-up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ,” and so teaches that his struggle is a part of a greater struggle, as each generation attempts to comprehend the meaning of life and adds to its purpose. The closest thing that parallels such an understanding of suffering is the struggle that parents endure to make a better life for their children, and their innate sense of satisfaction when they have achieved this goal. (1 Corinthians 4:15; 12: 12-26, and Colossians 1:24-29)

- ❖ Those who are “in Christ” have a new perspective that transcends distinctions, such as gender, race, ethnicity, etc. so that there is a basic equality among all – that should be recognized and utilized to bring further peace and consciousness to the earth. All “in Christ” are a presence of the divine as it was realized in the life and teaching of Jesus – beyond judgments of “right and wrong” or “good and bad,” etc., to a compassionate recognition that all are part of one process – helping each other to realize this and come to peace through an understanding that whatever happens affects all. (Galatians 3:28 and 1Corinthians 12:25-26)

Saint Paul asks that we “put on Christ,” with no space in our lives for fleshly desires. This is not interpreted as simply sexual desire – which is, after all, blessed in the Sacrament of Matrimony – but refers to a limited and ego-centered perspective relinquished by those “in Christ.” Paul’s

understanding of the difference between “the Spirit” and “the flesh” can be quickly understood verses from Ephesians:

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. (Ephesians 5: 19-20)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. (Ephesians 5: 22-23)

His last sentence in this passage gives a profound view of his meaning: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (Ephesians 5: 25-26)

Saint Paul teaches that to be “in Christ” is to “live by the Spirit.” Life is a discernment of the Holy Spirit – the dynamic guidance of God in every step of life. Since our identity is “in Christ,” our guidance is by the Holy Spirit. [The great image of this is in the gospels, when Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert to prepare his mission as the Christ.]

The letters of Paul also give a view of the final days – not a standard image of heaven, but an image of resurrection – of the transformation of all creation:

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15: 24-28)

C. The perspective of early Christian writers on Christ, the faith and the Church (4)

What role does the Bible play in Catholic faith and doctrine?

The Bible is normative and sacred as a foundation for all other documents on the Catholic faith. It is a sacred standard – so special that it is the only written document used during the readings of the liturgy. The gospels are enshrined as even more special – the central reading, since they involve the life of Jesus.

The Hebrew Scriptures give the background of Christian faith:

- ❖ God's self –revelation begins in creation, but also involves revelation through special individuals, such as Abraham and Sara, and the Abrahamic family line.

- ❖ God's covenants foreshadowed the new covenant in Christ. The covenants begin with Abraham and Sara, but special covenants stand out, such as the covenant between the Hebrew people and God given through Moses.

- ❖ God is known as one, and beyond human comprehension; present in all reality, but not contained by anything in creation.

- ❖ God has a plan for the universe and humanity, revealed through the Hebrew people. His plan is to be fulfilled among the Hebrew people through a Messiah.

- ❖ The prayer of the Hebrews is so normative that the Psalms (and other readings) later become central to the prayer of the Christian Church.

Does the New Testament play a special role for Catholic faith and doctrine?

The New Testament is the beginning document for the explanation of all Christian doctrine. It is also the foundation of the sacramental life of the Church, and the communal life of the Church. Jesus gives teaching and example for all Christians, as found in the gospels. The devotional life of the Church is guided by the New Testament as its normative guide.

Yet, it is still important to understand that the New Testament is not the source of the practices and doctrines of the Church. Instead, the New Testament is the sacred story and record of the beginning of the Church – chronicling the Christian tradition at its roots. The New Testament Church is part of the continuous tradition of the Church – it belongs to the Church as part of its heritage. Additional to the sacred Scriptures of the New Testament are the sacramental and creedal traditions of the Church, and the writings of the early Christian writers that describe and delineate the Catholic faith.

What do the early Christian writers contribute to our understanding of Catholic faith?

Early Christian writers – traditionally called “The Church Fathers” – give a historical description of the Catholic faith as it was practiced in the early centuries of the Church – until about the 7th

century. These writers lived in various parts of Europe, Asia Minor and North Africa, as well as the Syrian deserts (where “Church Mothers” also lived in small monastic communities).

In their writings we see the continuous threads of the fabric of the Catholic faith – the sacramental celebrations, doctrines and practices of the Church in the first six centuries. Added to this is their commentary on groups which deviated from the Catholic faith of the Church. They often wrote actual refutations of the beliefs or practices of these groups.

These writers sometimes gave histories of the various Churches which were in communion in early Christianity. They chronicled the persecutions of Christians, and the lives of the Christian martyrs – especially the persecutions by the Roman authorities prior to the time of the emperor Constantine, who legalized Christianity in 313.

The Early Church Writers, traditionally called Fathers of the Church, were the first influential theologians after the New Testament writers. They were great Christian teachers and bishops, whose writings were used as a precedent for the rest of Christian history. Most are honored as saints in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Anglican Churches, as well as in some other Christian groups.

It is noteworthy to mention two that are not venerated as saints in the Church:

- ❖ Origen of Alexandria, a great influence on the Greek Church – some of his thought, on the pre-existence, transmigration, and universal salvation of souls, was later condemned as heretical. [N.B. Belief that all will be reconciled to God is not contrary to Christian doctrine, and held by numerous saints and theologians of the Church.]
- ❖ Tertullian, from Carthage in North Africa, wrote one of the initial lucid and theologically sound Trinitarian formulations. He was an orthodox Catholic Christian. However, later in life, he broke with the Catholic Church to join the Montanist sect.

The Apostolic Fathers

The earliest Church Fathers, (within two generations of the twelve apostles of Christ) are the “Apostolic Fathers” since they were taught directly by the twelve. Important Apostolic Fathers include Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna. The Didache and Shepherd of Hermas among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, though their authors are unknown. The works of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, they were first written in Greek.

Clement of Rome: Was a leader in the Church of Rome, at the end of the first century. His epistle, 1 Clement was widely read in the early Church, and called on the Christians of Corinth to maintain harmony. It is the earliest Christian epistle outside the New Testament.

Ignatius of Antioch: He lived from about AD 35 – 110, and was the third bishop (Patriarch) of Antioch, and a student of the Apostle John. En route to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius wrote a series of letters which have been preserved. Important topics addressed in these letters include ecclesiology, the sacraments, the role of bishops, and Biblical Sabbath. He is the second after Clement to mention Paul's epistles. His writings are evidence of the early establishment of the structure of Church authority and leadership – with the three orders of bishop – presbyter – deacon.

Polycarp of Smyrna: He lived from AD 69-155, and was bishop of Smyrna (now Izmir in Turkey). He was a disciple of John the Apostle (author of the Gospel of John), according to the ancient Church historian, Eusebius. In 155, the Smyrnans demanded Polycarp's execution as a Christian, and he died a martyr. Legend says that flames built to kill him refused to burn him and that when he was stabbed to death, so much blood issued from his body that it quenched the flames around him. Polycarp is recognized as a saint in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The Greek Fathers

The Greek Fathers wrote in Greek. They include, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, Peter of Sebaste, Gregory of Nyssa), Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus.

Irenaeus of Lyons: He was bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul (now Lyons, France). His writings developed early Christian theology, and he is recognized as a saint by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. He was also a disciple of Polycarp and defended the Catholic position against various other sects. His best-known book is "Against Heresies." Irenaeus wrote that the only way for the Christian Church to retain unity was to accept one doctrinal authority, which is the episcopal councils. He promoted the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as canonical.

Clement of Alexandria: Clement lived from AD 150-215. He was married, and was a priest of the Church of Alexandria, as well as one of its most distinguished teachers. He united Greek philosophical traditions with Christian doctrine. Contrary to the Gnostics, he taught that "gnosis: (the deeper knowledge of God) was available to the average Christian. Clement developed a Christian Platonism. He came from Catechetical School of Alexandria, as did Origen, and was a scholar of the literature of Greek and Rome.

Origen of Alexandria: Origen Adamantius lived from AD 185 – 254, and was a scholar and theologian. He was probably an Egyptian who taught in Alexandria, and revived the Catechetical School where Clement of Alexandria had taught. The Patriarch of Alexandria supported Origen, but later expelled him for being ordained without the Patriarch's permission. He moved to Caesarea Maritima and died there (after being tortured during a persecution).

By his knowledge of Hebrew, he produced a corrected Septuagint (Greek Hebrew Scriptures), and wrote commentaries on all the books of the Bible. In *Peri Archon* (First Principles), he gave the first philosophical explanation of Christian doctrine. Origen interpreted Scripture allegorically. His writings show that he is a Stoic, a Neo-Pythagorean, and a Platonist. Like Plotinus, he wrote that the soul passes through successive stages before incarnation as a human and after death, eventually reaching God. He believed in universal salvation, and even demons being reunited with God.

For Origen, God was not Yahweh but the First Principle – and Christ, as the Logos, was subordinate to him. His views of a hierarchical structure in the Trinity, the temporality of matter, "the fabulous preexistence of souls", and "the monstrous restoration which follows from it" were condemned in the 6th century. Origen is technically not a Church Father by many definitions of that term but instead may be considered an ecclesiastical writer because of these controversies.

Athanasius of Alexandria: He was a major voice of the Catholic Church for the majority of the 4th century. He died in 373, and had been a noted theologian. As Patriarch of Alexandria, he was a fierce Egyptian leader Church – the major opponent of Arianism and suffered a number of expulsions from Alexandria because of his affirmation of the Trinity against his opponents. At the First Council of Nicaea (325), Athanasius argued against the Arian doctrine. (The Arians believed that Christ is of a distinct substance from the Father – created by the Father.)

The Cappadocian Fathers: The Cappadocians are saints in both Western and Eastern Churches, and definitive theologians of the Trinity. Their parents, Basil the Elder and Emmelia, are saints of the Church. Saint Macrina the Younger (the daughter of Basil and Emmelia and venerated as a saint) provided a residence for her brothers to study and meditate, and a peaceful shelter for their mother. Mother Abbess Macrina fostered the education and development of her brothers, called “The Cappadocian Fathers” – **Basil the Great** (330–379) and became a renowned bishop, **Gregory of Nyssa** (c.335 – after 394) who also became a bishop of the Bishop of Nyssa; and **Peter of Sebaste** (c.340 – 391) – the youngest brother and bishop of Sebaste.

The brothers were close friends with **Saint Gregory Nazianzus**, who is also considered a Cappadocian theologian, and who became the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Cappadocians engaged with the Greek-speaking intellectual world, arguing that the Christian faith, while opposed to some ideas of Plato and Aristotle (and other Greek philosophers), is a systematic and distinctive movement centered on the healing of the human soul, and the union with God. Their contributions to the definition of the Trinity gave form to the Trinitarian doctrine and creed of the First Council of Constantinople in 381, giving (the final version of the Nicene Creed).

Arianism continued after the First Council of Nicaea. The semi-Arians taught that the Son is of like substance with the Father (*homoiousios*), while the Arians taught that the Son was unlike the Father (*heterousian*). For the Arians and Semi-Arians, the Son was understood to be like the Father, but not of the same substance as the Father. The Cappadocians worked to return the semi-Arians to the Orthodox/Catholic Trinitarian faith. The Cappadocians used the phrase “three persons (*hypostases*) in one essence (*homoousia*)” – acknowledging a distinction between the Father and the Son (not as clear in the initial Nicene Creed), insisting on their essential unity of being.

John Chrysostom: He lived 347– 407, and became the Patriarch of Constantinople. He is known for his eloquence in preaching. For his astounding number of sermons, writings and letters, Saint John was given the name “Chrysostom” after his death, which means “Golden Mouth.” Saint John denounced abuse by religious and civil authorities. He could be considered the most influential saint and theologian of the Orthodox world because of the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, which is celebrated by the majority of Orthodox Churches.

Cyril of Alexandria: At the height of the influential power of the City of Alexandria in the Roman Empire, Cyril became its bishop. His life (AD 378-444) was filled with extensive writing, including his strong defense of the Catholic position in the Christological controversies of the late 4th and early 5th centuries. At the First Council of Ephesus in 431, his efforts led to the deposition of Nestorius as Archbishop of Constantinople, because of Nestorius’ position on Christology. Cyril's reputation within the Christian world has resulted in his titles "Pillar of Faith" and "Seal of all the Fathers".

Maximus the Confessor: He is also known as Maximus the Theologian and Maximus of Constantinople, and lived AD 580–662). Though in his early life, he was a civil servant and an aide to the Byzantine Emperor [Heraclius](#), he became a monk, scholar and theologian.

In Carthage, Maximus studied Neo-Platonism and became a well known author. He was soon drawn into the Christological controversies, and supported the position of the Council of Chalcedon that Jesus had both a human and a divine will. His views resulted in his torture and exile, and his death soon after. The Third Council of Constantinople affirmed his position, and he was venerated as a saint soon after his death – in the Eastern and Western Church. His title of “Confessor” means that he suffered for the faith, but not to the point of death, and thus is distinguished from a martyr. He published the Life of the Virgin, the earliest biography of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

John of Damascus: Saint John of Damascus lived AD.676–749, and was a Syrian monk and priest. Born and raised in [Damascus](#), he died at his monastery, near Jerusalem. He was a scholar of law, theology, philosophy, and music, but before ordination as a priest, he was the chief administrator for the Muslim caliph of Damascus. Saint John wrote works on Christian faith, and composed hymns that are still in use in Eastern Christian monasteries. The Roman Catholic Church regards him as a Doctor of the Church (often referred to as the Doctor of the Assumption because of his writings on the Assumption of Mary).

The Latin Fathers

Those Fathers of the Church who wrote in Latin are called the Latin Fathers.

Tertullian: Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (AD160–225) was an adult convert to Christianity, and a renowned writer of apologetic, theological, controversial and ascetic works. He was the son of a Roman centurion, born in Carthage. Tertullian opposed Christian doctrines he considered heretical, but later in life actually adopted views those views he formerly considered heretical. He wrote three books in Greek, but was the first great writer of Latin Christianity – known as the “Father of the Latin Church.” He had been a lawyer in Rome.

Tertullian introduced the Latin term “Trinitas” to the Christian vocabulary, in referring to the Holy Trinity. [Theophilus of Antioch had written of “the Trinity, of God, and His Word, and His wisdom”– similar but not identical to the Trinitarian wording] He probably was the first to use the formula “Three Persons, one Substance” as the Latin “*Tres Personae, una Substantia*” (Greek:“*Treis Hypostases, Homoousios*”) – also “Vetus Testamentum” (Old Testament) and “Novum Testamentum” (New Testament). In his *Apologeticus*, he claimed Christianity as the “vera religio”, and claimed the classical Roman Empire religion, and other cults, were “superstitions”.

Later in life, Tertullian joined the Montanists, a rigorist sect, which opposed Catholic understandings of forgiveness of sin and Church structure. He used the early Church's symbol for fish — the Greek word for "fish" is ΙΧΘΥΣ, which is an acronym for "Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ" — transliterated from Greek as Jesus Christus, Theou Huios, Soter (Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour) — to explain the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism because fish are born in water, writing that human beings are like little fish.

Cyprian of Carthage: Saint Cyprian (Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus) was born in North Africa, and died in 258. He was bishop of Carthage and an important early Christian writer. In North Africa, he received an excellent classical (pagan) education. After converting to Christianity, he became a bishop and eventually died a martyr at Carthage. His writing is very important to the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. One of his revered quotes is from his "Letters," and states:

I have made it a rule, ever since the beginning of my episcopate, to make no decision merely on the strength of my own personal opinion without consulting you [the priests and deacons] and without the approbation of the people. (Letters 14:4)

Hilary of Poitiers: Hilary of Poitiers (AD 300 – 368) was Bishop of Poitiers and is a Doctor of the Church. He was sometimes referred to as the "Hammer of the Arians" (Latin: Malleus Arianorum) and the "Athanasius of the West" because of his fierce opposition to the Arian position on the Trinity and the identity of Jesus Christ. ["Hilary" comes from the Greek word for happy or cheerful.]

Ambrose of Milan: He was the Bishop of Milan, and one of the most influential ecclesiastical figures of the 4th century – one of the four original doctors of the Church. The story is well known that Ambrose was a public figure, involved with imperial politics of the Roman Empire, when he decided to become a Christian. Because of his reputation as a public speaker, and the power of his personality, the people of Milan chose him to become their bishop, even before he had been baptized. He held a powerful position as the Bishop of Milan because, at that time, the court of the emperor had been moved there from Rome.

As a bishop, Ambrose was a tremendous teacher, and became the mentor of Augustine during the time that he was preparing for his own baptism. The instruction for catechumens lasted for months, with greater intensity during Lent, and especially Holy Week. Ambrose's teaching centered upon the use of Scripture for spiritual growth, an allegorical method of paralleling the stories of the Scripture with the events of each of our lives. Ambrose defended the Catholic faith in the face of Arianism, and other efforts opposed to it. He defended against any efforts of the emperor to intrude upon Catholic faith as well.

Jerome of Stridonium: Saint Jerome (AD 347–420) was an apologist, and a major translator of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin: the *Vulgate*. It is still an important text of Catholicism. A Doctor of the Church for Roman Catholics, he is known for a sometimes sour disposition. He was a contemporary of Saint Augustine, and shared the Catholic faith with many great Fathers of his day.

Augustine of Hippo: This Bishop of Hippo is a Latin Father and Doctor of the Church – one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. Prior to his conversion to Christianity, Saint Augustine served in the imperial court in Milan. Having been schooled in rhetoric – the exposition of philosophy – he was well acquainted with Greek and Roman philosophical thought. He was heavily influenced by a Neo-Platonism, and spent time as a Manichaen.

As a Catholic theologian, he established the meaning of original sin and the Western understanding of just war. When Rome was falling to the Visigoths, and the faith of many Christians was shaken, Augustine wrote “The City of God,” proposing that it is distinct from the material “City of Man.” Augustine's work defined the start of the medieval worldview, an outlook that would later be firmly established by Pope Gregory the Great.

Augustine was born in what is now Algeria - to a Christian mother, Saint Monica. He was educated in North Africa and began to teach in Rome. He resisted converting to Christianity for many years. He greatly loved one woman, and lived with her for 15 years. They had a son together (Adeodatus), who became a Christian when Augustine did – as did his life-long friend, Alepius. His most well known work is *The Confessions* (often called the first Western autobiography) is a masterpiece of psychological and spiritual self-investigation, and a classic of Western civilization.

The modern Catholic writer, Garry Wills, states that Augustine’s lover – the mother of his child – returned to their home in Tagaste (Thagaste) in Africa, to dedicate herself to a life of prayer. Augustine felt prohibited from marrying the woman because of class differences, and journeyed to Hippo in Africa to establish a monastic order. His “Rule of Saint Augustine” still guides religious communities of the present day.

Gregory the Great: Pope Gregory I (called Gregory the Great) lived AD 540-604, and was Bishop of Rome from September of 590 until his death. He was originally a monk, and a well-known Christian writer. Gregory is a Doctor of the Church and one of the four great Latin Fathers of the Church (the others being Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome). Gregory was a great reformer of the liturgy, and he sent missionaries to Northern Europe. He is known to have sent Augustine of Canterbury to Britain.

Isidore of Seville: Saint Isidore (AD 560–636) was Archbishop of Seville for over three decades and is considered one of the great scholars of the ancient world because of his historical works on the Iberian Peninsula. He was a participant in, and proponent of, synodal councils. When the bishops met in the Councils of Toledo and Seville, Isidore was influential in passing canonical legislation. His voice even had powerful influence on civil matters: He was involved in the conversion of the Visigothic Arians of Hispania, and their royalty, to Catholicism. Modern historians regard him as a very important influence in the development of representative government. A Doctor of the Church, he also influenced medieval learning with a compilation of knowledge that was a forerunner of the encyclopedia. One point to address: His troubling criticism of Jews was a fault influenced by the culture of his day, and the struggle for control of the Iberian Peninsula between the Christian and the Moorish monarchs. To his credit, he was able to champion legislation against child abuse in AD 619.

Other Fathers and Mothers of the Church

Many Christians fled to the desert in the first centuries of the Church, especially when the Roman Empire began to lose its power. They became monks – living close, but not always together. Yet even those who lived as hermits were urged to join with other monks for prayer, study and liturgy, as well as some meals. The Desert Fathers were early monastics living in the Egyptian desert. Not writing as much as those mentioned above, they were still influential.

Anthony the Great This Egyptian monk (AD 251–356) was known for his ascetic life, but also helped other monks to find a balanced existence of manual labor and prayer – in loose community life in the Egyptian desert. Saint Anthony aided Saint Athanasius in the struggle against Arianism. Saint Anthony was the mentor for **Saint Macarius** (AD 300-391), another priest and desert monk in Egypt, who founded a monastery, and **Saint Serapion** (AD 330-360) who developed an early sacramentary – the book of the priest at Mass, with prayers and rites of the sacraments. **Saint Pachomius** was another Egyptian (AD 292-348), who organized the desert monks into a common living space, and is credited to be the father of true the monastic movement (with prior monastic life being a grouping of hermits, rather than a monastic community with a rule and abbot, and a common life of prayer and work. Pachomius was 20 when he was forcefully recruited into the Roman army. He met Christians who ministered to the soldiers, and vowed to investigate Christianity. Eventually, he left the army, was baptized, and became a renowned monk – “Saint Pachomius the Great.”

Evagrius Ponticus (AD 345-399) wrote extensively, and developed a systematic approach to the spiritual life, describing in detail the psychological and bodily hazards of the monastic life, as well as lessons in spiritual growth. Later he was condemned for his teachings that were aligned with the doctrines of Origen of Alexandria.

The Desert Fathers wrote in a variety of languages, including Greek and Syriac. Other Desert Fathers include **Ephrem the Syrian** and **Isaac of Nineveh**, and a many lesser known monks. Saint Ephrem wrote many hymns, and encouraged female choirs. In the early Syrian Church, the Holy Spirit was often identified with the female because “Spirit” is female in Syriac. [In

Syriac document of the early Miaphysite church – which later became the Syrian Orthodox Church – the feminine gender of the word for *spirit* produced a theology in which the Holy Spirit was considered feminine.] Syriac is derived from Aramaic.

While the **Desert Fathers** are better known because of their writings, interest in the **Desert Mothers** is now being renewed. They were female Christian ascetics living in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. They lived in the 4th and 5th centuries, typically lived in monastic communities, though sometimes they lived as hermits. Other women from that era who influenced the early ascetic or monastic tradition while living outside the desert are also described as Desert Mothers.

The Desert Mothers were known as *ammās* (spiritual mothers), just as the Desert Fathers were called *abbas* (*spiritual father*). One of the best known Desert Mothers was Amma Syncletica of Alexandria, who had quite a few sayings recorded in the ancient text, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Two other *ammās*, Theodora of Alexandria and Amma Sarah of the Desert, also had sayings recorded. Desert Mothers include Melania the Elder, Melania the Younger, Olympias, Saint Paula and her daughter Eustochium, and several women whom the author does not name.^[3]

Amma Syncletica was born in 380 CE to wealthy parents in Alexandria and was well educated, including an early study of the writings of Desert Father, Evagrius Ponticus. She had studied the monastic writing of Evagrius Ponticus and, after the death of her parents, she sold everything she had and gave the money to the poor. She and her blind sister lived as hermits among the tombs outside the City of Alexandria; and other women gradually joined them – she was their spiritual mother. Syncletica taught moderation - that asceticism was in the service of holiness.

Theodora of Alexandria (died AD 490) was also the *amma* of a monastic community of women near Alexandria. **Sarah of the Desert** (5th century) was a hermit living by a river for sixty years. She had witty and sharp replies for those who taunted her as a female hermit and ascetic.

Melania the Elder (AD 325-410) was the daughter of a Roman official, and moved to Alexandria, and then to the Egyptian Desert. She met several of the Desert Fathers, and used her money for their support. At one point she was thrown into prison for these efforts, the Desert Fathers, after several Desert Fathers were banished by the officials in Palestine. She eventually founded a convent in Jerusalem which had about fifty nuns. **Melania the Younger** was her granddaughter, and married at the age of thirteen and had two sons. Her sons died when she was 20, and she entered her grandmother's way of life, while her husband entered the monastery.

What forms of Christianity were competing with Catholicism?

Group #1: Deviations from Catholic Christianity are usually called “heresy” by Catholic writers. This is different from abandoning the faith, which is traditionally called “apostasy.” Most of these forms of Christianity that were competing Christian heresies focused upon issues of the

nature of the trinity and the nature of the person of Jesus Christ. The official doctrines of Catholic Christianity on these issues (and still observed in the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Churches) is:

- ❖ God is a Trinity, three persons but one in being (consubstantial).
- ❖ Jesus Christ was one person, fully human and fully divine. His divinity and humanity are unmixed and unconfused. In most of Christianity this is expressed as the two natures of Christ.
- ❖ The trinity is the heart of Christian faith, in doctrine and devotion. The two natures of Christ are also at the heart of the understanding of his identity, and our devotion to him. The Catholic sacraments and the doctrine of grace are dependent upon belief in Jesus Christ as fully human and fully divine.

The following groups represent the major competitors to Catholic Christianity, and are considered heresies of the early Church by Western and Eastern Christianity:

Montanism is named for Montanus, who lived in Anatolia, in present day Turkey, in the middle of the 2nd century. He believed himself to be the Paraclete promised by Jesus. Montanists were rigorists who believed that others could achieve this state of Prophet, like Montanus. Since they believed that the world was in the end times, they urged people not to marry, but to live as ascetics. Men and women were equal among the Montanists, so that women could also become Prophets. Their prophecy was ecstatic, with exclamations of proverb-like sayings. By the time of Saint Augustine, many of the Montanist group reconciled with the Catholic Church.

Sabellianism is named for its founder Sabellius, who lived in the 3rd century – probably in Rome, but perhaps originally from North Africa. It is sometimes called Modalism or Monarchianism. This group taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three modes, roles, or faces of a single person, God. Thus, the Father incarnated in the form of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is the same as the Father. Jesus is fully divine, but incarnated in some form as human. What is in question is Jesus' full humanity and full divinity.

Docetism comes from the Greek word *dokesis*, which means "to seem." Like Sabellianism, Docetism says that Christ was not a real human being – without a real human body. He only seemed to be human to us. A number of early Christian groups were considered Docetists.

Monophysitism comes from the Greek words for "one body." This is a doctrine that Jesus Christ was a joining of the divinity and humanity in a single nature in the Incarnation. Thus the humanity of Christ was absorbed into his divinity. Throughout the centuries the problem of Greek philosophical terms (nature and person) were seen as the source of division between

Catholic faith and Monophysite faith. This form of Christianity centered in Syria and North Africa.

Some present-day Churches (such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Indian Orthodox Church, and the Coptic Orthodox Church) explain the full divinity and full humanity of Christ in a different way than using the term, "the two natures of Christ." But they agree that the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ are separate but united in one person— a essential of Catholic faith

Adoptionism teaches that Jesus was a human being who was "adopted" by God at his conception, at which point God filled Jesus with divinity. Others believed that he was adopted when he was baptized by John the Baptist. Thus, Jesus was a man filled with God, and adopted as God's Son – a denial of the doctrine that Jesus is fully human and fully divine, and a denial of the pre-existence of the Son before the Incarnation.

Nestorianism is named for Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople in the early 5th century, who rejected the term "Mother of God." He insisted that she was the mother of the human Jesus, who was united with the Eternal Son, but not identical. This was a denial of the Catholic understanding that the Second Person of the Trinity became incarnate in Jesus Christ (fully human and fully divine, united and incarnated in one person, Jesus Christ). Nestorianism was very strong in the Church of the East, which had millions of adherents throughout Asia. Now, the modern Assyrian Church of the East has worked out the doctrinal differences with Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, so that the terms used to describe Jesus Christ refer to his two characters in one personality. This is interpreted as equivalent to two natures united in one person – and affirming the Incarnation of the Son of God – in Jesus Christ.

Apollinarianism was named for Apollinaris, the bishop of Laodicea in Syria in the 4th century who taught that the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, replaced the human mind and soul of Jesus. Catholic doctrine affirmed that Jesus' humanity (body, mind and soul) remained intact, but was united to his divinity in a perfect union, unmixed and unconfused. Thus, God the Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Arianism is named after Arius, who was a priest in Alexandria, and lived in the late third and early fourth century. The Arian understanding of Christ is that the Son of God did not always exist, but was created by God the Father and is distinct from God. Arianism gained considerable followers, so that by the time of Athanasius, the Patriarch of Alexandria, it is estimated that as many as 70% of the Christian bishops were Arian. Athanasius was an outspoken opponent of Arianism.

However, the common faith of the people held to the Catholic Trinitarian position that the Eternal Son of God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine. Their

opposition to Arianism was a major factor in the Catholic position returning to its strength in the declarations of the Church councils at Nicaea, Constantinople and Chalcedon. The strength of this common faith of the people is celebrated in the writings of Cardinal Henry Newman in the 19th century. Some form of Arianism can be seen throughout the history of the Church.

Group #2: Two other groups were very strong in early Christianity, but did not center on controversy over the Trinity or the person of Jesus Christ, but rather on the nature of grace, and the sacraments.

Donatism was a Christian sect of the 4th and 5th centuries that flourished in the Roman province of Africa (what is now mainly Tunisia and Algeria). It was comprised of the surviving Christians who had endured persecutions from the Roman authorities, specifically under the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian. It was named for the North African Christian bishop Donatus Magnus. The controversy with the Catholics centered on reconciling Christians who had lapsed during the persecutions. Additionally, they Donatists argued that sacraments celebrated by a former lapsed priest or impure priest were invalid. The Donatists highly valued martyrdom, and were rigorists in the practice of the faith.

Many of the towns of North Africa had separate Catholic and Donatist churches. In 409, the Roman Christian emperor, Honorius, demanded that they reconcile with the Catholics, and bring their churches under the authority of the Catholic bishops. Saint Augustine was a major voice in the deliberations that resulted in the Donatists losing the theological debate, and the Catholic triumph. This gathering in Carthage was a sizeable number of nearly equal Donatist and Catholic bishops. Augustine likewise led the way for a peaceful reconciliation, offering the Donatist bishop in Hippo the opportunity to alternate with him in the Catholic cathedral of Hippo.

Pelagianism was centered in Gaul, Britain, and Ireland, and is named after the monk Pelagius, who lived in the British Isles at the end of the 4th and beginning of the 5th centuries. Pelagius and his followers were rigorists, who taught that the human will, was sufficient to live a sinless life – since God had created human beings with sufficient strength. Grace might assist in this work of perfection, but was not a basic requirement. Thus, Pelagius did not believe that humanity inherited original sin, but said that Adam was a bad example, and Christ was a good example to us of the path to perfection, through sacrifice and the instruction of the will. In other words, the Pelagians believed completely in free will, while the Catholics believed in an impaired human will because of original sin, which requires the transforming grace of God for salvation in Christ. Saint Jerome was one of the chief critics of Pelagianism, because, according to him, sin is a part of human nature and impairs every person, unless she or he receives the grace of Christ through baptism, the sacraments and the life of the Church.

Group #3: Two separate religious groups heavily influenced Christians, and competed with Catholicism in theological struggles and Church membership.

Gnosticism pre-dates Christianity, and comes from the word “gnosis” in Greek, which was meant to mean secret or esoteric knowledge. It separated people into the elite group of those initiated into this esoteric knowledge, and the rest of humanity. For the Gnostics, Jesus was a supreme teacher who brought the esoteric knowledge to the earth. Some Gnostics considered Jesus to be a divine being, while others believed that he was a human who had attained enlightenment.

The Gnostic movement was not unified, but had many separate communities. People would attend these communities and be slowly introduced to the secret ceremonies of initiation into the esoteric knowledge. Some teachers stood out as leading Gnostics, such as Valentinus, who had been a Roman theologian, and almost became the Catholic Bishop of Rome. Some Gnosticism became corrupt, and was really used as a ruse for manipulating wealthy Romans into secret ceremonies for monetary gain.

Manichaeism is a separate religion which blended Christianity with Gnosticism and other Asian religious beliefs. Saint Augustine was a Manichean prior to his conversion to Catholicism in 387. Manichaeism was named after the Persian, Mani, who lived in the middle of the 3rd century. Manichaeans believed in the struggle between God, who is not omnipotent, and the semi-eternal evil power of Satan. Jesus had three identities for the Manichaeans: Jesus the Luminous, Jesus the Messiah, and the Suffering Jesus.

They also believed that God created the universe through a sub-God (the Demiurge), but that demonic powers also entered the universe, so that every person is in an absolute struggle between darkness and light. Sexual activity is seen as part of the darkness because the light of God is trapped in the material body through procreation, the result of sexual union. Basically, the material world is part of the realm of darkness. They believed in the reincarnation, a realm of greater and lesser deities, and three separate creations that involved the realms of darkness and light. Manichaeism spread as far as Great Britain in the West, and China in the East. Its negative thinking about sexuality may have had influence on some early Christian writers. Its influence continued for many centuries.

The various competing forms of Christianity in its beginning days reveal a struggle to understand the Gospel as given by Jesus Christ. The various lights of faith – Scripture, the official teachings of Church councils, the revered early Christian writers, the liturgy and sacramental rites, and the common faith of the People of God – all speak us in unison, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, asking us to align these sources and continue to discover and live authentic Catholic faith.

D. *The emergence of the creeds and the sacraments (6)*

Are creeds necessary? Aren't they legalistic and too old to apply to modern life?

The word “creed” comes from the Latin word “credo,” which means “I believe.” Another Latin word for creed is *symbolum*. This word originally refers to a medallion that is broken into two distinct parts, so that when they are joined together they fit perfectly. Thus the creed refers to the unity of faith – what joins us together.

The creeds are sacred statements and official agreements as to what we believe as Catholic Christians – what unites us. These creeds act to protect what we believe and to guide our lives as Christians, as well as protecting and guiding those who believe the contents of the creeds. For example, we believe that we receive a share in the divinity of Christ. If someone does not believe in the divinity of Christ, then it changes this understanding of our share in his divinity. We may have other private beliefs, which others are not required to affirm, but we all affirm the creed as a common set of beliefs.

The official creeds of the Church, beginning with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, are precisely worded to allow people to know what is believed – to answer the questions that arise from these statements of faith. They are old because our spiritual ancestors have also been involved in conversations concerning the creed. Christianity is not something newly invented with each generation. It is a tradition that is handed from one generation to the next. Each generation may add its interpretation and application of these creeds, but the statements are historical, and foundational to the Catholic tradition. There are two standard creeds used often in the Church – in its sacraments and devotions – the creed from the Council of Nicaea, which was completed in a subsequent Council of Constantinople; and the Apostles Creed, which took its final form in the sixth century, but existed in various forms prior to that time.

When were the first creeds developed and how did the Nicene Creed become such a standard for the Church?

Creeds began as baptismal statements, but quickly developed into formal statement. A great deal of historical evidence shows the existence of a number of creeds:

About AD 107, Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote, in “Letter to the Trallians,” this passage:

Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and truly died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess true life.

In about AD 185, Saint Irenaeus wrote the work "Against Heresies." This passage is from that work, affirming an ancient creed:

The Church believes in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate, for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His future manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father to gather all things in one.

Around AD 200, Tertullian wrote "On Prescription Against Heretics," which gives still more evidence of early creeds:

Now with this regard to the rule of faith ... there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth; that this Word is called His Son, and under the name of God, was seen in diverse manners by the patriarchs, heard at times in the prophets, at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, and, being born of her, went forth as Jesus Christ; thenceforth He preached the new law and the new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles having been crucified, He rose again the third day; having ascended into the heavens, He sat at the right hand of the Father; sent instead of Himself the Power of the Holy Ghost to lead such as believe; will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their flesh. This rule, as it will be proved, was taught by Christ, and raises amongst ourselves no other questions than those which heresies introduce, and which make men heretics.

Other early Christian documents attest to the continual existence of these statements of faith, the creeds, including the works of Saint Hippolytus of Rome (about AD 250), Origen of Alexandria (about AD 230), St. Gregory Thaumaturgus of Pontus in modern day Turkey (about AD 250), and St. Cyprian of Carthage (about AD 250).

Why are the creeds written in a Trinitarian structure?

The Trinity is the most basic element of the Catholic Christian faith. We always begin every official sacrament and devotion with a “mini-creed” of these words: “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” The rest of the faith flows from the Trinity.

The creeds begin with an affirmation of the Father. Jesus used “the Father” when introducing his disciples to his teaching on prayer (Matthew 6:9). He constantly spoke of “the Father.” He told his disciples that he was returning to “my Father, and your Father.” (John 20:17) The Father is the Source of all being, and the Son proceeds from the Father. The creed affirms the Father as the Source of all.

The creeds then move to the Son, with an affirmation of all that is foundational to Catholic faith. His humanity and divinity are affirmed – contrary to many doctrines that would deny or lessen either. His death and resurrection are affirmed, as well as his presence with the Father and his expected return. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed also strongly affirms the pre-existence of the Son, incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, and the creation of all through him. All the sacraments are based upon these beliefs, such as Baptism “into Christ,” and the Eucharist – where we receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

The third part of the creeds involves the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is affirmed as participating in creation as well, and that the Spirit “spoke through the Prophets.” Then the creed expands the notion of the mission of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Through the Holy Spirit, the Church is made one, holy, catholic and apostolic [Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed]. This means that there is one Church into which all are baptized; and that the Church is the place and font of holiness; catholic, that is universal; and apostolic, handed down in a continuous tradition from the apostles of Jesus.

The third part continues in affirming the Church’s mission, by the power of the Spirit:

In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the text reads: “We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” This creed affirms baptism as the path of Christian life, without a need for re-baptism to repair any lapse from the faith, large or small. It affirms, like the Apostles Creed, the resurrection of the dead – that we shall be raised, and not simply pass to another state or lifetime. And it affirms “the life of the world to come.” Thus, there is a life to come after death, though it is not described by the creed – a life in God.

In the Apostles Creed, the text reads: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.” The work of the Spirit is 1) the unity of all who believe – living or dead; 2) the forgiveness of sins, in contrast with rigorist, ancient or new, who would choose to withhold the forgiveness of God; 3) the resurrection of the body, affirming the goodness of all creation, and not making a split between the redemption of the soul and the earthly body; and 4) life everlasting, which affirms the hope of Christians that we shall not each be swallowed into oblivion, but shall see God.

What is the Catholic understanding of each member of the Trinity – what are their roles and how do they relate to one another?

Some may be tempted to think that the precise wording of the creeds – and in particular, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed – is a theological game that has little to do with devotional faith in God. This is simply not true. The Trinitarian understanding of God shatters the common notion of God that is often dismissed by modern society as “superstition” or “naive thinking.” Too often, God is the “man upstairs,” This is an image of God as a big human in the sky. The Trinity calls us to a mystery of God as beyond comprehension, but even more present than our own identities.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, but not three gods. They are one God, and not simply three modes of God – each is God. Does this sound confusing? It is as mysterious as life itself, but also as real. Different terms are used to describe the relationships of the Holy Trinity:

Mutual Indwelling or *Perichoreisis*: In Western theology, this is called “circumincession.” It refers to the doctrine that the three Persons are distinct, but dwell in each other. Jesus gives an insight into this doctrine with the words, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us (John 17:21).” The term “perichoreisis” comes from a Greek term for dance, in which all participate, turning as one. But the Trinity is beyond the simply unity of the dance, for the doctrine of “mutual indwelling” speaks of a presence that thoroughly imbues each Person with the other Persons, without lessening their distinction in any way.

Procession: The theology of the Trinity includes the doctrine that the Son “proceeds” from the Father. This is not “creation” by the Father, but is “begotten” of the Father. The Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Father, but there is a controversy about the wording of the Son’s participation in the procession of the Holy Spirit. That controversy centers on the Latin term “Filioque” – which means “and the Son.” The Eastern Church insisted that this term gave a sense of the Spirit proceeding from two gods, and was inappropriate because it seemed to

subordinate the Holy Spirit. The Western Church used this term in the creed for centuries, while the East insisted on the creed stating that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father.” Perhaps the controversy can be resolved with the term “through the Son,” or with another solution, but no resolution has been completely satisfactory to the Eastern and Western segments of Christianity to date.

Finally, the creed affirms the Incarnation of the Son. No other member of the Trinity is Incarnate, only the Son. Yet the Son’s incarnation is not simply a divine appearance or visitation. In Jesus Christ, God takes on the material world, and changes it. All flesh is transformed by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The creed speaks of this as a timeless saving presence, when it proclaims that “through him all things were made.” Just as all creation shares in the humanity of Christ – taking on the material bodily world – so too, salvation comes from our participation in both his humanity and divinity.

What is the meaning of sacrament?

The Greek term for sacrament is *mysterion*. This term is often used in Western Christianity to refer to the sacraments as “sacred mysteries.” They are not merely symbolic, but are an entrance into signs and symbols that actualize what they symbolize. Baptism is a sign of death and new life in Christ, but it actually effects that incorporation into Christ. The Eucharist is a sharing of the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. This is not a symbolic gesture, but a sharing of the whole Christ.

The sacraments are traditionally numbered as 7: Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation (called Chrismation in the Eastern Church) are sacraments of initiation; also Holy Orders (Ordination), Matrimony, Reconciliation (also traditionally called Penance or Confession) and the Anointing of the Sick. The sacraments are instituted by Christ in his ministry – this may have been in seminal form in the gospels, but developed further in the Apostolic Community after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Did the Church develop the sacraments as rituals after the time of Jesus?

The extension of the ministry of Jesus can be clearly seen in the celebration of each sacrament. The form of the sacrament remained basically the same throughout history, but has been changed or enhanced with each age. For instance, Baptism has always taken the form of being immersed in water, or water being poured or sprinkled on the head, while saying the words, “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Another example is that of Holy Orders, in which there is always a laying on of hands. The Eucharist is always celebrated with Jesus’ words of institution, and the calling of the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – and is always celebrated as the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and resurrection from death, as well as his ascension and

expected return. The Church has added many prayers and rituals to the sacraments, but they retain their basic form and original intention throughout the ages.

Can we find evidence of every sacrament in the writings of the New Testament?

Yes, there are numerous examples connecting the sacraments to the New Testament. Here are some, but not all:

Baptism can be cited in Matthew 28:16-20, as the command of Jesus to his disciples:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Eucharist is a sacrament established by Jesus before his death. The narrative of its institution can be read in the gospels of Mathew, Mark and Luke, with extensive passages in John regarding "the Bread of Life." In 1 Corinthians 11: 23-29, Saint Paul affirms the words of institution in the three gospels with these words:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Confirmation (or Chrismation) is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus, and realized in Acts 2: 1-4,

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Confirmation involves both the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil (Holy Chrism). It is linked to the Sacrament of Baptism – they are two of the three Sacraments of Initiation.

When they heard this, [Paul's preaching] they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. As Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down upon them and they began to speak in tongues and utter prophecies." (Acts 19:5-6)

The anointing in the Confirmation rite is a sacramental sign and action of the coming of the Holy Spirit, as in Acts 10:37-38, with these words of Saint Peter:

"You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached — how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."

The very title of Jesus as "The Christ" refers to this anointing of the Holy Spirit, since "Christ" means "the Anointed One."

Holy Orders is evidenced in Acts 6: 2-6, when deacons were chosen for ministry:

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Additionally, in 1 Timothy 5:22, there is a word of counsel: "Do not be too hasty in the laying on of hands." This is a caution about sound discernment concerning those called to ordination.

Holy Matrimony, or Holy Marriage, is affirmed in Jesus' presence at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, when he changed water into wine (John 2:1-11). Additionally, in Ephesians 5:21-32, we have an insight into the meaning of the sacrament, where the marriage between the spouses is understood as a living sign and symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the

Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Reconciliation commissions the Church and its ordained ministers with the forgiveness and healing of sin. It is important not to be too concentrated on the word “sin,” since it refers to our personal mistakes and failures. All people experience their own shortcomings in relationship to others. All people are called to the ministry of reconciliation, but the sacrament is administered by a bishop or priest.

We may begin with 2 Corinthians 5: 16-19, in the call for reconciliation is made:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

In the John 20:19-23, the resurrected Jesus gives the commission that is fulfilled in the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

The Anointing of the Sick is a continuation of Jesus’ healing ministry, which has numerous citations in the gospels, as well as its extension with the apostles in the Acts of the Apostles. In James 5:13-16, we find an affirmation this sacrament and ministry:

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Chapter 4: The Church in Catholic Tradition (total 14 pages)

A. The organization of the early Church (3)

Was there a confusion about the structure of the early Church and its ministries?

To say that there was confusion about the structure of the early Church is to miss the point that there were always competing theologies and polities (forms of Church governance) throughout the history of the Church. The diversity of organizational forms was evident in the early Church.

Prior to beginning of the 2nd century, the various Christian communities around the Mediterranean showed a variety of structure, but was always under the leadership and governance of the bishops, who succeeded the apostles. For example, there is evidence that a council of presbyters might have led the Church in Corinth before the 2nd century (Letter from Saint Clement of Rome to the Corinthians). However, the Catholic structure solidified by the time of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, who died in AD 110. The accepted structure was that of a bishop, with a council of presbyters, and deacons. Each city had its own bishop.

There is ample evidence in the writings of all the Church Fathers that this model quickly became the standard for the Christian Church. All other models were considered irregular and unacceptable. Thus, the Catholic model of bishop-presbyter-deacon was developed throughout the Christian Church, East and West.

What was the structure of the early Church, and how is it a model for synodal polity?

Throughout the early Western Church, the people elected their bishop, who was then consecrated as bishop by the other bishops of a metropolitan region. This model of election of the bishop by the people was practiced even in Rome during the majority of the first millennium. Two popes (Celestine I and Leo I) of the 5th century condemned the imposition of a bishop upon the people of a diocese without their consent. A well-known quote from Pope Leo I says, “The one who is to govern all and should be chosen by all.” (Pope Leo I, Letter 10, no. 6)

Metropolitan regions were led by a metropolitan archbishop, who had some jurisdiction over other bishops, but governed in consensus with all the bishops in an Episcopal synod. Often, lay leaders (such as civil authorities) may have participated in synods. Some synods were called by the emperor, or local civil authorities, with the votes of the bishops deciding issues, which were then promulgated by the civil authorities.

An example is in Carthage, at the time of Saint Augustine, when the Roman emperor sent a tribune to Carthage to require the Donatist and Catholic factions to settle their differences. After debate and resolution, the tribune reported back to the emperor, who then decreed that the Donatist bishops, and their congregations, had to conform to Catholic practices, and come into the Catholic jurisdiction.

When did priests and bishops emerge as leaders and teachers?

Father John A. Sullivan, S.J., published a landmark book in 2001, entitled “From Apostles to Bishops, the Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church.” In this book he describes the quick development of the present form of episcopacy in the early Church. The form has

changed in terms of jurisdiction, and varies in different Catholic Churches (Orthodox Churches, the Old Catholics, etc.), but the structure of the bishop as the senior ordained leader of a diocese has continued from the first century onward. The ministry of the bishop is to teach, govern and sanctify. Thus the bishop is the primary theologian, primary administrator and primary celebrant of the Eucharist and the sacraments.

However, there is also ample evidence of the participation of the clergy and laity in the decisions of the bishop. The great African saint and martyr, Cyprian of Carthage (about AD 250), gave the following formula for the administration of his episcopacy:

I have made it a rule, ever since the beginning of my episcopate, to make no decision merely on the strength of my own personal opinion without consulting you [the priests and deacons] and without the approbation of the people. (Letters 14:4)

Aren't lay people allowed to teach or to lead public worship?

Certainly lay people who are prepared and educated have taught the faith since the first days of the Church. These are the catechists, who are authorized to teach by their bishops. Laity also have other liturgical roles in the Church. Qualified laity preach at the liturgy; and it is common for the laity to serve as readers of the readings from the Old Testament and New Testament Letters at the Eucharist, distribute Holy Communion at Mass, and take Holy Communion to the sick, lead the music at liturgy, etc. Yet, the sacraments are administered by a deacon or presbyter, and the Eucharist always has a presbyter (priest) as its celebrant (just as the Sacrament of Reconciliation is always administered by a priest). Finally, only a bishop may ordain presbyters, deacons or other bishops (more than one bishop is required for the ordination of a bishop).

Occasionally, we see deacons or qualified laity conducting a communion service, but this is different from the celebration of the Mass. And it is common for qualified laity to teach classes on doctrine, Scripture, sacraments, etc. The laity also lead retreats, serve as spiritual directors, participate in the governance of the Church through parish councils; and are delegates to the diocesan and national synods of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. They often serve as the representatives of the Presiding Bishop and the diocesan bishops to various conferences.

The laity are finally returning to the proper place of their own ministries. They are the people who live the Christian faith in the various walks of life – “in the world.” The clergy are really ordained to support and assist the laity in this ministry. The laity are the icons of Christ to the world – that the world may see Christ in their love, compassion and sense of justice. This is confirmed by Ephesians 4: 11-13, which reminds us that:

Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

B. Ecclesiology and the meaning of the Church (4)

What are some models of the Church? Is one of these models better than the others?

“Models of the Church” may mean images of the Church that give some sense of its character. One such model is that of the Church as “The Pilgrim People of God,” on the journey together – like the archetype of the ancient Hebrews of the Book of Exodus. Another model is that of a great ship – often used by the Church Fathers – that reminds us of both the Ark of Noah, which carries all to safety; and the boat of the apostle Peter, which carries Jesus and the disciples on a journey to a distant shore. These images of the Church have no “better” or “worse,” but are simply archetypes that convey the mission and ministry of the Church. There are other models as well.

“Models of the Church” also refers to the various forms of governance (called polity) in the realms of Christian ecclesial structure. There are three basic models of Church governance in the Christian world. Denominations use a variation of these three:

The Episcopal Model is based upon bishops as leaders – the senior authority in teaching, sacraments and administration. In some Churches, the bishops are elected, while in others they are appointed. Some Churches have a polity in which the clergy and laity participate in the legislation of the Church – called general synods. The administrators of the Church are the bishops, with authority concerning the communities and clergy of the jurisdiction. In this model, ordination has a permanent sacramental character. Examples of this model are the Episcopal Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church, as well as a number of Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The Presbyteral Model does not have bishops. It is governed by a board that oversees the ministry of the clergy, and provides clergy for the communities of the jurisdiction. Communities are governed by some combination of self-governing boards and regional boards, composed of laity and clergy. Congregations are generally autonomous, but belong to a synod or regional conference. Clergy belong to a governing board that has jurisdiction over them – a kind of order of clergy. Clergy are appointed by a governing board, after a process of “call” is

completed by a congregation. In this model, ordination is an office of the Church. One example of this model is the Presbyterian Church.

The Congregational Model is governed by a conference of congregations, and also does not include bishops. Clergy may be credentialed and licensed (and ordained) by a clergy board of governance. Congregations are autonomous, but belong to a conference. Clergy may belong to an association, but the local congregation is the determinant of clergy ministry. No board appoints the pastor of a congregation. In this model, ordination is an office in the Church. One example of this model is the Baptist Church.

Catholics, by definition, are of the Episcopal Model, with the bishop holding the place of chief shepherd, chief teacher and chief administrator. In the ECC, the bishop (nationally it is the Presiding Bishop) governs in consensus with the synod, composed of two houses of legislation: the House of Laity and the House of Pastors. Additionally, some legislation on the national level, and all juridical (courts of review and appeal) are the jurisdiction of the Episcopal Council. The local bishop of a diocese is the chief shepherd, chief teacher and chief administrator of the diocese, but must govern in consensus with a diocesan synod composed of lay and clergy delegates from the parishes and other faith communities of the diocese.

Conciliarism is the ancient model of Church in which many voices participate in the direction of the Church. (The word “conciliar” comes from Latin, while its counterpart “synodal” comes from Greek.) In conciliar or synodal polity, the voices of the bishop, laity and clergy participate on the local level of diocese in the life and direction of the Church. On a larger level – such as an international level – the bishops have traditionally come together in an “ecumenical council” to give voice and vote to the direction and governance of the Church. Their voices are balanced by the voices of the patriarchs, such as the Pope, who is the Western Patriarch as the Bishop of Rome, and generally recognized as a point of unity for the universal Church. The bishops are wise to listen to the *sensus fidelium*, which is the lived experience of the faithful Catholic people who exercise their faith in everyday life. The ECC espouses this ancient tradition of conciliarism/synodalism, as re-energized in the work of the Second Vatican Council.

Just as the word “democracy” requires elements of free speech, voting rights, a free press, an educated population, etc., so too the word “Catholic” requires elements of the authority of the bishop, the traditional seven sacraments, the understanding of the Eucharist as both the Sacrifice of Christ and Sacred Meal, Marian devotion, etc. The Ecumenical Catholic Communion fulfills the definition of “Catholic” by its inclusion of all these elements.

When is the Church really complete as the Body of Christ and the People of God?

The Church is complete when the bishop is present and united with the people and clergy, which happens especially at the Eucharist. This understanding of the Church is “holographic.”

What is meant by this is that the diocese is not simply a branch or piece of the Church; it is the Church, whole and complete. Whether the bishops are gathered together as a national synod with the clergy or people; or, the bishop is simply gathered with the people and clergy for the simple celebration of the Eucharist, an ordination or a diocesan synod: the Church is fully constituted.

This understanding of the Church is evident in the New Testament, with such a passage as the one from Colossians 1:17-18, which speaks about the Church, with Christ as the head:

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church...

And such passages that talk about “the Church in Corinth,” “the Church in Ephesus,” etc., like this one from Corinthians 1:1-2, in which begins the letter from Saint Paul:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

In these passages, the Church is fully constituted – large or small – with its gifts and ministries, as full and complete in each location – as well as fully constituted around the world as one Body of Christ. Saint Paul also gives this image of the Church as the Body of Christ in other passages:

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. (Romans 12:4-6)

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. (1 Corinthians 10:14-17)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Corinthians 12: 27-31)

Another New Testament passage speaks eloquently of the identity of the Church as the People of God, reminding its readers of the image of the Hebrew people being led by God through the desert to the Promised Land:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

There is one more image that has not yet been mentioned, of the Church as a holy building, made of living stones:

As you come to him, the living Stone —rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Why is Mary called the Mother of the Church, and what is her special relationship with the Church?

Mary is the mother of Jesus. Mary has been seen in a special light from the earliest days of the Church. Because Catholics believe that Jesus is the Son of God – the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – Mary is called the Mother of God. This affirms Jesus as a Person who is fully human and fully divine. Mary's own body was given to form the body of Jesus, for he is truly human. Jesus is also truly God, and Mary carried Jesus within her body, as every human mother does.

Mary is the Mother of the Church, the Body of Christ. By bearing Jesus into the world she also bore the entire plan of redemption of God into the world – the life, death and resurrection, the ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit, all came into the world through Mary's "Yes" to God's call: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

Mary is the icon of the Church because she is filled with Christ and bearing Christ into the world. She is "full of grace", as the angel of Luke 1 tells her – transformed by the divinity of Christ. She is divinized – sharing the divinity of Christ, as all Christians share it by his saving presence in us. Mary is an image of the Church, and the first to hear the saving message of Christ. She is the Mother of the Church. The early Christian writers saw this in the last act of Jesus, as he was dying on the cross. They interpreted this as not simply giving his mother to his beloved disciple, but to the whole Church:

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27)

C. Church and sacraments (4)

How is the Church itself a sacrament?

The Church is a sacrament because it is a living sign of God's saving presence through Jesus Christ, which actualizes that presence in the world. The Catholic understanding is that a sacrament is not just a symbol, but that it effects what it symbolizes – a means of grace. So it is with the Church: it effects what it symbolizes. The Church is a symbol of the kingdom of God and, through the mission and ministry of the Church, that kingdom is experienced in the world.

Some may criticize this understanding of the Church, saying that throughout history the Church has been prejudiced and abusive – that it does a poor job of witnessing the kingdom of God to the world. The criticism is merited, but goes too far in saying that the Church is not an icon of God's saving presence. Like any sacrament that is poorly celebrated, the Church can be a poor symbol of God. It can fail at conveying the love of God, God's mercy or God's wisdom. If the Church is a window into God, then the window can be so encrusted with dirt that light will not shine through – but that does not stop the window from being a window.

So too, the Church is in need of reform, so that it can be a living symbol that brings the presence of Christ into the world – into the lives of those who belong to the Church, and into the lives of others who are touched by Catholics. The Holy Spirit has a way of ensuring this reform – purifying the Church through external and internal forces that cleanse the Church of greed and corruption. Jesus warns his followers of such faults with these words:

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. (Matthew 10:16)

In the gospel of John, Jesus prays for his disciples on the night before he dies. This is a passage from that prayer:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. (John 17:15-19)

How does each sacrament relate to the Church?

Baptism is incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church. Salvation is not just a matter of believing intellectual tenets of faith, but instead it is about living the life of the Church – with its sacraments, its communal life and its ministries of service, as well as its life of personal devotion.

Confirmation (Chrismation) is a strengthening of the power of God, by the Holy Spirit, to live the life and ministry of the Church. The tiny Church gathered in the upper room after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. According to Acts 2:1, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” This was the Church prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit – the Advocate promised by Jesus:

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:2-4)

Confirmation is linked to Baptism as a sacrament of initiation, along with the Eucharist. It is the completion of the mission of Jesus: the bestowal of the Spirit upon the Church.

Eucharist is the third sacrament of initiation. It is also a strengthening of the Church – through an intense experience of its identity. At Eucharist the Church experiences Christ, and realizes itself as the Body of Christ. Christ is intensely and fully present in the congregation, in each member, in the ordained ministers of the liturgy, in the proclamation of the Word, in the bread and wine consecrated as the Body and Blood of Christ – in a myriad of ways, the One Christ is present and transforming all who are present to him.

In Holy Matrimony, the Church experiences its means of life and growth. Everyone belongs to a family – even if the other members of the family are dead or alienated. The family is sanctified in Holy Matrimony. It is a “little church” because “two or three are gathered” in the name of Christ. (Matthew 18:20) All the future members of the Church will come from families. The members of the Church are nurtured in families – children grow in families. The greatest

ministry of spouses is to lose the ego-self, and meld one's identity with the other spouse. Jesus emphasizes this in the strongest terms, as he quotes from the creation story of Genesis, and speaks a difficult saying against divorce:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19: 3-6)

Marriage is one school of Christian love for the members of the Church, as shown by the most popular reading at Christian weddings:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8)

The Sacrament of Holy Orders gives ordained leadership to the Church. The ministry of the Church belongs to the entire Church – all the members. But there are different roles in the Church – different ministries to the Church. Those ordained are to be icons of Christ for the Church, just as every baptized member of the Church is to be an icon to the world, and as spouses are to be icons of Christ to each other – and parents to their children.

That image of Christ for the Church begins with the bishop. It is through the ministry the bishop that all the sacraments are given to the Church. The bishop is a spiritual father/mother to the Church – giving life and guidance as the chief celebrant of all the sacraments and the chief teacher. The bishop ordains the presbyters and deacons of the Church, for service in its communities of faith. The presbyters serve the Church by the administration of the sacraments and teaching the Gospel – keeping the unity of the faith community. Deacons have an affinity with the outreach of the Church – specific ministries of service. They have always been the outreach to the marginalized:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:1-4)

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is meant to heal the divisions of the Church. “Sin” is a very unpopular word in modern culture – often stirring resentment from childhood experiences of the excessive promotion of guilt. Yet sin can easily be seen as an act that damages the relationship with another – all sin is communal, in that it somehow harms others. Even actions that harm the self – like the extreme act of suicide – damages those surrounding the one who commits the act. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a remedy for “sin.” The confessor is to act as a doctor of the soul – examining the circumstances and applying the love of God as the healing agent. The “penance” given is not meant to make up for the act, but to move the penitent to a place of restoration – the true justice of God. The transformation of God’s grace heals the alienation of the one confessing – the reconciliation with the Church at large. The confessor then helps the one confessing with the first step (like getting out of bed after a major surgery), which is a strategy for recovery.

The Anointing of the Sick is also a healing agent – for the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of mind and body. It is also an agent of comfort in the anguish of suffering and pain – a manifestation of “the human condition.” While we may not witness many miracles – as in the ministry of Jesus in Palestine 2000 years ago – we do find a ministry of love (and perhaps a miracle now and again) in this sacrament. It is meant to restore the members of the Church to their lives and ministries as Christians. Jesus’ ministry to the sick was extensive, according to the gospels. Saint Peter cites this in his very first sermon after the Pentecost experience in the upper room:

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.” (Acts 2:22)

The Church continues this ministry by all its sacraments and teaching; and ministers to its own members in their suffering through the Anointing of the Sick.

D. Church leadership and apostolic succession (3)

Does the entire Church inherit the Catholic faith, and how does this apply to each person who is a baptized Christian?

In the past, the impression might have been given that the Church belongs to the clergy. This was never the intention of Jesus Christ. The clergy do not own the Church; no one owns the Church. All are invited into the Church of Christ through faith and the sacraments, beginning

with baptism. All are inheritors of the Catholic faith, without regard to his or her place of ministry in the Church.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs —heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8: 16-17)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3: 26-28)

How are bishops the successors of the apostles, and why is this so important for Catholic faith?

In the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:15-26), the entire apostolic community of Christians is gathered in the upper room, before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The structure of the Church is evident in its seminal form, as the community chose two men to replace Judas, and the community prayed for guidance. After casting lots, Mathias was chosen. The Scripture then says, "So he was added to the eleven apostles." This is scriptural evidence that the continuation of the ministry of the apostles was important for the apostolic community. In other words, the apostolic ministry was not simply to be the witness to the resurrection, it was to continue as a ministry of the Church.

The continuance of the ministry of the Church is evident in three areas:

- ❖ **Word** There is a continual preaching of the Gospel, and a passing of the sacred Scriptures as the initial witness. Faithfulness to the witness of the Scriptures is one form of faithfulness to the apostolic faith.
- ❖ **Sacrament** The celebration of the sacraments from generation to generation is another form of faithfulness to the apostolic tradition of faith. It is seen even in the first generation, as Saint Paul gives witness to passing on the apostolic Eucharistic tradition:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26)

- ❖ **Authority** The Lord Jesus chose twelve apostles as the senior leadership of Church. They continued the apostolic tradition by the laying on of hands. In the apostolic community there is a distinction between apostles and elders. The apostles continued in the line of bishops, ordained through the laying on of hands. They also followed the apostolic tradition of other leaders (such as the “elders” cited above) who were presbyters and deacons.

Christianity is not a matter solely of right doctrine, but also of right sacramental worship. It involves faithfully carrying on the traditions of the apostles. Apostolic succession is one guarantee of the continuance of authentic Catholic faith. The authority of the Church is centered upon the episcopacy as the chief teachers and chief sacramental celebrants of the faith. They are a guarantee of the authenticity of the core beliefs cited above (Word, Sacrament and Authority).

It is important to note that the bishops are ordained into a *collegium* of bishops. They participate with other bishops in a “communion” of Catholic orthodoxy. This *collegium* is essential to understand the nature of authority in the Church, which is conciliar and synodal.

What is synodal polity and why is it the basis of the structure of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion?

Synodal polity is ancient, and can be found in the Acts of the Apostles. It means that various voices come into “communion” to share in the life of the Church. That communion is expressed in the polity of the Church – its governance. This means two things:

- ❖ Various voices are expressed on the diocesan (local Church) level in the governance of the Church. Thus, the voices of the bishop, laity and clergy are expressed in the diocesan synod.
- ❖ Various voices are expressed on the universal level, through the communion of the bishops, as the elected senior leaders of each diocese. This is conciliar Catholicism, which traces its history throughout history in the ecumenical and regional councils of the Church (also called “synods”).

Synodal polity is seen in the earliest writings about the Church, the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 1, when the apostles sought a replacement for Judas, after his betrayal and death, they asked the community to choose candidates. Likewise, in chapter 6 of the Acts, the apostles again ask the community to choose the candidates who will be ordained as deacons by the apostles. The

principle of multiple voices being involved in the discernment and direction of the Church is shown by these two examples.

Throughout the history of the early Church, this principle of the engagement of voices of the bishop, laity and clergy in a continuous conversation is seen as a strength:

- ❖ In the third century, Saint Cyprian was the Bishop of Carthage, in North Africa. This great saint was eventually martyred for his faith. As bishop, he wrote the following:

I have made it a rule, ever since the beginning of my episcopate, to make no decision merely on the strength of my own personal opinion without consulting you [the priests and deacons] and without the approbation of the people. (Letters, 14:4)

Saint Cyprian of Carthage offered this testimony about the election of bishops in the early church:

It comes from divine authority that a bishop be chosen in the presence of the people before the eyes of all and that he be approved worthy and fit by public judgment and testimony.

When Cornelius was elected pope in 251, Cyprian wrote these words in a letter to a colleague:

Cornelius was made bishop by the judgment of God and His Christ, by the testimony of almost all the clergy, by the vote of the people who were then present, by the assembly of venerable bishops and good men.

- ❖ Celestine I was Pope (422-432). He defended the election of bishops by the people. Pope Celestine wrote: "No one who is unwanted should be made a bishop; the desire and consent of the clergy and the people and the order is required" (Epistolae 4.5, PL 50:434-35).
- ❖ From the very beginning of church history, bishops were elected by the laity and clergy of the various local churches, or dioceses. And this included the Bishop of Rome, known more popularly as the pope. In the 5th century, Saint Leo I, the Bishop of Rome (440-461), wrote these words: "He who is to preside over all must be elected by all."

The historical evidence for conciliar and synodal polity (Church discernment, governance and direction) is overwhelming, and has become the central focus of Catholic renewal in the ECC.

How is synodal polity a reflection of the Holy Trinity?

The Holy Trinity is dynamic, relational and understood as complete unity with distinction of the Three Persons. Synodal polity strives to mirror the Trinity in these qualities. It is a dynamic and loving conversation between the three distinct voices of bishop, laity and clergy – united as

one, and reflecting One Church, the Body of Christ. The three voices are given clarity through the houses of polity, and the Presiding Bishop with the Episcopal Council.

How does the meaning of the Church relate to the role of the bishop?

The bishop is to bring unity to the Church by witnessing to the voice of the past (the Catholic tradition), and by supporting the voices of the laity and clergy in his jurisdiction (which is normally the diocese.) The bishop is the chief shepherd of the diocesan Church, and as such is the prime teacher, prime celebrant of the sacraments and prime administrator. This role of the bishop as chief shepherd is cited in Canon 23 of the constitution of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. *This is best accomplished in small dioceses*, where the people have access to their bishop, and the bishop functions as the spiritual guide for the communities of the diocese, its people and its clergy.

What is the difference between consecration as a bishop and jurisdiction as an ordinary of a diocese, or as the Presiding Bishop?

Consecration as bishop is a sacrament of the Church. As such, it is permanent, and gives to the bishop the power to exercise her/his ministry as bishop, but not the authority to exercise that power. It is the Holy Synod of the ECC that *confirms* the jurisdictional authority to diocesan bishops, after they have been chosen by their people.

Sacramental consecration gives the power to the bishop for his teaching, sacramental and liturgical function, but election to the position of diocesan bishop (ordinary of the diocese) authorizes the function of the bishop, which is confirmed by the synod.

For bishops who are not ordinaries, their sacramental consecration gives them the power to act as bishops, but they act as representatives of the Presiding Bishop or the diocesan ordinary – they are called “suffragan” to the bishop they represent.

The Presiding Bishop, as with all other bishops, derives her/his sacramental and teaching power and authority from sacramental consecration as bishop, but derives her/his jurisdiction from election by the Holy Synod.

What is the difference between a suffragan bishop and a bishop who is a diocesan ordinary?

A suffragan bishop represents either the Presiding Bishop, or the ordinary of a diocese. If the suffragan bishop represents the ordinary of a diocese, she/he is an auxiliary bishop – usually consecrated as bishop to serve a particular population. (For example, an auxiliary bishop may assist the ordinary by serving the Spanish-speaking people of the diocese, especially when the ordinary does not speak Spanish, and thus serving the whole diocese.)

When the bishop is suffragan to the Presiding Bishop, she/he may represent the Presiding Bishop in service to a specific population (again, such as the Spanish-speaking), but more often serves as a regional bishop – forming a regional mission with a dean (who is elected by the clergy of that region) and an advisory council (composed of laity and clergy from the communities of the region), until the time that the region is large enough to form a diocese with its own elected bishop (ordinary of that diocese) and diocesan synod.

E. The Ecumenical Catholic Communion in the Catholic tradition

How is the Ecumenical Catholic Communion authentically Catholic?

Words can describe qualities. For example, the word “democracy” is used to describe a country. What are the elements of democracy? The word does not simply mean that the citizens vote. It also means that they are educated enough to vote; that there is a free and independent press, that commerce is generally open but regulated, that the judicial system is free from political constraint and free to exercise the law without undue pressure, etc. This is what we mean when we use the word “democracy.”

The same can be said of the word “Catholic.” To say that a Church is Catholic describes elements embraced by that Church. These elements can be found in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), and are expressed through the ECC constitution. They can be listed as:

- ❖ A foundational faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Savior of the world is proclaimed by the ECC and its communities of faith.

- ❖ The Scriptures (Old and New Testament) as the sacred foundational record of faith, and affirmed as such by the ECC.

- ❖ The ECC embraces and affirms the tradition of the Church (beginning with Scriptures as normative) as the guide for authentic faith – continuous thread of belief and understanding, according to the creeds of the great ecumenical councils. (The Nicene-Constantinople Creed is generally considered normative in the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox world.

- ❖ The ECC maintains the tradition of the sacraments – generally numbered as seven – with an understanding that they are the presence of Christ, and the work of Christ. The sacraments are an authentic encounter with Christ – each sacrament bestowing a grace for a special purpose, by the work and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

- ❖ The Eucharist is central to the Church, and affirmed as such by the ECC. In the ECC, the Mass is affirmed as the timeless sacrifice of Christ on the cross at Calvary – and his resurrection and triumph over death. We participate in his life, death and resurrection through our participation in the Eucharist, and by receiving Holy Communion, which we believe is the Body and Blood of Christ.

- ❖ The tradition of apostolic succession: The Church is the community that inherits the faith of the apostles; and the bishops are within the Catholic community of faith as the successors of the apostles. The ordained ministry is bishop in the apostolic succession, with presbyter and deacon ordained by the bishop as successor of the apostles. The bishops succeed the apostles in the Church as the chief pastors, teachers and celebrants of the sacraments. This does not diminish from leadership among the laity, nor the participation of the priests and deacons in the ministry of the bishop for the Church.

- ❖ For the ECC, the Church is the community of faith which is part of the worldwide Church of Christ. However, each Church (bishop-laity-clergy) is whole and complete in itself as “Church.” The local Church (bishop-laity-clergy) is in communion with other local Churches, while the bishops form a *collegium* – the apostolic order that inherits the consecration and role of the apostles in the original community of the Church. The Church is the gift of Christ, and not simply an organization that fosters faith –it is the Body of Christ, and the People of God, filled with the presence of the Trinity, and guided by the Spirit.

- ❖ The ECC affirms the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in its entirety, while the interpretation of the creed is specific to the Church in each age and culture.

- ❖ The ECC maintains devotion to Mary as the Mother of God (Theotokos), and devotion to the saints – who have gone to be with the Lord Jesus, and are still present in the “communion of saints.”

The Ecumenical Catholic Communion is the name that proclaims three basic elements:

1. It is Ecumenical – dedicated to the unity of the Church, the reconciliation with all Christians and their ecclesial communities. This is central to the mission of the ECC: the restoration of the unity of the Church. Additionally, the openness to all people who embrace faith and peace is affirmed as part of the mission of the ECC, and the continuation of the mission of Christ as Savior of the world.
2. It is Catholic – as explained above, it bears the element of Catholicity, the ancient apostolic tradition. The Catholicity of the ECC is lived out through a sense of justice, in that diverse people are welcomed to participate in the sacramental life of the Church. This diversity is inclusive – male and female, of different sexual orientations, of all ethnicities and races, without regard to educational background, of all political persuasions, and of all social and economic levels.
3. It is a communion – meaning that it is the participation of the whole and complete Church (bishop-laity-clergy) in unity with other such Churches. It is open to communion with other Catholic Churches, East or West.

Additionally, the ECC reflects the authentic marks of the Church. It is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. This is further explained in the section on the creed and the life of faith, under the question below: **“How is the structure of the Church guided by the official creeds?”**

Chapter Five: The Sacramental Life of the Church (total 12 pages)

A. Lex orandi, lex credendi (2)

What is the meaning of “*lex orandi, lex credendi*,” and how does this understanding guide the doctrine and structure of the Church?

If we look at the history of this phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, we will find that its first recorded use was by Saint Prosper of Aquitaine, who was a disciple and defender of Saint Augustine of Hippo. He was also a secretary to Pope Celestine I, the Bishop of Rome (Pope Celestine I also defended the election of bishops, as previously quoted.) Saint Prosper wrote these words:

Let us be mindful also of the sacraments of priestly public prayer, which handed down by the Apostles are uniformly celebrated in the whole world and in every Catholic Church, in order that the law of supplication may support the law of believing. (Indiculus, chapter 8, Denzinger, Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum).

The intent of *lex orandi, lex credendi* is that the doctrines of the Church are informed by the worship and prayer of the Church. There is a temptation to believe that the doctrines are more important formulations of the faith – with the worship added on as an expression of doctrinal statements. However, the opposite is true in the Catholic faith of the Church. Long before the doctrines were systematically formulated by Church councils, they were celebrated in the liturgical language and ritual of the Church – the experience of Catholic faith informing the creedal formulations.

For example, from the beginning Christians celebrated the Eucharist believing that they were celebrating the timeless sacrifice of Christ and his resurrection. They revered the consecrated bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Christ, and received these elements as such in Holy Communion. This was formulated much later in the doctrinal statements of the Church, but believed from the beginning – as evidenced in the liturgical and sacramental prayer of the Church. The same can be said for the doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, honoring Mary as the Mother of God, etc. Each of these doctrines has been celebrated in the prayer of the Church long before they were formulated as doctrinal statements.

Lex orandi, lex credendi becomes a principle for Catholic faith because it allows us to continue the line of authentic faith, as traced through the worship and tradition of the Church. We may interpret this faith in the language of our day, but the experience of the worship of the Church is itself a tradition and guide for our lives. The liturgy, for example, teaches by the very act of prayer.

Again, this points to the fact that our Catholic faith is not simply a matter of believing certain tenets of doctrine. Instead, it is centered on the encounter with God. That encounter is in Christ, which means that Jesus’ experience of God is our experience of God – Trinitarian,

salvific, and within the community of the Church. Jesus' experienced God as ever present – calling it the Kingdom. He prayed to “the Father” as “the Son.” We are made one with that Sonship of Jesus, in and through the life of the Church. We celebrate this in a phrase that teaches us much about what we believe. At the end of each Eucharistic prayer of the liturgy, these words ring out: “Through him and with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever. Amen.”

B. History and theology of the sacraments (8)

Are there really only seven sacraments, and aren't some more important than others?

The Eastern Orthodox Church has never really published a list of the official number of sacraments, although the Roman Catholic Church has done so. There are traditionally seven sacraments: Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation (Chrismation) are the sacraments of initiation. The other sacraments are Holy Orders, Holy Matrimony, Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. These are the traditional sacraments that can be traced throughout the history of the Christian Church. However, official Church pronouncements on each of these sacraments vary in terms of when they received more attention. The history of each as a sacrament can be followed and affirmed. They were also celebrated differently in different times and places. Also, they were more highly standardized, with regulation by canon law, as the history of the Church progressed.

What are the basic teachings regarding each sacrament, and how did each of the sacraments develop over the centuries?

Baptism Baptism is the “door into the Church” in that it is the beginning of life in the Church, the Body of Christ. It is the first sacrament of initiation. The ancient ritual of baptism reveals its meaning fully: the one to be baptized is immersed in water, like a drowning person, and then emerges as “a new creation.” Those who are baptized live a new life in Christ. Baptism takes away original sin – that state into which all are born, the human experience of alienation from self and God. This is an alienation experienced by all creation, but healed by Christ. Jesus teaches that we are to be “born of water and the Spirit, in John 3:5, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.” We are tempted to think that being a Christian is about having the right beliefs, but the sacraments – and specifically this Sacrament of Baptism – remind us that the Catholic Christian faith involves the whole person, body, mind and soul. This sacred ritual is the introduction into the life of Christ – a rebirth, through the life of the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

Infants and children are baptized in the Catholic tradition, precisely because the gift of new life in Christ is beyond just the intellectual understanding of faith. It is given as a grace – a share in the divine life through Jesus Christ. The baptism of adults and children has been practiced since the beginning. The Acts of the Apostles describes a scene in which Saint Paul is speaking with a woman who was a vendor in Phillipi. Her entire household is baptized – implying that everyone in the house, including the children, was baptized:

One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. (Acts 16:14-15)

Later, Paul and Silas are arrested and put into prison. There they speak with the jailor, who asks them about salvation through Jesus Christ:

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved —you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household. (Acts 16:31-34)

A traditional question is, "Must we be baptized to be saved?" The answer is that the Church is the vehicle for salvation in Christ – divinely given to the whole world. Baptism is the entrance into the community of faith – the Church, the Body of Christ. Through the Sacrament of Baptism we begin to live the sacramental life of faith of the Church. Only within the context of the Church do we understand the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism. Outside that context, the elements of faith may appear to be empty rituals, or make no sense at all. The ancient tradition of the Church, supported by the Scriptures, makes the case for the necessity of baptism into Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. At the same time, we believe that God loves all people, and seeks their salvation. We believe so strongly in this affirmation of the universal call to salvation that we cite 1 Corinthians 15: 26-28, which proclaims:

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

The Church also teaches that there is only one baptism – nothing that an individual does can require another baptism (not even a denial of the faith). The only time that someone might be re-baptized is when she/he is not baptized with water (immersion, pouring or sprinkling) and the specific words, “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” – the Trinitarian formula. (This is the formula given by Jesus in Matthew 28: 18-20.) Throughout the centuries, and despite the efforts by a few groups to change this practice, the Church has maintained baptism using water this specific Trinitarian formula – called *forma absoluta* in the Catholic world. We recall the words of Saint Paul:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4: 4-6)

In the Catholic tradition, the ordinary ministers of baptism are ordained clergy: bishops, priest or deacons. It is the Catholic tradition that anyone can baptize in an emergency, when Catholic clergy are not available. For example, when a person who is dying asks to be baptized – and clergy are not available – anyone can do so, using water and the specific Trinitarian formula of “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Such circumstances have sometimes been seen in hospitals, where patients are close to death, or during wartime on the battlefield.

Some ask if Protestants who become Catholics are generally re-baptized. The majority of Protestant denominations use this form of baptism with water and this specific Trinitarian formula – therefore accepted as valid baptism, as understood by the Catholic tradition. This means that, since a person is baptized as a Christian only once, a mainline Protestant is generally not required to be re-baptized in the process of becoming a Catholic.

The Catholic tradition recognizes two other instances as equal to baptism, when baptism with water and the Trinitarian formula has not been possible:

- ❖ Baptism of Desire – When someone wants to be baptized, but is prevented from doing so, and subsequently dies, she/he is accepted by the Church as if she/he had received baptism. This was sometimes the case in the early Church, when adults had a long period of preparation (sometimes as much as two years), and died before being baptized. In these instances, the catechumens (those preparing for baptism) were buried as if they had been baptized.

Therefore, everyone who acknowledges me before people I, too, will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. (Matthew 10:32)

- ❖ Baptism of Blood – This is when someone dies for the faith (martyrdom), without having received the Sacrament of Baptism, she/he is accepted by the Church as if she/he had received baptism. Again, this was sometimes the case in the early Church, during the persecution of the Christians, when catechumens were killed before they could be baptized. The Church Fathers compare the “good thief” at the crucifixion of Jesus to the early Christian martyrs, who were “baptized in their own blood.”

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23: 39-43)

The ritual of the sacrament includes promises to affirm the creed, anointings and other sacred and symbolic rites, and the central sacramental action of water (by immersion, or by pouring or sprinkling on the head) with the specific Trinitarian formula of “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Eucharist

The Eucharist is also a sacrament of initiation. In the Eastern Orthodox Churches the newly baptized receive Holy Communion after Baptism at the Eucharist. This is also done in the Western Catholic Church when adults are baptized at the Easter Vigil, on the night before Easter.

The Eucharist is always celebrated by a bishop or priest (presbyter). A communion service which has no Eucharistic Prayer (Eucharistic Prayer includes such things as the “Words of Institution,” and the calling of the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ) may be administered by a deacon or specially authorized lay minister of the Eucharist (usually a catechist in mission territory).

There are different roles in the Eucharist. A bishop or priest is the celebrant and presides at Eucharist. Deacons participate in the prayers at the altar, having the liturgical task of calling the people to prayer, such as saying, “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith” after the Words of Institution. A deacon or priest reads the Gospel, and the people read the lessons from the Old and New Testaments. The priest prays the Eucharistic Prayer, with specific parts for the people, such as the final “Great Amen.” Along with the priest and deacon, laypeople distribute Holy Communion as Eucharistic ministers of the sacrament. Laypeople also serve as acolytes, holding the book of prayer, carrying the cross and candles, assisting with incense or holy water,

etc. A very powerful ministry for laypeople is that of the sacred music at Mass. It is a vital part of the worship, and requires a strong sense of the liturgy.

The Eucharist is a call and response experience. The priest says, “The Lord be with you,” and the people respond, “And also with you.” Back and forth the words alternate between the priest and the people – calling to mind the voice of God in the life of the People of God. As a people and as individuals, God calls us in many ways. We are asked to respond with faith and love.

Catholics believe that they are participating with the timeless sacrifice of Christ at the Eucharist – sharing in his death and resurrection, his ascension and sending the Holy Spirit, and anticipating his return. Catholics believe that in receiving Holy Communion they are receiving the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ – transformed by Holy Communion and made into One Body of Christ. The consecrated bread and wine are reserved in a special place (usually the tabernacle) because Catholics believe that they remain his Body and Blood after Mass – that which is left is often taken to the sick who were not present at Mass.

The liturgy of the Eucharist has seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time, as well as special feasts and memorials. The sacraments are often celebrated at the Eucharistic liturgy, as are funerals.

Confirmation (Chrismation)

The Sacrament of Confirmation is also a sacrament of initiation. It is celebrated and conferred at the time of baptism in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. This may also be done in the Western Catholic tradition for adults baptized at the Easter Vigil, on the night before Easter. It is the general custom in Catholicism for the bishop to celebrate and give the Sacrament of Confirmation to children, teenagers who were baptized at an earlier time (and to adults who have not been confirmed). Often, baptized adults who become Catholic are confirmed as part of becoming Catholic.

Confirmation involves anointing with Holy Chrism and the laying on of the hands by the bishop. [The Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with Chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”] Holy Chrism is used in other solemn rites of the Church, such as baptism and ordination. (Chrism comes from the same Greek word as Christ – meaning “Anointed.” The Holy Chrism has been blessed by the bishop at the Easter Vigil – on the night before Easter.)

Holy Orders

There are three Sacramental Orders of the Church: bishop, presbyter (priest) and deacon. These are three sacramental orders, and not simply offices in the Church. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is permanent, and not simply an office of the Church. This means that an ordained person retains ordination even when she/he is not in a position of ministry to a specific community in the Church.

- ❖ The bishop is ordained by other bishops. The ordination centers on the laying on of hands (on the head) by the other bishops, while the Book of the Gospels is held over the head of the bishop being ordained. Her/His head is also anointed with Holy Chrism during the ordination, and she/he is vested with the liturgical garb and symbols of the episcopacy (miter, staff, pectoral cross and ring).
- ❖ The priest (presbyter) is ordained by a bishop, who lays hands on the head of the person being ordained, followed by the priests who are present also laying hands on the priest. His hands are anointed with Holy Chrism, and she/he is presented with the chalice and paten used for the Eucharist, and vested with the garb for celebrating the Eucharist (stole and chasuble).
- ❖ The deacon is ordained by a bishop by the laying on of hands (on the head). The newly ordained deacon is presented with the Book of the Gospels, which she/he will read at Mass. She/He is vested with the liturgical garb of the deacon for Mass (deacon stole and dalmatic).

The Sacrament of Holy Orders is understood to set the ordained person apart for service of the Church. She/he has no higher standing than laypeople, but has a different role and function in the Church, and especially at Eucharist.

- ❖ The bishop may celebrate and confer all the sacraments, and preaches at the liturgy as a part of her/his ordained office.
- ❖ The priest (presbyter) may celebrate and confer the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation, the Anointing of the Sick. The priest may celebrate and witness the Sacrament of Matrimony. With special permission from the bishop, the priest may celebrate and confer the Sacrament of Confirmation. She/he has ordinary faculties for preaching at the liturgy.
- ❖ The deacon may celebrate and confer the Sacrament of Baptism, has a specific role and specific functions at the liturgy, and has ordinary faculties for preaching at the liturgy. The deacon may celebrate and witness the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

In the Catholic tradition, the laity have roles and functions at Eucharist that are proper to them, but may not assume the liturgical roles of the ordained members of the Church. The laity read the lessons from the Old and New Testaments, distribute Holy Communion and take it to the sick, teach the faith to adults and children in classes outside the liturgy – and may receive special permission to speak/teach at the time of the homily of the liturgy.

A priest or deacon receives faculties from the bishop of the diocese (ordinary of the diocese) to function and minister within that diocese.

Holy Matrimony

Holy Matrimony is generally called Marriage, and is sacred within the Church. Two people are bound for life by the sacrament. In the Catholic tradition the couple being married are the ministers of the sacrament, with the priest or deacon celebrating and witnessing the Sacrament of Matrimony. The center of the Catholic marriage ritual is the exchange of vows. It is traditional that rings are also exchanged, as well as other rituals to symbolize the joining of their two lives.

Questions of divorce and re-marriage are always difficult in the life of the couple – and in the life of the faith community, the Church. A marriage can die, or the couple could never have had the maturity and strength to enter into the marriage. These vexing matters require the compassion of the Church, its ordained leadership, its lay leadership, and all the members of the Church.

Reconciliation (Penance or Confession)

The bishop and the priest are the ministers of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Scripture citation often used to refer to this sacrament is the resurrection passage in the Gospel of John:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20: 19-23)

The Catholic tradition teaches that this sacrament bestows the forgiveness of personal sins committed after the Sacrament of Baptism. The bishop or priest exercises the sacramental power of the forgiveness of sins by her/his ordination. (A priest is given the authorization to hear confessions by the diocesan bishop.) The prayer and central words of absolution said by the bishop or priest (in recent Catholic tradition) are:

*God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and **I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.***

The Anointing of the Sick

Illness is physical and emotional. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is given for those who are gravely ill, and for those facing illness or medical procedures, such as major surgery. In the Catholic tradition, the sacrament is meant for the healing of the mind, body and soul. It is meant to comfort the person who is ill. The Scripture cited for this sacrament is:

Is anyone among you sick? Let him bring in the presbyters [priests] of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him. (James 5:14-15)

The sacrament is celebrated with the reading of Scripture and prayer. The sacrament is celebrated and conferred with this central prayer, during the anointing of the sick person with Oil of the Sick, which has been blessed by the bishop at the Easter Vigil. In the recent Catholic tradition, the bishop or priest says these words:

Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.

What is the meaning of “grace” in the celebration of the sacraments?

It is important to understand that Catholic understanding of the sacraments includes the belief that each sacrament bestows grace upon the recipient, through the action of the Holy Spirit. The grace given is for the particular call of each sacrament. For example, the grace of Holy Matrimony is for the life of the couple – that they live in love and mutual support. Grace is a term with a long history in Catholic theology.

A basic understanding of grace includes a traditional discussion (especially in Western Christianity) that *sanctifying grace* confers on our souls a new life – a share in the life of God. This is saving grace, which comes from the life of the sacraments and faith – beginning with baptism.

There have been many disagreements, in the course of Church history, about the loss of sanctifying grace as a result of serious sin (traditionally called mortal sin). And this traditional language regarding grace now has often become secondary to language based upon scriptural terms. Thus, we may talk about the meaning of salvation in Christ, about serious sin, and about how God saves and transforms us through the work of the Holy Spirit – Christ sharing his divine with us, as the Son of God. But now, the

discussion more often takes the form of New Testament language, the words of the Documents of Vatican II, and modern recent theologians of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions.

Along with sanctifying grace, the term *actual grace* has also been used in traditional writings of an earlier time, such as the catechisms of the 19th and 20th centuries. Actual grace is the strength that God gives us – again by the work of the Holy Spirit – to live the life of faith. Events, people and circumstances are often seen as actual graces to help us with the Christian life.

Traditional language also referred to individuals living in *the state of grace*. This meant that they lived with that divine life in them. This state could be lost by serious sin, according to traditional teaching. Thus people received sanctifying grace by baptism, were renewed in it by other sacraments, and restored to it by the sacrament of reconciliation (confession). Yet such a system became confusing and a bit mechanistic for many Catholics.

In the Eastern Church, the understanding of grace became simply the indwelling of the Holy Trinity – that God dwells within us and guides us by that indwelling through the many circumstances and events, and leads us to people who will support us in our journey of faith. For the Christians of the Eastern Churches, the term *deification* is the answer when asked about the grace of God. This basic belief of Eastern Christian spirituality is that we are being transformed into the image of Christ, to dwell with the Trinity. This is by the life of the Church, its sacraments, and devotional life to prayer and the study of the scriptures – all a part of tradition of the Church.

C. The Church as minister and guardian of the sacraments (2)

How does the Church minister the sacraments?

The Church ministers the sacraments in the assembly of the faithful. In other words, the sacraments are not private ceremonies, although they are personal for the people receiving them. They may be administered to someone who is alone – such as someone who is sick and alone – but the sacraments are the ceremonies of the Church. In a sense, the entire Church – the Body of Christ – is present when the sacraments are celebrated. The Church across the earth is present at each sacramental celebration because all are made one in Christ, and it is Christ that administers the sacrament through his Church.

Must a priest be the minister of the sacraments?

There are different roles in the Church. The laity have the great ministry of praise, which includes the music ministry and the prayer of the people at the Eucharist and the other sacraments. The laity also have roles as readers of the Old and New Testament Lessons. With

the priest and deacon, the laity are Eucharistic ministers, distributing Holy Communion to the congregation, and taking Holy Communion to the sick who cannot attend Mass.

The bishop or priest is the celebrant of the Eucharist and the other sacraments. The deacon may celebrate and confer baptism, as well as witness the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The deacon rightly proclaims the Gospel at Mass – or the bishop or priest.

The roles are iconic, and speak in their contribution to the ministries of the Church. For example, the liturgy of the Eucharist is a call and response song of praise, alternating between the ministers at the altar and the congregation. This ancient tradition is based upon the sacrament of Holy Orders, in which particular people are set apart for service to the Church. While the laity also serve the Church, the ordained members do so in sacramental settings. This is the extension of the ministry of the bishop, who shepherds the Church. Roles are not meant to create levels of Christians, but are the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ. Just as Christians are icons of Christ in the world and to each other, the ordained ministers are icons of Christ to the assembly of faith, the Church.

Can laypeople administer the sacraments?

Laypeople have ministries such as reading the Lessons of the Mass from the Old and New Testaments, and distributing Holy Communion. They do not preside at the Eucharist, not celebrate and confer the Sacraments of Baptism (unless it is in an emergency), the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Sacrament of the Sick, nor the Sacrament of Holy Orders (which is only celebrated and conferred by the bishop). They are the ministers of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, but cannot witness a marriage as the official representative of the Church.

How is the Church the guardian of the sacraments?

- ❖ **Authenticity** The Church is the witness to the authenticity of the Sacraments. They are from Christ, and given through the apostles as part of the sacred faith. They are passed from age to age, but remain faithful to the original understanding, though they are celebrated distinctly in each age.

- ❖ **Integrity** The Church ensures that the sacraments are not abused, sold, or celebrated in a way that will compromise their authentic meaning and intention. This is often referred to as the validity of the sacrament. The ministers of the sacraments are prepared and worthy candidates, who understand the sacraments, and celebrate them

in accordance with the apostolic tradition, and the traditional understanding of the Church. (This is the tradition of the Church, not traditionalism.)

- ❖ **Inclusivity** The Church is to seek the widest understanding of inclusion in the sacramental life of the Church because the sacraments are intended for the life of the world:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

At the same time, the Church must remain faithful to the apostolic tradition in sharing the sacraments, so that the authenticity, integrity and solemnity are not compromised. This balance requires a sense of justice and pastoral skill.

- ❖ **Solemnity** The sacraments are celebrated with reverence. This may mean a simple and quiet celebration, enthusiastic music, or a large and very formal celebration of the Mass and the sacraments. Yet each celebration still has a sense of the holy – that God is present in the People of God, and coming in a special way through the sacraments.

This requires a “progression of solemnity.” This means that the intimacy of a small group celebrating the sacraments will be different from a large Church celebrating a special event. Between these two polarities lie all sorts of differences in the way the Mass and sacraments are celebrated.

A Mass may be said or sung – with more of the Mass sung for special celebrations. For example, a small group celebrating a Mass in a home will probably stand together around the table used for the altar. A large parish of a few hundred people celebrating Christmas Mass will sing and chant together, use incense, banners, special decorations, etc. All this requires ministers (music ministers, readers, deacons and priests – and perhaps the bishop) who are trained in liturgical worship, have an aesthetic sense of what is appropriate for each setting, and have the resources to celebrate “the sacred mysteries” in a manner appropriate for the setting and time.

The liturgical seasons each set a tone for the celebration of the Mass and the sacraments. For example, during Lent the Mass is usually very simple. Much of the chant and music reflect a quieter time of reflection and dedication to inner transformation. The liturgy is solemn, but toned down – and preparing for the great burst of celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter, when incense, bells, joyous music and the alleluia will sing out with joy.

Chapter Six: The Creed as Guardian and Guide (total 17 pages)

A. *Early creeds (4)*

Besides the Nicene Creed, are there other authentic creeds of the Catholic faith?

While there are many creeds, the three notable creeds are the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Apostles' Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. A number of councils have also published creeds. A recent creed was that of Pope Paul VI, in 1968.

Two creeds often affirmed by Catholics are the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Apostles' Creed. The creed produced by the Council of Nicea (325) was further developed by the Council of Constantinople in (381) – the creed used in the liturgy. The Orthodox and Catholic Churches did have a dispute over specific words regarding the Holy Spirit – whether to say that the Spirit proceeds “from the Father” or “from the Father and the Son.” While this may seem like a simple difference, the meaning of the Trinity is changed by affirming one version or the other. **Here is the literal text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) translated into English:**

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made:

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man;

And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried;

And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;

And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father;

And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets;

And we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.

We look for the Resurrection of the dead,

And the Life of the age to come. Amen.

In Greek:

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεόν, Πατέρα, Παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων.

Καὶ εἰς ἕνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων· φῶς ἐκ φωτός, Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ, δι οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο.

Τὸν δι ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς Παρθένου καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα.

Σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, καὶ παθόντα καὶ ταφέντα.

Καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς Γραφάς.

Καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ Πατρὸς.

Καὶ πάλιν ἐρχόμενον μετὰ δόξης κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς, οὗ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.

Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, τὸ ζωοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν.

Εἰς μίαν, Ἁγίαν, Καθολικὴν καὶ Ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν.

Ὁμολογῶ ἕν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

Προσδοκῶ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν.

Καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος.

This is a form of the creed that is commonly used at the Eucharistic liturgy (at Mass). The Western version added “and the Son” to the section on the Holy Spirit. It is bracketed here, as well as the use of the word “incarnate/born.” (The word “incarnate” aims at technical precision, and is commonly used in the Eastern orthodox Churches.):

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, True God from True God, Begotten, not made; one in Being with the Father, by whom all things were made:

Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate [born] of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man [human];

And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried;

And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;

And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father;

And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father [and the Son], Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets;

And we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.

We look for the Resurrection of the dead,

And the Life of the age to come. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed is used especially at the beginning of the recitation of the rosary. Its text is as follows:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Did early Christians follow a creed? Wasn't the Church more unregulated at that time?

The creeds did not begin as a new invention of the Church councils. There were early creeds that were used at baptism, prior to the creed developed by the Council of Nicaea in 325. These were affirmations of faith may by the catechumens as a part of the baptism liturgy. Creeds are affirmations of faith. They pre-date Christianity, for there are affirmations of faith in ancient

Judaism, such as the "*Shema*," "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one."
(Deuteronomy 6:4)

There are affirmations of faith throughout the New Testament. Here are a few from the gospels:

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:1)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

Nathan'a-el answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49)

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6: 68-69)

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

1 Corinthians 15:3-7 gives a very long affirmation of faith:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles...

Philippians 2:6-11 also has an affirmation of faith that may have been in standard use, perhaps at baptism or Eucharist. It may have been sung as part of the liturgy:

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death —
even death on a cross!*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

There are also many early summaries of Christian faith which predate the creeds. In his book, "Against Heresies," Saint Irenaeus (130-202) recorded such a summary, generally called "The Rule of Faith."

... this faith: in one God, the Father Almighty, who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all the things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who made known through the prophets the plan of salvation, and the coming, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father to sum up all things and to raise anew all flesh of the whole human race ... :

Saint Hippolytus of Rome (170 – 235), was a disciple of Saint Irenaeus, and wrote this account of the liturgy of the Sacrament of Baptism (in his work, "The Apostolic Tradition," written about the year 215):

When the person being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say: "Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?" And the person being baptized shall say: "I believe." Then holding his hand on his head, he shall baptize him once.

And then he shall say: "Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?" And when he says: "I believe," he is baptized again.

And again he shall say: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the body?" The person being baptized shall say: "I believe," and then he is baptized a third time.

Both of these early Christian texts are very similar to the Apostles' Creed. There is ample evidence that the Church was not unregulated, but had definite liturgical practices that were widespread, as well as a few standard creeds. The Council of Nicaea was called in 325 to settle some serious disputes and conflicts about authentic Catholic doctrine – especially the Arian conflict, which denied the Catholic understanding of the Trinity and the doctrine that Jesus

Christ is fully divine and fully human, “one in Being with the Father” (also read as “consubstantial with the Father.”)

B. *The creed and the life of faith (6)*

How is the structure of the Church guided by the official creeds?

The structure of the creed (Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds) is Trinitarian. It is in three sections – devoted to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The structure of the Church is also Trinitarian – it follows the dynamic flow of the Persons of the Trinity (called the processions and circuminceptions in technical theological terms). This means that the conversation between the distinct elements of the Church mirrors that flow between and among the distinct members of the Trinity.

Additionally, the Church reflects the unity of God: One God in Three Persons. The Church is One. The other marks of the Church reflect the Trinity as well: The Church is holy, and the holiness of the Church is the presence of God within the Church. The Church is catholic – one Body of Christ throughout the world. The Church is apostolic – faithful to the apostolic tradition: it is from Jesus Christ, it is the will of the Father, and the work of the Holy Spirit. This living ministry of Jesus in his Church finds its commission in the words of the resurrected Jesus:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:16-20)

The mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel, as affirmed in the creed. As we read the creed, we see that each statement is taken from the Scriptures. Here are a few references for each statement of the Nicene Creed (again the disputed “and the Son” is included in brackets):

*We believe in one God, (Mark 12:29, 12:32, Ephesians 4:6)
the Father almighty, (2 Corinthians 6:18)
maker of heaven and earth, (Genesis 1:1, Revelation 4:11)
of all things visible and invisible. (Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 11:3)*

*We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:5)
the Only Begotten Son of God, (John 3:16)*

eternally begotten of the Father, (Colossians 1:15, 1:17)
God from God (John 1:1-2),
Light from Light, (John 1:4, 1:9, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Hebrews 1:3)
true God from true God, (1 John 5:20)
begotten, not made, (John 1:14)
consubstantial with the Father; (cf. 1 John 1:5 & John 8:12)
through him all things were made. (John 1:3, 1:10, Colossians 1:16, 1 Corinthians 8:6,
Romans 11:36, Hebrews 1:10)
For us and for our salvation (Matthew 1:21, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Colossians 1:13-14) he
came down from heaven, (John 3:13, 3:31, 6:38)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, (Luke 1:34-35)
and became man. (John 1:14, Hebrews 2:14)

For our sake he was crucified (1 Peter 2:24) under Pontius Pilate, (Mark 15:15)
he suffered death (Matthew 27:50) and was buried, (Matthew 27:59-60)
and rose again on the third day (Mark 9:31, 16:9, Acts 10:40)
in accordance with the Scriptures. (Luke 24:45-46, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9)
and is seated at the right hand of the Father. (Mark 16:19, Luke 22:69)
He will come again in glory (Mark 13:26, John 14:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:17)
to judge the living and the dead (Matthew 16:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 Timothy 4:1, 1
Peter 4:5) and his kingdom will have no end. (Hebrews 1:8, 2 Peter 1:11)

We believe in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), the Lord, the giver of life, (John 6:63, 2
Corinthians 3:6) who proceeds from the Father (John 15:26) [and the Son, (John 16:7)]
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, (2Corinthians 3:8) who has
spoken through the prophets. (1 Peter 1:10-11, Ephesians 3:5)

We believe in one (Ephesians 4:4), holy (Ephesians 1:4, 5:27), catholic (Matthew 28:19,
Acts 1:8) and apostolic (Ephesians 2:20) Church (Matthew 16:18, Romans 12:4-5, 1
Corinthians 10:17). We confess one baptism (Ephesians 4:5, Galatians 3:27, 1
Corinthians 12:13) for the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 2:12-13, Acts 22:16) and We
look forward to the resurrection of the dead (Romans 6:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 4:16) and
the life of the world to come (2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1). Amen.

Like the rest of the liturgy and the sacramental rites, the creed corresponds to the Scriptures. The liturgical, sacramental, devotional, theological life of the Church and its polity, reflect the structure of the creed. As a proclamation of the Holy Trinity, the creed (which is affirmed in full

at baptism) is affirmed each time we begin to join together for the prayer of the Church, with the words, “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

How is each individual’s life of faith guided by the creed?

While the Scripture is written in more descriptive language, the creed is written in the language of definition, using very precise language to express the mystery of God in Christ. Every word was weighed and calculated to express precisely what is meant by Catholic faith. When the Eastern and Western Churches disagreed on one specific word describing the relationship between the Father and the Son, it caused a major split between them.

How does this relate to the individual life of a Christian. One might be tempted to say that this precision is simply the work of theologians, and not very relevant to the faith in God which ordinary people have. This would be a serious mistake. The truth is that “simple faith” can be unexamined faith. Such faith cannot stand for long against the experience of suffering. Additionally, science can explain the function of the universe without referring to God; and secular society promises (somewhat carelessly) that it can make people happy by fulfilling their needs to acquire enough things and remain occupied with family and friends.

The human heart returns again and again to the questions of God and death. We find fulfillment in love, and profound fulfillment in self-giving love: pouring oneself out for others, even without much material or financial compensation. It is love that seems most real – the most authentic thing of all. Love of spouse, family, friends, community and country, as well as love of the stranger in need: these are the experiences that confer the sense of truth, and the strong connection with the very force of life.

The creed is a description of love itself – the outpouring of God from before all time, and the further outpouring in time. In the language of the creed, God is not static, but dynamic and relational; God is not a being, but Being itself. The creed describes the divine outpouring within God and from God – the life within the Trinity, and the life that flows from the Trinity.

That love begins with the Source of all – whom Jesus specifically called “The Father.” Though unseen, the reality of the Father is as present as what we see. From the Father comes the Son, *and we are all part of that Sonship*. Here is what the Scripture says:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1: 15-17)

The creed affirms our connection to God in Christ. All things are created in Christ. For the Christian, this says that we are not simply something that a transcendent God created – an image that the modern developed world often rejects. We are part of the outpouring of the Father – we are “in Christ.” We are in the process of divinization – a return to the Father. This is an image for our hearts, to take us through each day.

Finally, we are in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the community of the Spirit, the Church. We look forward to the works of the Spirit, which is to make all into one (the communion of saints), to heal all wounds (the forgiveness of sins), to transform all that exists (the resurrection of the dead), and to make all one in God (the life of the world to come). We move toward this blessed vision, expressed in 1 Corinthians 15: 26-28.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

What this all means for the personal life of an individual Christian is that we live in faith, hope and love.

- ❖ We live by the path of faith – a trust in the Gospel as a way of life in Christ, and not just a set of beliefs. It is a way to think and perceive the meaning of life – through the eyes of the creed: that life has meaning; that we come from the unseen God and will return to God, and that we are already one with God in Christ, guided by the Spirit of God. We live by *discernment* of the Trinity.
- ❖ We live in hope. There are troubles and mistakes; we often suffer. But we believe in all that “is seen and unseen.” We believe in the outcome that is triumphant in Christ because we fix our eyes on the passing events of each day, but look to the life of Jesus (encapsulated in the creed) as an archetype for our own.
- ❖ We live in love. We believe that love will triumph over all. We believe that we have come from love (“God is love,” says 1 John 4:8) and love shall overcome all things. Love is our guide and our aim. Saint Dominic said it well: “I study the book of love. It teaches me everything.”

The creed is a proclamation of triumph over suffering. It is not simply a set of statements, but a step by step guide to each challenge of life – to overcome anxiety by remembering that all has come from God, and will be reconciled in God. It is a discipline of the mind in the face of the troubles of life.

Do I have to believe the entire creed, and what if I don't accept some of it?

Each segment of the creed is a seed of meditation, carefully crafted to express something deep within our Catholic and Christian faith. Perhaps some of it is not well understood. For example, these words may seem alien to our daily vocabulary:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.

What they refer to is the divinity of Jesus Christ. We cannot connect the belief in our own divinization without that affirmation in Christ. He is “eternally begotten of the Father.” He is “the only Son.” This is essentially saying that there is only one eternal outpouring of the Father – the Son, in whom we exist. We are in Christ. Connect this with the following quote:

But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. (John 1: 12-13)

In affirming the creed, we affirm this belief that we are born of God. It is not simply by human achievement, nor by violence or passion, that the world is shaped – it is ultimately shaped by God, just as each life is shaped by God. This proclamation is the meaning of the creed. If we study it deeply, we will find its meaning for the guidance of each of our lives.

C. The creed as guardian of orthodoxy (4)

What is meant by “orthodoxy,” and why is it important?

The word “orthodox” literally means “right belief” or “right worship.” Orthodoxy means that the doctrines we hold are the traditional doctrines of the Church – authentic Catholic Christianity. Catholic faith is handed from one generation to the next as a way of life, How do we know that the things we say and do are really a part of that way of life – or simply culturally

connected as practices of one group of Catholics? The answer has been given by Saint Vincent of Lerins, who lived in the 5th century, in what is presently southern France. Vincent wrote in his work, “The Commonitory:”

Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense Catholic, which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient [unanimous] definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors. (Commonitorium 2:6)

Saint Vincent urged three tests of Catholicity – universality, antiquity and consent.

- ❖ What is held as Catholic doctrine from the beginning, through the centuries.

- ❖ What is universally held throughout the Church.

- ❖ What is found in the common teaching of the overwhelming majority of ordained and theological leadership, that is: 1) the gatherings of bishops in synods councils, and 2) the recognized and acknowledged major theologians in the history of the Church (commonly called Doctors of the Church).

Additionally, there are three sources that come into alignment for the test of Catholicity: Scripture, the creeds of ecumenical councils, and the tradition of the sacraments. These are the tests of orthodoxy: Is this what we have read in Scripture? Is this what we have proclaimed in creeds? Is this what we have celebrated in the sacraments?

How does the creed guarantee orthodoxy?

The creed’s precision helps the Church and its members to understand the meaning of the faith that we profess. The creed is one central light of orthodoxy. It is definitive language, exacting in its wording, to say what Catholics believe. It is neither the descriptive language often used in Scripture, nor the language of the sacraments, which is often more poetic. Instead, it aims at

clarifying the limits and focus of what is believed – and to exclude what is not believed. The language of the creed must be aligned with the Scripture and the liturgical language of the sacraments to achieve a balanced approach to Catholic faith. Otherwise, relying solely on the creed can lead to a rigid and uninspiring approach to Catholic faith, and gives an inadequate picture of Catholic life.

This is not to denigrate the language of the creed, but to use the creed as it is intended. Just as the creed is one part of the liturgy, so it must be one part of the spiritual life, and not the sole source of guidance. It is the rational and definitive element, and meant to be so. The devotional element of faith speaks to other parts of the human heart, mind and soul. Each must be in combination with the others, and balance each other as healthy and nourishing elements of the spiritual life.

D. The creed as guide for the life of faith and the encounter with God (3)

My relationship with God is very personal; why is the creed important for my personal spiritual life?

Our life of faith and devotion is guided by the specific beliefs expressed in the creed. For instance, there are two philosophies of life that dominate the culture. One is the idea that people are fundamentally dishonest and greedy, and must be limited by the law. The other is that people are basically good, and will live up to that goodness if given the resources. (There is a third philosophy that people are basically neutral, but we generally act according to optimism or cynicism – which gives a clue as to which philosophy we really believe.) Christians believe that we are made in God's image – that God created all, and that creation is good because it is from God, and exists in God. The trouble and failure of life is seen as an aberration – and Jesus liberates us from that fault by taking human suffering onto himself and transforming it. He is fully human and fully divine – the Son of God, begotten of the Father.

These doctrinal beliefs affect personal attitudes because they give the outlook of the mind of Christ. The creed is Trinitarian because Jesus' experience is Trinitarian. The Church has been given the outlook of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who affirms the goodness of humanity, and redeems that goodness from suffering and evil. In Christ death and the triumph over death are accomplished. It is a mystery that will come into every life, and can be met with faith.

While the relationship with God is personal, it is also communal. We are one with each other and can never simply have a relationship apart from others. The creed guides our thinking about life. It guards against extreme views.

Isn't it enough just to follow the two great commandments of Jesus to love God and love my neighbor?

Here is a Scripture passage where Jesus repeats these commandments – which he quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18):

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

Jesus challenges us to live the faith that we embrace – to love God and love our neighbor. How do we love God with our whole being? How do we love our neighbor? The answer is not easy. We will spend the rest of our lives – if we are good Catholic Christians – answering those questions.

Yet, we have the answers of many generations who have gone before us to guide us. They are the saints and great Catholic teachers who speak to us in the living Church – for we believe that they are now with God. Their teaching has spoken about God and about love. It is authentic Catholic teaching that has given great light and direction into the nature of God, our relationship with God, and the meaning of faith. This is embodied in the creed, not simply as a demand for doctrinal purity, but as a light to illumine and strengthen faith.

We now live in a secular society that asks if any faith is needed to do good in the world. Some people even suggest that religion does more harm than good by demanding adherence to doctrine, rather than simply acting with charity. Yet the result of removing religious faith from the human experience has not been the increase of happiness and harmony. In some cases it has meant the loss of any sense of direction – especially in the face of suffering.

The forces of death, greed, prejudice and poverty remain constant in the world. Into this world Jesus was born, with the message of the Gospel. The authentic interpretation of the Gospel, with all its power to transform the human heart and human relationships, is discovered in the creed. Rather than being simply a rule forced upon believers to demand uniformity, it is best interpreted as a description of the mystery of God – the ultimate reality beyond all joy and suffering experienced in human life.

The God of the creed is not a static super-human above the clouds, nor simply a feeling in the human heart. The God of the creed brings all opposites into unity, and erases all boundaries without destroying the uniqueness of every human heart, as well as every atomic particle. The God of the creed seems totally absent from human perception, but is in the very fiber of the universe. This is the Holy Trinity, revealed in Christ, and known in the power of the Spirit. The Trinity is Jesus' own experience, and therefore our experience of God.

E. The Creed and the Ecumenical Catholic Communion

How does the Ecumenical Catholic Communion interpret the creed for our own times?

The Ecumenical Catholic Communion has a traditional interpretation of the creed. This means that the interpretation is well within the Catholic tradition of the Church. The ECC, and its faith communities, affirm the Triune God, and the two natures of Jesus Christ – fully human and fully divine.

If we study the creed carefully, we find that it does not insist on a specific cosmology (structure of the universe), not scientific outlook. Rather, its language is technical to strengthen and assert faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We may add to this, but not subtract from it. For instance, we may say that the Father is the “Source of all Being,” but we are cautious not to change the biblical designation of Father, nor the Triune formula found in Matthew 28:19-20, which instructs us: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

The creed follows the biblical foundation in affirming the doctrine of God, of Christ, and of the Spirit – including the Church and its mission. It is a positive statement, upon which we build the faith of the 21st century. However, we always remember that our faith is built upon the faith of every generation before it.

The creed is not a weapon to force people to believe in a certain manner. It is a guide – a light that defines the search of faith, and its fulfillment in the authentic apostolic and Catholic tradition: God is a mystery of multiplicity and unity, relational yet distinct, a unity of love. Christ is a mystery of God becoming human – a man; of human birth and brutal human death, but also of triumph in the resurrection. In the Spirit, the mission of Christ is fulfilled as humanity is filled with the divine life. The Church is the continuation of the presence of Jesus, and his mission. The creed is a calling to live in Christ, take on his character and his mission, and await his coming in fulfillment of his promise to be with us until the end of the world: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Chapter Seven: Catholic Devotional Life (total 22 pages)

A. Public prayer and private prayer (3)

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the public and private prayer of the Church?

Saint Paul gives a comprehensive teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit in chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans. Here are three passages that teach us about the Spirit and prayer. The

prayer of the Church, and our own private prayer are meant to transform our hearts, that we may hear the Spirit, and be conformed to the image of Christ:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs —heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8: 14-16)

First, the Holy Spirit leads us away from fear and into the sense of intimacy with God. We are awakened to our identity as the daughters and sons of God – “children of God.” This intimacy is compared to the cry of a child, “Abba, Father” the central gesture of our prayer – immediate and trusting. As we share in the suffering of Christ, so too we share in his glory, as we become “co-heirs with Christ,” being changed into his image.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8: 26-27)

Second, the reason that we “do not know what to pray for” is not that we are unaware of our deficits, but that we are unaware of our real needs, “God’s purpose,” which is the weaving of all things for the good.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (Romans 8:28-29)

Those “who love God” seek this weaving into the good as the reason for prayer – to discern the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Ultimately, the greatest purpose is to transform us into the image of Christ – a more profound purpose than the simple fulfillment of any specific need. It is about an identity that goes beyond each life, and even beyond death.

The deepest reason for prayer is not simply to “talk to God,” but to gain the outlook of Christ, for we are being transformed into his image, as children of God. As we gain this outlook, we see the purpose of everything in our lives – the experiences of happiness and the suffering. Even death is transformed in our minds, as an entry into eternal life. Christ is the “firstborn of many brothers and sisters,” and we follow his journey.

I think I encounter God when I pray alone. Do I have to go to Church to find God?

We encounter God everywhere. No one has to go into a church to find God. However, the Church is not the same as a church building – the Church is the People of God. The Church is the Body of Christ, alive and filled with the Holy Spirit.

The responding question of “having to go to Church” is, “Why would anyone not want to be with people who share the same faith?” While the Church has its problems and mistakes, it also has faith, saints who have shown tremendous compassion, the sacraments of Christ, and the treasury of wisdom – which begins with the Scriptures and continues through the excellent teaching on everything from the life of prayer to social justice. The challenge is to find these jewels of the Church – and it’s not really that difficult in this information age – within a community of faith that we can embrace.

We encounter God alone, and with others. This is not a matter of “either-or,” but of both. Jesus promises: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7) The Church is a movement from “me” to “we.” We can only experience this within a community of faith, where we learn to live with others by adjusting our own personalities to blend with the characteristics of other people. This is well symbolized in the Eucharist, which is many grains of wheat and many grapes, now made into one bread and one cup, the Body and Blood of Christ.

Saint Paul reminds us: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20) This means that we endure the struggle of the daily cross – a hard lesson of self-giving love. In doing so, we discover a new life of peace within ourselves and with others. The words of Saint John the Baptist that refer to Jesus (in the Gospel of John) also give us direction: “He must become greater, I must become less.” (John 3:30)

What is the difference between private prayer and the public prayer of the Church?

The prayer of each Christian is fed by the liturgical and devotional prayer of the Church. The reverse is also true. The prayer of the Church, in its sacraments, devotions and daily readings, feeds the personal prayer life of each member of the Church. There is no real division between these two realms of prayer. They are two sides of our devotional life that come together in each human heart.

The private life of prayer is guided by the liturgical life of the Church. The seasons of prayer provide a context for each of us to live out the Gospel, our life in Christ. Through the seasons of the Church year, we examine and celebrate the life of Christ, and reflect upon it within our own lives.

For example, we begin the Church year with Advent, in which we anticipate the coming of Christ. This is a time to examine the mystery of Christ hidden deep within each heart. We find that mystery within our own hearts through the quiet reading of Scripture and books that inspire us, and through the meditative prayer that leads to silence – such as the rosary or other meditation traditions.

B. The centrality of the Eucharist in devotional life (3)

Does “Eucharist” mean taking Holy Communion?

Yes, the Eucharist is “taking Holy Communion,” and that also means much more. At the Eucharist we join with Jesus Christ, who gave his life for the world. We also join with one another, becoming one with Christ. This is especially expressed in the beautiful words from 1 Corinthians:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.
(1Corinthians 10: 16-17)

The Eucharist is the experience and the symbol of our oneness in Christ – his coming and birth, his life, death, and resurrection, his ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit. That unity is characterized by the word “communion,” which reflects and unites us in the life of the Holy Trinity – for we partake in Christ, the Son of God.

What is the role of the Holy Trinity in the Eucharist?

The liturgy of the Eucharist answers this question very well with these words from a prayer before Holy Communion:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, Your death brought life to the world. By Your Body and Blood free me from

all my sins, and from every evil. Keep me faithful to Your teaching, and never let me be parted from You.

In the Mass we are joined to Christ – his life, death and resurrection – as he offers himself to the Father for the salvation and redemption of the world. His offering in time and history is actually timeless, and we participate in it through the Eucharist. The Father is the Source of all Being – all that exists and all that lives. During the Mass we pray that the Holy Spirit transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ – and also make us one in the Body of Christ, the Church. The Eucharist unites us to Christ, through his Body and Blood, and gives us a share in the life of the Trinity, for the Son of God is the second member of the Holy Trinity.

Why is the Eucharist so important to the life of faith?

The life of faith is centered on that sense of “communion” with all. We live to reconcile ourselves with each other and with the entire world. 2 Corinthians tells us that we are ambassadors for Christ in the work of reconciliation:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

These points help us in understanding the Eucharist as the pattern for the life of faith:

- ❖ The life of faith is centered on oneness with God, and oneness with God gives unity to all else. We are in communion with God and each other. The result of this unity and reconciliation is peace: “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)

- ❖ The vision of Christ is unity – that all may return to the Father, through the Holy Spirit. Again and again, the New Testament Scriptures call us to unity:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called ; one

Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4: 3-6)

- ❖ Saint Paul, in his letter to the Romans, quotes the Book of Job, affirming the unity of all with God: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.” (Romans 11:36)

- ❖ The Eucharist celebrates and creates that unity by joining us to Christ. This is a timeless unity, and not just a symbolic action. It unites us to the offering of Christ, so that we fulfill the doxology at the end of the Eucharistic prayer:

Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever.

- ❖ The offering of Christ in the Eucharist looks forward the fulfillment of all the world in Christ, when Christ will “hand over the kingdom to the Father...and God will be all in all.” This vision from 1 Corinthians 15 is the call to unity, that Christ may unite heart and mind within us, and unite all of us in God.

Is it important to believe that we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion?

Again, the quote from 1 Corinthians 10 is pertinent:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

From the earliest times, Christians have believed that in taking Holy Communion they are receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and not just a symbol of Christ. Thus they are receiving the whole Christ – traditionally stated as uniting our body and soul with the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. The Church Fathers vehemently taught that Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Here are a few sample quotes from their writings:

Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote these words in the year 110:

Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God. . . . They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes. (Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2-7:1)

. . . and are now ready to obey your bishop and clergy with undivided minds and to share in the one common breaking of bread – the medicine of immortality, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ for evermore. (Letter to the Ephesians 20)

Saint Justin Martyr wrote in the year 151:

We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [i.e., has received baptism] and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these, but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus. (First Apology 66)

Saint Irenaeus wrote in 189:

He has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own blood) from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase unto our bodies. When, therefore, the mixed cup [wine and water] and the baked bread receive the Word of God and become the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported) how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life — flesh which is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord and is in fact a member of him? (Against Heresies 5:2 [A.D. 189]).

Saint Clement of Alexandria wrote in the year 191:

"Eat my flesh)" [Jesus] says, "and drink my blood." The Lord supplies us with these intimate nutrients, he delivers over his flesh and pours out his blood, and nothing is lacking for the growth of his children. (The Instructor of Children 1:6:43:3)

Saint Hippolytus wrote in the year 217:

"And she [Wisdom] has furnished her table" [Proverbs 9:1] . . . refers to his [Christ's] honored and undefiled body and blood, which day by day are administered and offered sacrificially at the spiritual divine table, as a memorial of that first and ever-memorable table of the spiritual divine supper. [i.e., the Last Supper] (Fragment from Commentary on Proverbs [A.D. 217]).

Cyril of Jerusalem wrote in the year 350:

The bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ. (Catechetical Lectures 19:7)

Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that, for they are, according to the Master's declaration, the body and blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the body and blood of Christ. . . [Since you are] fully convinced that the apparent bread is not bread, even though it is sensible to the taste, but the body of Christ, and that the apparent wine is not wine, even though the taste would have it so. . . partake of that bread as something spiritual, and put a cheerful face on your soul. (Catechetical Lectures 22:6,9)

Saint Ambrose of Milan wrote in the year 390:

Perhaps you may be saying, "I see something else; how can you assure me that I am receiving the body of Christ?" It but remains for us to prove it. And how many are the examples we might use! . . . Christ is in that sacrament, because it is the body of Christ. (The Mysteries 9:50, 58)

The doctrines of the Church are best understood as they are lived, and so it is with the belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The encounter with Christ in Holy Communion is transforming, if we approach with faith. We are reminded of this in the story of Emmaus, when the disciples are awakened to the presence of Jesus in the breaking of the bread:

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:28-32)

Jesus gives us this directive: "Abide in me, and I will abide in you. Just as the branch cannot produce fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." (John 15:4) Catholics have always understood the Eucharist as a way to abide in Christ – intensely and solemnly at Mass.

Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is a beautiful meditation on our own lives: what we see and what we are – our true identity – is like the hiddenness of Christ in Holy Communion. We receive the Body and Blood of the Christ and meditate upon these words:

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:2-3)

C. *The special place of the icon in Christian devotion (2)*

Why are icons very different from Western religious art?

The word "icon" comes from Greek and means "image." It generally refers to the stylized painting of the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic world. Icons are distinct from Western art, in that they are much more symbolic and less naturalistic in style. While Western religious art has its symbolism, icons are totally dedicated to the expression of religious faith and the doctrine of the Church. They are so very dedicated to this that they are said to be "written."

Icons are aesthetic expressions of belief. The icon painter undergoes a fast and an intense time of prayer before beginning the process of painting an icon. Icons are more flat in their

perspective, while Western art (in the last five or six centuries) generally has more perspective in its naturalistic style.

Icons are for devotion. They inspire prayer and meditation on the subject of the icon. It is said that an icon is a window to heaven – to look at the icon and see through the imagery into the unseen reality of God and the saints. Images are stylized in specific postures that teach the meaning of the icon. For example, Mary, the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), is often pointing to Christ, in many icons where they are together as Mother and Child – and in some, their cheeks are touching – giving the message of both intimate love, and slight foreboding for the future in the life of Christ – who will face opposition and death, but ultimately the triumph of the resurrection.

The colors in the icons are also traditional, and teach the doctrine of the Church. Gold signifies the light of heaven, red is used to mean divine life, blue means human life, and white is the Uncreated Light of God. White is used for icons of the resurrection and transfiguration of Christ. In icons of Jesus and Mary, Jesus wears red undergarments with a blue outer garment, giving the message of the Incarnation (God becoming Human); and Mary wears a blue undergarment with a red over-garment signifying the doctrine of “divinization” or “deification, in which humanity is given a share in the very life of the Trinity, through Christ. Letters are symbols too, meaning some aspect of doctrine – such as the NIKA often used in icons, meaning “Victorious” in Greek.

It is important to remember that Christ himself is an icon of God, as explained in Colossians 1:15, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” All icons are inspired by Christ. We are made like him, by his saving grace:

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18).

D. *Private devotion: lectio divina, scriptural study, written prayers (4)*

What is *lectio divina*, and is it different from bible study?

In *lectio divina* we listen to the voice of God. God may speak to us within our hearts, but also may speak through the circumstances of the day, the events of life, or through the guidance of a friend or advisor. *Lectio divina* is a way to prepare ourselves for the voice of God. It is a way to listen through the reading of the Scriptures (and sometimes through the writings of the

spiritual masters of the Church). *Lectio divina* is a way to open ourselves to the Scriptures – different from the analytical and literary study of the bible. It is the infusion of the wisdom of the Scriptures within our souls – the words of the bible reflecting Jesus, the Word of God, in our hearts.

We begin with reading a passage of the Scriptures. This may be from any passage, but we should regularly choose a passage from the gospels. We read the whole passage, then choose a sentence that stand out in our minds, and read it again. We may finally concentrate on one word from the passage. This exercise is called *lectio* (reading).

The second step is to meditate upon the passage, the sentence and the word. We ponder these things in our hearts, like Mother Mary in the Gospel of Luke:

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:15-19)

To treasure the words of the Scriptures in our hearts is to see them as a valuable guide – to see them in the context of our lives – the things that happen to us, and the wisdom of the Scriptures in the light of these events. This is called *meditatio* (meditating).

The third step is to pray. Prayer may begin with very simple words. It may involve a short prayer that we read, or a chant. It can begin with a simple phrase, such as "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy." Other short phrases are also used. But prayer then moves into silence – an opening of the heart. This can even utilize a prayer posture, such as opening the hands to God, or holding the hands and arms open on the side (traditionally called *orantes* posture). This is called *oratio* (prayer).

In the final step we let go of our thoughts. This may seem challenging, but it can happen if we simply stay in the moment – not worrying about letting go of thoughts for the rest of our time at *lectio divina*. We stay in the moment, letting go of a thought as it arises. This is just like breathing one breath at a time – we can't breathe past or future breaths, only the present breath. It is gentle: the thought passing through the mind is like a cloud passing through the sky. This is called *contemplatio* (contemplation).

Lectio divina is an ancient practice, found in the early monastic communities of the Church, such as the deserts of Syria and Egypt. It has a long history within such religious communities, and in the life of devoted laity as well.

What is historical criticism of the bible? Will it help my relationship with God?

The historical criticism of the bible is a literary analysis of the Scriptures by an examination of the culture of the author and his original audience; the intention of the author within the social and political circumstances at the time of the writing; the understanding of the specific book and passage of the Scripture throughout history (especially the history of the Church); and the kind of literature being written (genre), as compared with other non-scriptural writings of the same time and genre. Added to this are studies of the various texts of each book of Scripture, to compare the contents, and word studies to understand their meaning within the age and culture of the book of Scripture.

Historical criticism is very helpful for understanding the author's meaning, and the circumstances of a passage. However, it is the beginning of understanding the Bible, which must always be studied from the viewpoint of faith and devotion – the profound life of the Church. Without faith and devotion, historical criticism of the Scriptures becomes a scholarly study of history. There are people who do not have faith in Christ who study the Scriptures as scholars – sometimes in colleges and universities. The Christian uses historical study to help interpret the wisdom of the Scriptures for life in Christ. This is pursued in the context of faithful participation in the sacraments, a personal prayer life, and participation in the faith community (such as a parish).

What are the traditional ways of interpreting the bible?

The traditional way of interpreting the bible is called “the four senses of Scripture.” These are not mutually exclusive, but instead are complementary. Each sense actually aids us with the other senses of the Scripture, as we study the bible. These are:

- 1. The Literal Sense.** This is a reading of the passage, observing the details of its story or message. Historical criticism of the bible is useful for this sense, to understand what is happening in the passage. For instance, in Mark 9:2-9, we find the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus:

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

The literal sense also allows us to compare the various gospels in their presentation of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Matthew 17:1-9 and Luke 9: 28-36 also give an account of the Transfiguration. In the literal sense we compare the words and the texts – noting similarities and differences.

- 2. The Allegorical Sense.** This reading is for the life of devotion. The allegorical approach to Scripture centers on telling a story. We are tempted to believe that our learning comes from rational concepts, but the reality is that we have a deeper intuitive learning from the stories we see and hear. Stories resonate within us, and we identify with the characters of the story. So it is with the allegorical approach to a passage of the Scriptures. We look through the eyes of Jesus, see ourselves as characters of a parable, or listen to the wisdom of Saint Paul. Other passages offer further situations to teach us wisdom. We may then turn to our own lives to see the parallels, and bring Christ into every situation that we face.

For an example of the allegorical sense, we might return to Mark 9:2-9. In the passage cited above, we might find ourselves in the place of the disciples, transfixed by the brilliance of Christ. We find parallels in our own lives, where Christ shines forth. The example of the story of the Transfiguration becomes a meditation on the places that God is evident.

The allegorical sense of Scripture is sometimes mistaken for a symbolic projection of Scripture into the future – to predict such things as the end of the world. This is not the intention of the allegorical sense of Scripture. Instead, it is to tell a portion of the story of salvation, that we may see the parallels in our own lives, and conform our present lives to the story of Christ – in whom we live, and by whose power we minister to the world.

- 3. The Moral Sense.** This reading is for my daily relationships and decisions. The moral sense is helpful through giving us a sense of identity in Christ – thus clarifying our duty and our loyalty in every action. Our thoughts are aligned with the mind of Christ, and our actions flow from the direction of the Holy Spirit.

If we continue to use the example above, we will understand how the moral sense of Scripture adds to our understanding of the message of the bible, as part of our faith. It may not be apparent, but even passages such as Mark 9:2-9 have a moral teaching for us. Jesus appears with Elijah and Moses, the great figures of Jewish faith which represent the Prophets and the Law. Christ is with them and in conversation. Thus, the meaning of this passage is that the action for justice (Prophets) and the observance of the commandments from the Hebrew Scriptures (Law) are interpreted in the light of Christ – who is the central figure of the Transfiguration. Christ is the meaning of our understanding of all religious faith – all that comes before, and all that we believe. Thus, our moral decisions are not just ethical, but done in the Spirit of Christ. He is the guide for our lives. Our moral lives are but a part of the life of faith – in conversation with the devotional and doctrinal aspects of Catholic Christianity.

- 4. The Eschatological or Anagogical Sense.** This reading is for my place in time and space. The words eschatological and anagogical point to hope; they refer to “final things,” the concerns of death, afterlife and the future of creation itself. The eschatological sense relies heavily on imagery and poetic language, just as the allegorical sense relies upon identification with stories of the Scripture. Imagery conveys a message beyond the ability of logical language to express. Poetry and imagery are not like the technical language of scientific experimentation, nor the precise language of law. Poetry and imagery speak of something mysterious, such as the urge within us to love and connect with others – and the forces within us that frustrate this very urge. We are motivated to beauty and loving relationships by instinctive and intuitive forces within the very fabric of our human existence. Yet “sin” is the word that describes the mysterious impairment of this urge to love and freedom.

The kingdom is a mystery described by analogy – by parables or images. The kingdom of God – kingdom of heaven, in the Gospel of Matthew – is present and all-pervasive, yet only seen with the eyes of faith. “The Kingdom” is a perfect example of eschatological language because it is at once present and future, within us and beyond us – standard

categories of time and space are insufficient. The Kingdom of God is perhaps the best example of “eschatological” imagery.

In the example from Mark 9: 2-9, the imagery of the Transfiguration speaks to us of glory. It is the imagery of hope, in which we shall share the light of Christ. We recall the words of 2 Corinthians 3:18, which tell us, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” The Transfiguration resonates within us.

Do written prayers help my relationship with God? Do they limit my spiritual life?

Written prayers are important aides in our prayer lives. They are the beginning of prayer. Sometimes they are able to become a special way to enter the time of prayer – a holy ritual that is the door to our personal time with God. They are meant to aid our prayer, which has the aim of opening the heart – that we may listen to the Spirit and be joined with Christ.

E. Private devotion: The rosary, novenas, the Jesus prayer, meditation (6)

Some people say that the rosary is just a superstitious repetition of prayers, so why is it important?

The use of beads during prayer is seen in the religions of the world. This is because the beads are a way to engage the body during prayer – to remove the distractions of the body by actually giving it something to do. This is parallel to concentrating on the breath during prayer.

The rosary uses this ancient technique, but gives it a very Christian focus: meditation on the life of Christ. The rosary is made of introductory beads and five sets of beads that are called a decade of the rosary. The rosary begins with the Apostles’ Creed while holding the cross, then the Our Father, followed by three Hail Marys for faith, hope and love. The “Glory be...” is next, then another Our Father follows to begin the first mystery of the rosary. For example, the first Joyful Mystery is a meditation on the Annunciation to Mary – when the angel announces to the Virgin Mary that she will bear Jesus, if she but gives her consent. The ten Hail Marys are said for this mystery, with a “Glory be” following. The next mystery follows with another Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and a “Glory be.” On and on the rosary progresses.

This is not an empty repetition of prayers because the intent is to focus the body on the routine, so that the mind may concentrate on the mystery of the rosary – without distractions of mind or body. The goal is that the prayers become so routine that they are habitual, and the mind and heart may become open to God – undistracted by the body or the surroundings. This is an ancient prayer, and a very effective meditation technique for concentration.

What is the best way to pray the rosary?

The best way to pray the rosary is to follow the routine of prayer, continue the repetitions in sequence, and concentrate on the mystery of the rosary. This may be visualization that begins with the reading of the passage of Scripture that refers to the scene from the life of Jesus Christ, before the verbal prayers begin for each mystery of the rosary. Some people prefer to pray the rosary silently, while others whisper the prayers. Either method is perfectly acceptable, as long as the prayer is leading to an opening of the heart. When the heart is open, the entire process may be suspended for a while, as God speaks to the one at prayer – feeling a oneness with God. The rosary sometimes stops, then starts again because the one praying the rosary is caught up in the meditation. It is important to remember that silence and stillness are a focus of all prayer – so that the rational process of looking at the world is suspended, and the experience becomes one of pure encounter with God.

What is “the Jesus Prayer,” and how does it help my spiritual life?

The Jesus Prayer is like the rosary, in that beads are often used for the process, and specific words are recited. This prayer practice is very popular in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, often used in the monasteries of Eastern Europe. The words are some variation of “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This is a combination of various phrases from the gospels, where people are calling upon Jesus, and one phrase uttered by Peter, the disciple and apostle of Jesus (See Luke 18:38-39, Matthew 9:27, and Matthew 16:16)

Again, this repetition allows the mind to concentrate on the prayer, without distractions. The Jesus Prayer is repeated hundreds of times throughout the day, becoming thousands of times as the practice progresses. The great teachers of this prayer say that the words begin on the lips, become part of the mind, and then move to the heart. The practice imbues the whole person, so that it even seems that the prayer is praying itself within the one praying. The one who prays the Jesus Prayer has her/his life transformed, becoming one with Christ. This is the process known as deification or divinization, in which we receive a share in the divinity of Christ – filled with Christ and transformed into his image. It is important to remember that this is the focus or goal of prayer.

What is meditation, and how is it different from prayer?

There are many techniques of prayer – ways to help us enter into a state of concentration. In prayer we begin by thinking of the things faith that are associated with Christ – God’s love, the stories of the Scriptures, the saints, etc. We might use the rosary, the Jesus Prayer or *lectio divina*. The hope of these efforts is to move away from the distractions of body and mind, and to open the heart to God.

When the heart is opened to God, we rest in the stillness. We might say that we are listening to God, but the great teachers of prayer tell us that we will eventually move to a pure encounter with God – a sense of oneness. This is more than listening, it is an experience that transforms us and gives us that peace which is beyond understanding and explanation (Philippians 4:7). This final state of prayer is described as contemplation by the great spiritual teachers of Christianity, such as Saint Teresa of Avila or Saint John of the Cross. It is “non-dualistic” because there is no sense of separation between God and the one at prayer. The celebrated medieval mystic, Meister Eckhart, wrote, “Between God and me there is no between.”

Prayer does not always result in such an experience. The spiritual life has stages of growth, as does the life of prayer. Still, oneness with God is the gift of God, given to those who persist in prayer. Jesus Christ promises this: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7).

Ultimately, prayer leads to meditation because meditation is the state of detachment and rest, when the mind is clear of distractions. (In non-Christian meditation, the goal is often a state of no thoughts – the mind empty of the thinking process. This aims at a state of pure consciousness, without being conscious of any one thing – pure awareness.) Christians too experience such a state in meditation. However, in this state, we open ourselves to God’s grace – God’s transforming presence. For Christians, this centered place of God’s grace is God’s gift – not achieved through our efforts. Therefore, meditation is an opening of the mind and heart – clearing away other thoughts. Yet the state of contemplation is ultimately given by God – the encounter with God in which all separation is no longer perceived. In Christian faith we believe that we are completely made one with God, without eliminating our distinct identity. In this, we are a reflection of the Trinity – three distinct Persons in One God.

Sometimes this understanding of the relationship between God and us is connected with “panentheism” – different or distinct from pantheism – that the universe is imbued with God, but that God is still greater than the universe. God is both transcendent and immanent. And in Christian spirituality, the Eastern Church has contributed the immense emphasis that we are “deified” or “divinized” – we are transformed and given a share of the divinity of Christ. We may describe it as dwelling in the Trinity, and the Trinity in us. Saint Athanasius (4th century) boldly described this divinization in Christ with these words: “God became man so that humanity could become God.”

Christians meditate, as do non-Christians, and Christian meditation is also a state of emptying the mind, and opening the heart. However, Christian faith understands this as a state of relationship with God – the goal of faith and the gift of Christ. Trust in Christ becomes the guiding light of meditation. It is like the pure encounter of lovers, who are lost in one another. We know that this is an apt description because the great teachers of prayer have described it in just such terms. Saint John of the Cross, a Doctor of the Church and perhaps the greatest Western mystic, wrote these words about the state of pure encounter with God (in his work, *Dark Night of the Soul*): “I remained, lost in oblivion; My face I reclined on the Beloved. All ceased and I abandoned myself, Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.” (Last verse of the poem)

Christian faith reminds us that all is relationship – we are in relationship with God, and even God is relational for God is Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit – distinct yet One). The tradition of faith guides the spiritual life, just as it guides all else in the Church. The focus of Christian meditation is not simply centered on emptying the mind to achieve a state of enlightenment. It is about emptying the mind and heart – the whole self – in union with Christ. In this emptiness, we are open to Christ, becoming one with him. In meditation we seek the identity described in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

We believe that we encounter God in Christ in every part of the universe:

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17)

We also encounter God through our own selves, by stilling our hearts in prayer, to embrace Christ as “the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6)

Why do some people say that meditation is wrong because it is really non-Christian?

The practice of meditation predates Christianity, and has always been the practice of Christian saints. Early Christians went into the Syrian and Egyptian deserts to pursue a life of prayer through meditation. Yet many Christians are not aware of the great tradition of Christian meditation. Meditation has also been a practice in Christian monasteries for many centuries. This has taken many forms, but all led to the stilling of the mind and the opening of the heart – that Christ may fill and transform them into his own image. Even the Scripture attests to the practice of silent awareness, as Luke 2:19 describes: “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

Silence is difficult for many people. We are restless and often prefer activity to stillness. Thus, meditation may feel troubling to some people. Others may also distrust meditation because it is practiced in Asian religions, like Buddhism or by devotees of yoga. Yet, prayer itself is practiced by many religions. It is important to remember that the creedal and sacramental traditions of Catholic faith are guides to our understanding of meditation, as well as all religious practice. Almsgiving and fasting are also practices of many religions. Yet, we do not distrust these things in our own faith simply because other religions promote them. For example, we do not avoid celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony just because other religions also perform marriage rituals.

F. Pilgrimages, retreats, and spiritual direction (4)

What is a pilgrimage, and how does it help my life of faith in God?

A pilgrimage is a journey – usually several days or weeks – to a sacred place. This could be to a shrine of a saint, a mission church, a site of a miracle, or to a place revered for its special purpose for the Church. People make pilgrimages to Lourdes and Fatima, where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to children. They make pilgrimages to the Holy Land, where Jesus lived; and they also make pilgrimages to shrines dedicated to the Blessed Mother Mary, or to the saints. One of the great pilgrimage sites in North America is the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Mexico City.

A pilgrim undertakes a journey by land, but also a parallel spiritual journey. Through prayer, meditation and participation in the sacraments, the pilgrim lives an intense spiritual experience, which is usually transformative. The pilgrimage begins with the first step toward the intended holy place – a shrine, church or other special site. The pilgrim concentrates on the devotion, and the story of the holy place – reflecting on her/his own life's journey, and praying for guidance and healing, a change in life or an answer to profound questioning.

What is a retreat, and why is it important for my life of faith?

In some ways, a retreat is like a pilgrimage. It is in one place, and characterized by prayer, the sacraments, and personal examination. However, the retreat usually involves time with a theme or directed consideration through verbal presentations. If someone is making the retreat alone, the presentations may be specific reading or discussions with a retreat master – a spiritual guide trained in theology and spiritual direction. (It is very important that the retreat master have the education and other preparation necessary for such a responsible position.)

Most often retreats are given to groups of people. There are specific retreats, such as the “Cursillo,” which is led by a priest, and presented by a team of speakers. Other retreats may be given for the sake of a specific group – like the “Marriage Encounter,” which is for married couples.

Retreats also have other activities, such as silent walks or times of personal sharing with the group by the retreat participants. Usually, meals are taken together. Retreats may have times of silence, or require the complete silence of the participants.

There are specific retreats that are part of a spiritual tradition. One that stands out is the “Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola,” which leads the participant on an inner journey of examining the light and darkness of the mind and heart, and to understand God’s enlightening guidance, even in subtle events of life.

Retreats are important because they are times of reflection and spiritual growth. Skilled retreat masters may help us to examine our lives and faith. They may also be a time of sharing, in which we may hear the stories of others, and find inspiring or comforting parallels. Sometimes the retreat is only one day – a day of prayer. While a short day dedicated to the spiritual life is not as intense as a longer retreat, it is still helpful as a time of reflection – allowing God to awaken us to our needs and guide us.

What is spiritual direction, and how can I find a good spiritual director?

Spiritual direction is a kind of spiritual companionship, but it requires that the spiritual director have some training in theology and spiritual guidance. While present ideas of spiritual direction portray it as a form of friendship, the more accurate description requires that the spiritual director not be engaged in other activities of friendship with the one seeking spiritual direction. The spiritual director may participate in discussions, the Mass, or similar activities of faith with those she/he is directing, but casual interactions (like shopping together) or serious career endeavors (like doing business together) are to be shunned as a conflict of interests. The spiritual director and the one being directed need a clear relationship that is not swayed or influenced by decisions regarding other matters, like the ones described.

The spiritual director usually meets regularly with those being directed. This is usually a one to one experience, and private. The things that are discussed need to be confidential. There are instances of group spiritual direction, but the majority of the time spiritual direction between the director and the individual in direction.

The Christian life is focused on uniting oneself with Christ, so that Christ might be present in the world through us. Christian spiritual direction is a quest to understand the presence and guidance of God in the life of an individual. The spiritual director helps the individual to

recognize the lead of the Holy Spirit. This is often through insights into the course of one's life. Yet spiritual direction is not the same as psychotherapy, which focuses on eliminating the impairments to a full and happy life. Instead, spiritual direction is focused upon growth in the spiritual life – in identification with Christ, and discovering the personal call of God in the life of each person. That call may be to a specific ministry, a way of deepening the life of prayer, or to a profound encounter with God. Spiritual direction is also not the same as confession, though an individual might reveal her/his faults while meeting with the spiritual director.

- ❖ The spiritual director should have a deep and regular prayer life. Saint John of the Cross gives this reason for a prayerful spiritual director:

The person wishing to advance toward perfection should 'take care into whose hands he entrusts himself, for as the master is, so will the disciple be, and as the father is so will be the son. (From The Living Flame of Love, stanza 3:30)

Saint Teresa of Avila wrote these words about her search for a good spiritual director:

It is a great encouragement to see that things which were thought impossible are possible to others and how easily these others do them. It makes us feel that we may emulate their flights and venture to fly ourselves, as the young birds do when their parents teach them; they are not yet ready for great flights but they gradually learn to imitate their parents. (3rd Dwelling, chapter 2, Interior Castle)

- ❖ The spiritual director should have a strong background in theology. This is needed to understand the meaning of Catholic faith. Questions about God, God's grace, the relationship of Christ to the Church and its members, etc., are all relevant to spiritual direction. Catholic doctrines are not simply intellectual expressions of the faith. They are guides to our self-understanding, our relationship with the Church and the various people and roles of the Church, our relationship with other people in general, and our decisions. Catholic doctrine is itself a guide in spiritual direction.
- ❖ The spiritual director should have knowledge of the spiritual life, and the writings of the great spiritual masters of the Church. She/he should not be scrupulous, nor too rigorous. The role of spiritual director is to aid in discernment of the Holy Spirit. The director follows the teaching of the Church that we are transformed by the action of God within us – by grace. Thus, we seek an openness to God's grace – how God is cultivating our growth, and where we are being guided.

- ❖ The spiritual director should have some training in psychology, to understand when an individual might need the services of a professional therapist. Sometimes people need both the services of a spiritual director and the services of a psychotherapist. This is not an either/or situation.

- ❖ The spiritual director should be part of a Catholic faith community, participate in the Mass and sacraments, and be engaged in the life of the community.

- ❖ The spiritual director should have a relaxed style of interaction. It is often difficult to interact with people who are too formal – making those directed nervous or anxious just to be there. The spiritual director should also not be too casual. Spiritual direction should be in an appropriate place, where there is privacy and enough tranquility for an easy conversation.

Usually we find a spiritual director through interaction with others who are serious about the spiritual life. We may ask friends about their own spiritual guides and advisors. It is important to find a spiritual director who is wise, easy to get along with, patient and compassionate, but understands the boundaries between herself/himself and those being directed. We begin by praying to find a good spiritual director.

Chapter Eight: Catholic Doctrine and Moral Practice (total 14 pages)

A. Theology and Catholic faith (6)

What are the guiding lights or principles of Catholic Christian faith?

The presence of Christ – and his Gospel – is found in the Scriptures, the sacraments and the Church. The creed and the consistent teaching of the Church express the authentic Catholic faith, which is clarified in each age, expanded to its full meaning, and affirmed by the faith and practice of the People of God. These are the lights of the Catholic Christian faith, and guiding principles of its expression. All is centered upon the Trinity as the core of both the revelation through Jesus Christ, and the image upon which all faith and structures of the Church are established.

Sometimes the bible seems to be different from the teachings of the Church. Doesn't this cause some confusion?

The bible is interpreted in the light of the Catholic tradition because it is part of that tradition – the sacred record of its foundation. The Catholic faith does not accept the teaching that everything in its faith and practice is simply based on the bible. The bible is understood as part of the entire stream of Catholic faith. It is a guiding light of the faith, but is understood in the light of the development of that faith over the centuries.

For example, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 says:

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

A literal interpretation of this passage would mean that women are not to teach or preach – no matter how qualified they are. The tradition of the Church, however, is that women teach the faith, and are now ordained to Holy Orders in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. The literal interpretation of this passage would be unjust to woman – disqualified for leadership in the Church simply by their gender.

Who are the primary teachers of Catholic faith?

The People of God, by their lives and devotion are the most fundamental teachers of the faith. The faith is learned by its living practice, day by day, through the celebration of the sacraments, meditation and prayer, and sharing the love of Christ with all.

Parents are primary teachers of the faith for their children – by example, by observing the Catholic traditions, by devotion to Christ, and by loving service of others in the name of Christ.

In the Church's structure, bishops are the primary teachers, speaking to the Church as a *collegium*, in the continuance of the apostolic succession. In a diocese, the bishop is also the primary teacher, in communion with other bishops in their own jurisdictions. The bishop's role was well established in the early Church – witnessed by the writings of the Church Fathers. The roles of the priests (presbyters) and deacons are also seen in their writings. Here are examples:

Saint Ignatius of Antioch was martyred in the year 108. He was Bishop of Antioch and wrote numerous letters. These are passages from his letters, written about the year 110.

Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus Christ, who was

with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest. (Letter to the Magnesians 6:1)

Take care, therefore, to be confirmed in the decrees of the Lord and of the apostles, in order that in everything you do, you may prosper in body and in soul, in faith and in love, in Son and in Father and in Spirit, in beginning and in end, together with your most reverend bishop; and with that fittingly woven spiritual crown, the presbytery; and with the deacons, men of God. Be subject to the bishop and to one another as Jesus Christ was subject to the Father, and the apostles were subject to Christ and to the Father; so that there may be unity in both body and spirit. (Letter to the Magnesians 13:1–2).

Indeed, when you submit to the bishop as you would to Jesus Christ, it is clear to me that you are living not in the manner of men but as Jesus Christ, who died for us, that through faith in his death you might escape dying. It is necessary, therefore—and such is your practice that you do nothing without the bishop, and that you be subject also to the presbytery, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom we shall be found, if we live in him. It is necessary also that the deacons, the dispensers of the mysteries [sacraments] of Jesus Christ, be in every way pleasing to all. For they are not the deacons of food and drink, but servants of the Church of God. They must therefore guard against blame as against fire." (Letter to the Trallians 2:1–3)

In like manner let everyone respect the deacons as they would respect Jesus Christ, and just as they respect the bishop as a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and college of the apostles. Without these, it cannot be called a church. I am confident that you accept this, for I have received the exemplar of your love and have it with me in the person of your bishop. His very demeanor is a great lesson and his meekness is his strength. I believe that even the godless do respect him. (Letter to the Trallians 3:1–2)

Saint Clement of Alexandria lived from 150-215 and was married. He was priest and teacher at the Catechetical School of Alexandria. These examples of his writing are from the years 191 and 208 respectively:

A multitude of other pieces of advice to particular persons is written in the holy books: some for presbyters, some for bishops and deacons; and others for widows, of whom we shall have opportunity to speak elsewhere. (The Instructor of Children 3:12:97:2)

Even here in the Church the gradations of bishops, presbyters, and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the apostles and who have lived in complete righteousness according to the gospel. (Miscellanies 6:13:107:2).

Saint Hippolytus lived from 170 to 235, and was a priest in Rome. He wrote *The Apostolic Tradition* in 215, which gave instructions for the ordination of priests (presbyters) and deacons by the bishop.

When a deacon is to be ordained, he is chosen after the fashion of those things said above, the bishop alone in like manner imposing his hands upon him as we have prescribed. In the ordaining of a deacon, this is the reason why the bishop alone is to impose his hands upon him: he is not ordained to the priesthood, but to serve the bishop and to fulfill the bishop's command. He has no part in the council of the clergy, but is to attend to his own duties and is to acquaint the bishop with such matters as are needful. .

On a presbyter, however, let the presbyters impose their hands because of the common and like Spirit of the clergy. Even so, the presbyter has only the power to receive [the Spirit], and not the power to give [the Spirit]. That is why a presbyter does not ordain the clergy; for at the ordaining of a presbyter, he but seals while the bishop ordains.

Over a deacon, then, let the bishop speak thus: 'O God, who have created all things and have set them in order through your Word; Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom you sent to minister to your will and to make clear to us your desires, grant the Holy Spirit of grace and care and diligence to this your servant, whom you have chosen to serve the Church and to offer in your holy places the gifts which are offered to you by your chosen high priests, so that he may serve with a pure heart and without blame, and that, ever giving praise to you, he may be accounted by your good will as worthy of this high office: through your Son Jesus Christ, through whom be glory and honor to you, to the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, both now and through the ages of ages. Amen'

How does doctrine and worship relate to authentic moral behavior?

Doctrine is lived out in authentic moral behavior. Doctrine is not simply expressed in statements about the faith. It is also experienced in the worship of the Church. In the Eucharist and the sacraments we experience the teaching of the Church – through the actions and prayers of the sacraments. Moral behavior is related to the sacraments by adhering to the things believed and celebrated in the sacramental life of the Church – and not violating what is celebrated. This is an example of *lex orandi, lex credendi* – what is publicly prayed is also lived as the doctrine and moral practice of the Church.

An example of this is in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. In this sacrament a couple promises their exclusive love with each other, and are joined by the rites of the Church in a sacred vow. They live out this sacrament by their fidelity to each other.

What are the different kinds of theology, and what is systematic theology?

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) described theology as “Faith seeking understanding.” Theology is the study of the faith. It is the illumination of what we believe, and the implications of our belief for all of life. In the ancient tradition of the Church, theology is meant to be a reflection on the encounter with God in Christ. There are many systems for organizing

theological thought. However, there are some standard ways of distinguishing different areas of theology:

- ❖ **Dogmatic Theology** is the study of the doctrine of the Church. This aspect of theology draws upon the various parts of Christian faith – its creeds, official statements, worship and structure to produce an analytical examination of what Catholics believe. Dogmatic theology relies on a conceptual expression of the faith of the Church as its method of communicating the Church’s beliefs. Thus, it generally discusses Catholic doctrine in precise terms and statements.

- ❖ **Sacramental Theology** is the study of the sacraments of the Church and their meaning. This aspect of theology examines how the Church has worshipped and celebrated the sacraments, and how its faith is expressed in the sacraments. Sacramental theology seeks to express the tradition and meaning of each sacrament, as discovered through their history; and the implications for the Church in our day.

- ❖ **Biblical Theology** is the study of the Scriptures and their meaning for the Church – the implications of the Scriptures for the doctrine, sacraments, moral teaching, spiritual life and structure of the Church. Biblical theology informs other branches of theology, and the life of the Church, through an examination of the scriptural foundations of faith.

- ❖ **Moral Theology** is the study of the Catholic tradition for the moral and ethical decisions of life – its application for each of us in our own lives. Moral theology involves the Catholic tradition regarding decisions and actions in society and its institutions, medical issues and sexual issues. To be authentic, Catholic moral theology considers virtue as the primary focus, and “sin” as “falling short” of Christian virtue. Just as dogmatic theology examines what Catholics believe, moral theology examines how we make moral decisions and how we act. Catholic moral theology connects the way we believe with the way we act.

- ❖ **Mystical Theology** is the study of the spiritual experience of the people of the Church, especially the great saints who have written about such experiences and its implication for all Christians, and for the development of their devotional lives. Its focus is on the encounter with God, and the stages of growth in our relationship with God. The grace

of Christ is examined as the force of transformation in the soul. Mystical theology examines the presence of the Trinity in us, and we in the Trinity – our transformation into the image of Christ, deified or divinized by the Trinity. The great masters of this theology have encountered God in a profound way. The great masters of mystical theology are the mystics – such names as Saint Paul of Tarsus, Saint Augustine, Saint (Amma) Syncletica of Alexandria, Saint Pachomius, Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Ignatius Loyola, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Therese Lisieux.

- ❖ **Historical Theology** is the study of the development of the theology of the Church in all its branches. It examines the social, political and religious influences on the Church, its faith and structure, and its devotional life. Historical theology traces the doctrinal, sacramental and structural development of Catholic faith, as it interacts with society and various other influences, like science and other religious traditions.

- ❖ **Systematic Theology** is a comparative study of theology in which the various branches of theology are considered in terms of the implications for all the doctrines, worship and practice of the Church – a reflection on the Church as a holistic way of life in Christ. While some like to think that systematic theology is the same as dogmatic theology, there is a wider understanding of the term. In systematic theology, the doctrine, sacraments, devotional life, and societal influences are woven together to give a full picture of the Church in any given age. Thus, the way that Catholics lived their faith has been influenced by the structures within the Church, and outside the Church, as well as currents of thought, science and geographical discoveries.

- ❖ **Pastoral theology** is an examination of how to live the Catholic faith – what we believe and how we act – in our everyday lives. The strong emphasis in pastoral theology is on how leaders, such as clergy, can guide others in faith and moral decisions. Rigid applications of Church teachings are often not helpful to the growth of the people in parishes, schools and other settings of the Church. Pastoral theology considers the practical side of community life, the growth of the community as a whole, and the growth of the members of the faith community.

B. The sources of Catholic moral theology (4)

What are the sources of moral theology?

The primary inspiration and source of Catholic moral theology is Jesus and his Gospel. The sources that inform us of his Gospel begin with the gospels and the other New Testament Scriptures. Catholic moral theology also draws upon the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jewish moral and ethical tradition. The early Christian writers, the Church Fathers, add to this foundation, as do the theologians throughout all ages.

Moral theology is also formed by the creeds, the sacramental life of the Church, and its devotional life. The ecumenical councils of the Church, and its patriarchal leaders, such as the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) have contributed greatly to Church teaching on morality. Every century of the Church is influenced by societal institutions and structures, by the sciences and philosophies of each age – and thus, the development of Catholic moral theology was also influenced by these same forces.

An example of this is the institution of slavery. For most of history it was tolerated by the Church, and some Catholic clergy and leaders even held slaves. Catholic moral theology was influenced by a societal structure that is contrary to the Gospel of Jesus, which teaches human dignity and freedom.

Catholic moral theology is also influenced by psychology and medical science, other sciences and technology. While these are not strictly sources for the moral teachings of the Church, they are influential currents of thought that sway Catholic practice. Examples of this are the development of the role of women in society, and recent legal and medical developments that change our understanding of sexual behavior. Greater awareness and acceptance of individual freedom of conscience, and the advances in education of the greater population, have also influenced Catholic moral theologians – though struggles continue in the Church regarding the implications of these changes. It is important to remember that some of the deepest divisions in the Church have been in these areas. With charity and faith, these divisions will begin to heal.

How has the moral stance of the Church developed over the years?

The Church is in conversation with society and culture, with science and with other religions. That conversation has continued through the centuries, and each of the institutions involved has changed because of the conversation, as well as the Church.

Moral theology is both a contributor and a monitor of this conversation. In the example given above, the Church experienced an awakening in its own need to address the inhumanity of slavery – an institution directly opposed to the Gospel, as well as opposed to the basic freedoms stated by most societies. This development in the moral teaching of the Church, can be traced by moral theologians. Saint Paul accepted slavery as a reality, and gave no argument against it – as shown in the Letter to Philemon. During most of Church history, peasants were held in near slavery through laws of feudal servitude. As Europeans entered the Americas, in the 16th century, the debate over the feudal enslavement of the native peoples of America continued, with great voices arguing for change, such as that of Bartolomé de las Casas, a Catholic colonist, and the first Bishop of Chiapas, Mexico, who struggled for the rights of Native Americans. In the last 200 years, slavery has been outlawed in most of the world – though still practiced illegally in many regions. This can be seen as a result of the struggle and conversation between the Church and other institutions. Evangelical Christians, for example, led the struggle to abolish slavery in England and the United States.

A similar pattern can be seen with regard to the place and role of women. Women have struggled for centuries to be educated, just as men, to freely make their own choices regarding marriage and career, to have control of their financial assets, and finally to have a say in civil governance. Women are now engaged in a continual struggle for equality in the Church. While the Church can be credited with advances in an earlier age with regard to the rights of women, the Church can also be faulted for strong opposition to many of the measures just mentioned regarding the equal treatment in the workplace and courtroom, and with regard to the rights of women.

The struggle for human rights by women and all those who are subject to discrimination, segregation or enslavement, is now recognized as being at the core of the moral teaching of the Church, and the subjects of moral theology. The development of a sense of social morality is part of the conversation influencing personal morality. For example, effective contraception has allowed women to make wider choices regarding family and career. This ability to limit family size has a direct impact on the role of women in society – civil government, business, professions, etc., and the Church. It is no coincidence that the rise of women in business and the professional world corresponds to such things as the reduction in family size. In the Church, this has impacted religious orders of women, which depended upon the entrance of young women to staff schools as teaching sisters and hospitals as nursing sisters. Thus the influences on the role of women in society were science, culture and the Church.

This conversation has always been the arena of struggle for human rights, and thus the forum for moral theology. The definition of marriage, human sexual behavior, the rights of women regarding medical procedures and control of their bodies, the rights of unborn children, etc., have all been controversial topics for moral theology. It is important to understand that none of these can stand apart from the background of the struggle for consciousness of the rights of each individual.

Throughout the centuries, the Church has had the difficult task of separating the message of the Gospel from the cultural habits of each society where the Gospel is preached. It has faced questions of divorce that involve the right of individuals to end a troubling or damaging marriage. This struggle to reconcile the Gospel with culture and society can even be seen in the New Testament, where we move from Jesus' prohibition of divorce except for "un-chastity" (Matthew 19: 1-12), to Saint Paul's pastoral decision (1 Corinthians 7:10-15) to allow divorce for Christians who choose to separate from a non-Christian spouse (possibly applied to catechumens about to be baptized).

The Church will always be faced with the need to respond to new moral decisions. As technology develops, new choices regarding family, sexuality, identity and the environment will all demand decisions regarding human dignity, and the values of the Gospel. The lights of faith will be very helpful guides, as we align them to test our responses to the ever-changing world. Though some may not understand or agree, the Church itself has also been in constant flux – adapting to new economic systems, a new model of the family, new scientific discoveries, and different understandings of life that come from other religious traditions.

C. The authority of the Church (4)

How is the authority of the Church understood in its early history?

The Church is understood as the authentic by its adherence to the creeds, the ecumenical councils, and the communion among dioceses (the local Churches) of the universal Church. It celebrates this in its sacramental celebrations, where the Church and Christ are united. Jesus Christ is the authority of God, and the Church speaks for him: "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me." (Luke 10:17)

Saint Irenaeus wrote these words on the authority of the Church, in the year 189:

Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account we are bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the things pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. For how stands the case? Suppose there should arise a dispute relative to some important question among us. Should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary [in that case] to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the churches? (Against Heresies 3:4).

The Church Fathers defended the authority of the Church as an apostolic tradition handed from generation to generation. The teaching of the Church became for them a vision of life and a path of peace. This was more than the choice of principles to believe. It was an image to which all conform. This is the image of Christ. Their goal was to see the world as Christ sees it, and to live as he would live in the circumstances of each society and era.

Saint Irenaeus even defended the tradition of the apostles prior to its being expressed in the New Testament writings – an oral tradition of the apostles:

True knowledge is the doctrine of the Apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved, without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither addition nor curtailment [in truths which she believes]; and [it consists in] reading [the Word of God] without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy... (Against Heresies 4:33)

The great theologian, Origen, defended the authority of the Church as a part of the entire tradition, written and oral (AD 225):

Seeing there are many who think they hold the opinions of Christ, and yet some of these think differently from their predecessors, yet as the teaching of the Church, transmitted in orderly succession from the Apostles, and remaining in the churches to the present

day, is still preserved, that alone is to be accepted as truth which differs in no respect from ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition. (On First Principles Bk. 1 Preface 2)

Around the year 400, Saint John Chrysostom made a strong case for the Church as the bearer of the Catholic and Christian tradition, from even before the establishment of the New Testament writings:

So then brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther. (Homilies on Second Thessalonians)

Yet another example is the affirmation of the Church's authority by Saint Vincent of Lerins, in the year 434:

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical pravity; and I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or anyone else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways: first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church. (Commonitory 2)

These writings, and numerous others from the various Church Fathers, who wrote in Greek and Latin, teach that the Church is not simply an association for individuals who believe in Christ. Instead, the structure and life of the Church carry the authority of Christ, if they are aligned with the traditions of faith, such as the Scripture, the consistent doctrines and practices of the Church throughout the centuries, and its sacramental life. This is not meant to compel people, but to invite all to follow the "Way of Christ" that is lived out in the Body of Christ, the Church. As these words from the ritual of baptism proclaim, "This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We rejoice in professing it, in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Chapter Nine: The Lives of the Saints as Witness of the Gospel (total 12 pages)

A. Learning from the great saints (4)

Why are the saints so important in the witness of the Church?

The saints are important because we believe that we are still “in communion” with them. In other words, they have died, and are with the Lord Jesus – according to our Catholic faith. But they are still very much with us in spirit because, as Catholics, we believe that death is not the end, but only a change:

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54)

We ask the saints to pray for us because they are with the Lord Jesus, and still very much part of the Church – as he is.

Another reason for the devotion to the saints is that they are role models for the Church. They are the great Christians who teach all others by their example. They were the masters of prayer, the great and compassionate servants of the poor and sick, the Doctors of the Church who expanded Church teaching, and the joyous troubadours of God’s love (like the great Saint Francis).

Who are some of the great saints who give this kind of witness?

Again, Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) stands out as a towering figure who has inspired millions of people – Catholics, non-Catholics and non-Christians. He showed a great love for creation as the door to God’s presence.

His words ring out through the centuries. Here is an excerpt from the “Canticle of the Sun,”

*...Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.*

*Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
in the heavens you have made them bright, precious and beautiful.*

*Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
and clouds and storms, and all the weather,
through which you give your creatures sustenance.*

*Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.*

*Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.*

*Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us,
and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.*

*Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you;
through those who endure sickness and trial.*

*Happy those who endure in peace,
for by you, Most High, they will be crowned...*

Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross (16th century) are both known for their huge contribution to mystical theology, through their writings on the life of prayer and on spiritual growth. Saint Ignatius Loyola (16th century) is famous for his classic writing on the spiritual life, called “The Spiritual Exercises.”

Earlier than these saints are the great lights of Catholic thought and spirituality: Saint Dominic (a contemporary of Saint Francis of Assisi, who founded another great religious order) and Saint Bonaventure (13th century). Saint Catherine of Siena (14th century) was also a spiritual master, and also influenced the highest levels of Church and civil government. Saint Thomas Aquinas was considered the most influential Catholic theologian for centuries – required study in seminaries for centuries.

Two great saints of the seventh century include Isidore the Archbishop of Seville, who is the last of the Western Church Fathers. Isidore called the Fourth Council of Seville, to establish seminaries across much of Spain, was able to bring harmony between the Catholic Church and the Arian king of the Visigoths, who ruled much of the Iberian Peninsula, and maintained an independent Church in communion with the Church of Rome. He may be the first to promote and pass legislation against child abuse in 619. Saint Maximus the Confessor, in Asia Minor, was the secretary to the Eastern Roman emperor until he became a monk. His monumental work clarified Church teaching on divinization (deification) – the teaching that we share in the divinity of Christ through grace, becoming transformed into his image – because the purpose of salvation is precisely the restoration of unity with God. He believed that all would eventually be reconciled with God.

Saint Benedict of Nursia (6th century) was the master of the monastic life, and wrote a rule for monks that became a standard for thousands of monasteries. Saint John Chrysostom lived in

the 4th century, and found himself enmeshed in the politics of Church and State as the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Orthodox world honors him by the celebration of *The Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*. Saint Maximos is the Orthodox master of theology who lived at the time of Saint Benedict, in the area of Constantinople.

Three great saints of 4th century Asia Minor (Cappadocia) are honored as giants of theology who contributed greatly to the doctrine of the Trinity: Saints Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Saint Athanasius, a 4th century Patriarch of Alexandria, preceded them as the giant of Catholic orthodoxy, suffering exile from his diocese because of this. The earliest Christian saints are of course the apostles of Jesus, joined by Saint Paul of Tarsus. Saint Mary Magdalene is called “The Apostle to the Apostles” because she brought word of Jesus’ resurrection after he appeared to her.

Recent saints include Mother Teresa of Calcutta, celebrated world-wide as a model of compassion for the poor and sick; Dorothy Day, a 20th century American Catholic convert who dedicated her life to serving the poor and to social justice. Mother Katherine Drexel is a 20th century American saint, honored for her vast work with the poor, and her struggle against racial injustice and segregation – establishing Xavier University of Louisiana to promote higher education for African Americans. Father Damien of Molokai was known world-wide for his courageous work in Hawaii, serving the medical and spiritual needs of lepers in Hawaii. We count the renowned theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, among the saints because of his martyrdom for the faith under the Nazi regime – as were the martyrs, Saint Edith Stein and Saint Maximilian Kolbe (who voluntarily took the place of another prisoner who was to be executed).

Two celebrated American saints who dedicated their lives to the sick and needy were Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton and Mother Francesca Cabrini. Mother Seton had been a married woman with children. After the death of her husband, with the children then grown, she founded a congregation of women religious. They were dedicated to founding schools, and especially to advancing the education of girls. Mother Cabrini is greatly honored by American Catholics and American civil government for her dedication to the poor and needy – founding over 67 institutions for this purpose.

These are but a few names of well known saints. Each of us may be able to add the names of those giants of faith in our own lives – not officially honored, but revered by those they served for their work with the poor and sick, their faith in Christ and their compassion. Our own family members might be our saints, for their guidance and love.

B. What the saints teach about doctrine, faith and devotion (4)

What do the great saints have to teach us about Catholic faith?

The saints teach many different things. The great lesson they give to all is that the faith can be lived in various states of life, various cultures and societies, and in a number of ways. Another thing they share is the dedication to the faith, in whatever way they chose to live, wholeheartedly giving themselves to the themes of their lives.

Those who were theologians and defenders of Catholic faith wrote continuously on behalf of Trinitarian doctrine and the Catholic understanding of Christ as fully human and fully divine. Others defended the faith against violent attacks, such as those who died in Nazi concentration camps. Some of the great saints were masters of the spiritual life, and wrote extensively on prayer – based upon their own journeys, and their mystical experience of Christ. Still others worked tirelessly for the sick and the poor, founding hospitals, orphanages and schools.

They shared a love of Christ and devotion to the sacraments – which sustained them in their work for others. In the face of political struggles in the Church, they remained constant in their faith, and compassionate with opponents. (Saint Augustine, for example, debated with the Donatists, but immediately welcomed the Donatist bishop of Hippo into his church once they were reconciled.)

The saints are examples of how to live the faith in many ways. They were married, single and celibate. They were monks and nuns, or they were laypeople – many were ordained. They were in quiet lives of prayer in a monastery, or they were in the demanding work of serving the poor and sick. Some were highly educated, and some had only basic formal education. Some were sophisticated and cultured people, and some were peasants. All the saints put Christ as the center of their lives – for better or worse – and they loved the Church as the Body of Christ.

Are there specific devotions that the saints have fostered?

There are devotions associated with saints and promoted by saints. Here are a few:

- ❖ Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe began in the 16th century, when the Mother of God appeared to Juan Diego (now a Native American Saint). She appeared dressed as an Aztec princess, to comfort the people of Mexico. Her shrine in Mexico City contains the *tilma* – an article of clothing like a poncho, that bears her image. This image is still unexplained, and the fabric has a natural life of about 20 years. Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe brings millions of pilgrims to her shrine each year.

- ❖ Saint Louis Marie de Montfort (1673 – 1716) promoted the rosary, which actually dates back hundreds of years. The rosary was promoted by Saint Dominic (13th century) long before Saint Louis Marie de Montfort, and can be traced back even further. In recent times, the children visited by the Mother of God in Fatima, Portugal, in 1917 (Lucia de Jesus, aged 10, and her cousins, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, aged 9 and 7 at the time of the apparition), also urged faithful Catholics to pray the rosary. Saint Bernadette Soubirous was visited by Mary, the Mother of God, in 1858, and soon the young saint inspired a renewed devotion to the rosary in the Catholic world.

- ❖ Perhaps the most widespread devotion is the manger scene at Christmas. Saint Francis of Assisi promoted this devotion at a time in which Jesus was often portrayed as a distant king and judge – with images of Christ high above the congregation in the great churches of Europe. Saint Francis loved the divinity and the humanity of Christ, and also promoted the stations of the cross – modeled after the “Via Crucis” in the Holy Land – the stops that pilgrims made when walking the path that Jesus walked to his crucifixion and death.

- ❖ Devotion to Saint Christopher, as the patron of travelers, has also been widespread – with very popular Saint Christopher medal given to many as a prayer reminder for their safe journeys. Often, statues of Saint Christopher are seen on the dashboards of cars.

How do the saints witness to authentic Catholic teaching?

While many of the saints do teach – especially those in a teaching role, such as ordained clergy and theologians, the saints teach even more profoundly by their lives. The mystics teach by their journey into God – witnessing to the reality of Christ transforming them in the depths of their souls. Many of the saints lived courageously dedicated lives for the poor and the sick, caring for them tirelessly in the name of Christ. The saints have fulfilled the greatest commandments – to love God and neighbor – by such efforts. They are icons of Christ in many cultures and settings.

Saint Teresa of Avila gives us an insight into the path of sainthood. It is not as complicated or arduous as one might think, but it requires a routine persistence: “Accustom yourself continually to make many acts of love, for they enkindle and melt the soul.” Saint Therese Lisieux took this great saint as a model, and added her wisdom to such advice. She urged

people to love God and neighbor in their own way, and according to their own circumstances: “The splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not rob the little violet of its scent, nor the daisy of its simple charm. If every tiny flower wanted to be a rose, spring would lose its loveliness.” Therese followed the great Teresa of Avila in concentrating on the moment – small acts of kindness and trust as the events of the day unfold: “A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul.”

The doctrines and sacramental life of the Church are not simply intellectual principles and required rituals. They translate into life as the incarnation of Christ – moments of grace in which we experience death and resurrection, the strength of the Holy Spirit, the love of the faith community that we call the Church, and the power of the Eucharist to transform our lives. We could and should go on to examine the faith of the Church – its ancient creeds and worship – as it enlivens and awakens us. Soon, we have insight into life; the parables and teachings of Jesus echoed by the events in our lives, and the mystery of God reflected in the mystery of each life – the joys and sorrows surprising us and confirming the faith in the Triune God that we have discovered. We are inspired by the great saints, and enlightened by the unsung saints in our own lives, who teach the Gospel by simple words and kindness, and by courageous love. They fulfill these words from 1 John:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. (1 John 1:1-4)

Why does the Virgin Mary have a special place of devotion in the Catholic tradition?

The mother of Jesus Christ has a special place of devotion – beyond the veneration of the other saints – because in her own body, the Word of God became incarnate. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, was born of Mary – her flesh giving birth to the Son of God. The mystery of Christ intimately includes this young Jewish woman accepting the call of God to bring forth the Messiah. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and transformed. This transformation is an iconic image for us, for we are also called to bring Christ into the world, and to be transformed (partaking in the divinity of Christ). Mary is a mirror of what we are and what we will be. She is the first Christian, for she is the first to receive the Good News of Christ (the Gospel). She is the model Christian for the Church. Indeed, she is an image of the Church – bearing Christ within herself, to bring him forth into the world.

Why is Mary honored as the Mother of God? Why is she honored as our Mother?

Mary is the Mother of God because she gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus is one person with two natures – he is fully human and fully divine. The title “Mother of God” is an affirmation that Mary did not simply give birth to the human side of Jesus. Mary is not called the mother of the Trinity, but she is called the Mother of God because she did not simply give birth to the human side of Jesus. Again, Jesus is one person with two distinct but united natures – human and divine.

Many controversies emerged over the issue of how Jesus is human and divine. Some tended to see the Son of God (the Second Person of the Trinity) as somehow adopting the human person called Jesus. Others wanted to declare Jesus as God appearing as a man. Some wanted to deny the Trinity and say that Jesus is the incarnation of the Father. Still others wanted to say that Jesus is a special creation of God.

The term “Mother of God” affirms that the Son of God was born of Mary – is the incarnation of God the Son, in a perfect unity of divinity and humanity: one person with two natures, fully human and fully divine. Mary gave her flesh that Jesus might be born.

Mary is honored as our Mother because she is the Mother of God, the Mother of Jesus Christ. He is the head of the Church, and the Church is “the Body of Christ.” We are “in Christ.” We are united with him, and we live “through him and with him and in him” – words from the Mass. As his mother, so she is our mother. This is the tradition from the earliest times of the Church. This is best symbolized when Jesus gave his mother to his beloved disciple, at the time of his death, that he might care for her:

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27)

C. *What do the saints teach about the shortcomings of the Church as organization* **(4)**

Are there examples of saints who have led the reform movements of the Church?

Perhaps the greatest example of a saint who contributed to the reform of the Church was Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226, Italy). He reformed the culture of the Church, which is more difficult than reforming its laws. Francis took on “Lady Poverty” at a time when the Church was in the heights of wealth and power. He reminded the hierarchy and people that Jesus was the humble teacher of Nazareth – the son of a carpenter. Francis adopted the dress and simplicity of the Lord Jesus – a simple tunic and dependence upon the generosity of the people for his daily needs. In his own lifetime, the ranks of those who followed him grew into the thousands.

Saint Teresa of Avila (16th century Spain) did a great deal to reform the Church through the reform of her religious order for women. During her time, wealthy women often joined the convent, but kept to a lifestyle that was in line with their wealth – supported by that wealth. Poor women who joined the same convent often functioned like their servants. Teresa put an end to this by requiring that all the sisters of her convent remain on an equal basis. This was symbolized in her requirement that they be barefoot in the convent. This order is called the Discalced [Barefoot] Carmelites.

Saint Francis de Sales lived from 1567 to 1622, and became the Bishop of Geneva, Switzerland. At the time, the pursuit of holiness was thought to be a concern only for monks and nuns. For other Catholics, following the law of the Church and the regular reception of the sacraments was thought to be sufficient. Little thought was given to the spiritual growth of the laity. Saint Francis changed this perception by giving spiritual direction to lay people, who lived their ordinary lives in the world. His book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, was written in 1608 for the average Catholic. It was originally written as a series of letters, and became extremely popular throughout Europe. Bishop Francis wrote:

The thoughts of those moved by natural human love are almost completely fastened on the beloved, their hearts are filled with passion for it, and their mouths full of its praises. When it is gone they express their feelings in letters, and can't pass by a tree without carving the name of their beloved in its bark. Thus too those who love God can never stop thinking about him, longing for him, aspiring to him, and speaking about him. If they could, they would engrave the name of Jesus on the hearts of all humankind. (From “Introduction to the Devout Life”)

According to Saint Francis, the key to love of God is prayer: "By turning your eyes on God in meditation, your whole soul will be filled with God. Begin all your prayers in the presence of God." For busy people, he advised "Retire at various times into the solitude of your own heart, even while outwardly engaged in discussions or transactions with others and talk to God." He believed the worst sin was to judge someone or to gossip about them. He promoted gentleness with others and forgiveness of both self and others. In a time when Protestants and Catholics were in furious conflict, he promoted dialogue and courtesy between them. Finally, he believed that the sincerity of spiritual growth is tested by a person's actions: "To be an angel in prayer and a beast in one's relations with people is to go lame on both legs."

Saint Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641) joined the efforts of Saint Francis de Sales. She was married with six children. As a woman of means, she was able to help the poor, but was criticized by friends for her devotion to this work. When she was 28 years old, her husband died. She sought spiritual direction from Francis de Sales, and eventually founded a religious order for women to expand her service for the poor. When friends criticized her for accepting an 83 year old woman into the order, she responded, "What do you want me to do? I like sick people myself; I'm on their side."

Saint Vincent de Paul was a priest who lived in France in the 17th century, when Church and state were unified into a force of power. The king had enormous control in the life of the Church. Father Vincent saw the poor state of training for the clergy, and the need of the Church in France to turn its attention to the poor. He had been captured by Turkish pirates, while traveling by ship, and sold into slavery for three years. After his escape, he began intense work for the poor, for galley slaves and other prisoners, and the additional work of education for priests.

Saint Louise de Marillac (1591-1660) joined his efforts by founding a religious order for women which had the central mission of serving the poor and the sick. She had to use the name "Daughters of Charity" because nuns remained in convents at that time, and not in social service. Louise had been married, and had a child. After her husband's death, she met Vincent de Paul, and joined his work for the poor – which was very spotty and disorganized in France during that period. Having suffered from depression for years, Louise found a great healing in her life by her renewed spiritual life and her new mission of serving the poor – culminating in founding the Daughters of Charity.

One of the great reforms of the Church is the reform of its focus on justice and compassion for the needy. The lives of Francis de Sales, Jane Frances de Chantal, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac exemplify the call of Christ to such reform, remembering his words, "Whatever you do to the least of the sisters and brothers, you do to me."(Matthew 25:40)

What do the saints have to teach about reforming the Church?

The saints recognize that the Church is in need of constant reform. This parallels our own personal lives. Each of us needs to evaluate our own thoughts and actions, and seek to detach from harmful or limiting ways of life. We depend upon God's light and God's grace for this reform in our lives, but we cooperate with God's presence by heartfelt review of our strengths and weaknesses, and our need for growth. So too, the Church is in need of reform as a community of faith. This is true in the local Church and the universal Church.

The reform is guided by the apostolic foundations of our faith. We return, again and again to the inspiration of the life of Christ, and the life of the apostolic Church. They are a measure for

reform. Additionally, we look to the constant threads of faith, creed, sacramental practice, devotion, and the official teaching of the Church councils as the standards of reform.

Reform is internal and external. Internally, a return to the life of prayer is the central process of reform. To pray is to spend time with God, sifting through our thoughts in dialogue with Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit. We listen, and are finally united with God in an encounter that is beyond words. Such an encounter reminds us that reform is deeper than changing the laws or structure of our faith communities.

Externally, we return to the ancient tradition of the Church to see how the community lived, and the roles of each element of the Church: bishop-laity-clergy. As we turn to the earliest days of the Church, we find a vibrancy that is lived out in a very recognizable Catholic style. We observe the celebration of the sacraments; the participation of laity, clergy and bishops in Church polity; the centrality of profound prayer; the necessity of education for all members of the Church; and the leadership of the bishops mainly expressed in spiritual guidance. The great saints witness to this in their reform efforts.

Are there saints who have been mistaken about the faith? What does this teach us?

We may begin by examining the divisions which are in the Christian Scriptures. The apostolic community was divided about the need for non-Jews to become Jewish in order to become Christians. Saint Paul struggled against other apostles, and wrote of his disagreement with Saint Peter:

But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish Christians followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. (Galatians 2:11-13)

Three saints – Paul, Peter and Barnabas – were in disagreement. Eventually, Saint Paul's position was accepted by the apostles (including Peter and Barnabas), with a few exceptions. Despite their error, Peter and Barnabas are revered for their heroic love of Christ.

Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Isidore of Seville were prejudiced against the Jews. Some say that they must be seen within the context of their times, but the truth remains that they were wrong in their prejudice. They are revered as saints, but cannot be revered for their anti-Semitic statements and actions. John Chrysostom wrote eight sermons against the Jews. We are able to find anti-Semitism in many other saints as well, such as Saint Ambrose, Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Jerome.

Isidore was the Archbishop of Seville, and promoted legislation at the Fourth Council of Toledo for the forced removal of Jewish children from the parents and their education by Christians, and other legislation forbidding, Jews and Christians of Jewish origin, from holding public office.

These saints were influenced by the conflicts of their times – conflicts between Christians and Jews. However, this cannot remove the mistaken attitudes toward Jewish people – contrary to the teaching of Christ, and the example of Saint Paul in understanding the place of the Jewish people within the Christian perspective.

The **Great Western Schism** was a division within the Catholic Church from 1378 to 1417. Two men simultaneously claimed to be the true pope. The divide was driven by politics rather than any theological disagreement. The schism was ended by the Council of Constance (1414–1418). The simultaneous claims to the papal chair of two different men had thrown the Western Church into turmoil during the entire period. The saints themselves were divided in this controversy. For example, Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Catherine of Sweden were on one side of the controversy. Saint Vincent Ferrer and Saint Colette were faithful to the other side.

These examples teach us that saints may be seriously dedicated to the life of faith, but can be flawed in their own thinking and actions. We are all influenced by the viewpoint and prejudices of our times. We are tempted to only see things from one aspect. The life of holiness needs to be focused upon skillfully aligning with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This can be discerned by a careful examination of the Scriptures, the creedal beliefs of the Church, the specific teachings of Jesus on the love of God and neighbor, an insistence on compassion and charity in all situations, and by continuing a dialogue even with those who are in disagreement with us.

Chapter Ten: The Development of Doctrine and the Historical Perspective in Catholic Faith (total 19 pages)

A. Doctrinal controversies in the early Church (2)

What are some of the doctrinal controversies of the early Church?

The following are some of the central struggles of early Christianity. There are variations with each name below, but similarities in terms of what the controversy was about. The Church went through a great deal of turmoil over these controversies, which were resolved through the first seven ecumenical councils of the Church, held in Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon.

Adoptionism was the belief that Jesus was not really God, but was a man to whom special graces had been given and who achieved a kind of divine status at his baptism. It was promoted by Theodotus of Byzantium. This idea that Christ was a man (the "adopted" son of God) proved to be persistent, surfacing in many eras of history, but contrary to Catholic belief.

Apollinarianism was the teaching of Apollinaris (310-390), the bishop of Laodicea in Asia Minor. He believed that Jesus Christ had a human body, but that his human mind and human free will had been replaced by the "Divine Logos" (or Word of God).

Arianism is named after its primary proponent, Arius (256-336), a priest of Alexandria, who denied that there were three distinct divine Persons in God. He taught that there was only one Person, the Father. According to Arius' theology, the Son was created ("There was a time when he was not"). Thus, according to the Arians, Christ was a son of God, not by nature, but by grace and adoption. This changes the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ because God does not become human according to Arius, but is a special creation of God. Arianism was the major controversy of its day, and resolved by the very first ecumenical, the Council of Nicaea, which produced and published the original version of the Nicene Creed. Arianism and variations of it, continued in many areas for more than a century – especially among the Visigoths, and some of the emperors of Rome. The most celebrated opponent of Arianism was Saint Athanasius, the Patriarch of Alexandria (296-373).

Donatism was a belief that the validity of the sacraments depends upon the moral character of the minister of the sacraments, and that there was no reconciliation with the Church for major sins, such as giving up the faith in times of persecution. Donatism began when rigorist Christians (who had survived the persecution) claimed that Bishop Caecilian of Carthage (around 313), was not a valid bishop because he had been ordained by a bishop who had abandoned the faith under duress – during the Diocletian persecution. The Donatists broke their communion with the Catholics, and ordained their own bishops, one of whom was Donatus, for whom the heresy is named. The Roman emperor required the two sides to reconcile at the beginning of the 5th century, with Saint Augustine defending the Catholic side at a great conference in Carthage, Africa. Augustine gave great effort to reconcile with the Donatists.

Gnosticism was a belief in special enlightenment through secret knowledge given only to those who would give themselves to its ceremonies and secret rituals. This was usually knowledge

claimed by an elite group. Gnosticism existed before Christianity, and the Gnostics interpreted the four gospels to their own views and for their own purposes, adding additional Gnostic gospels, with their particular doctrines. Gnosticism generally held matter to be constrictive – something from which we are freed, through the special knowledge. They rejected the Trinity, and adopted a belief in a supreme god and lesser gods. Jesus was seen by some as an incarnation of a supreme being, who came to bring this knowledge to the world, others saw Jesus as an enlightened human being. Valentinus lived in Rome between 136 and 165, and was a prominent leader of one group of Gnostics.

Macedonianism is named for Macedonius, a 4th century Arian bishop of Constantinople, whose followers denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit, stating that the Spirit is a creation of the Son.

Marcionism takes its name from Marcion (early 2nd century bishop). He and his followers rejected the Old Testament and much of the New Testament, except for the Gospel of Luke and ten of the Letters of Saint Paul. They claimed to preach a purer gospel – modeled on the writings of Saint Paul – a gospel of love, and excluding any law. They only baptized virgins, widows, and celibates. Married people could not be more than catechumens.

Modalism held that there is only one Person in God, who manifests himself in various ways, or modes. Sabellianism and Priscillianism are forms of Modalism. A number of groups held this belief.

Monophysitism is a 5th century belief that in Christ there is only one nature (Greek: *mono*, single; *physis*, nature), which is a divine nature. (Thus, the human nature of Christ is absorbed into Christ's divine nature. This movement arose primarily in reaction to Nestorianism. Monophysitism, continued in different forms, at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451. Some of the argumentation between the Monophysites and the Catholic/Orthodox factions came from difficulties in the language – specifically the differences in the vocabulary.

Monothelism arose in the seventh century as a result of the efforts of the Eastern Roman emperor to accommodate the Monophysites. Monothelites accepted the creedal doctrine of the two natures, divine and human, in the Person of Jesus Christ, but said that these two natures had only "one will" (Greek: *monos*, single; *thelein*, will). 681.

Montanism arose in the 2nd century, and professed a belief in a new "Church of the Spirit." Montanus was a prophet in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). The Montanists were rigorists who claimed the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit – proponents of "New Prophecy." They were very ardent ascetics as well. Much of their doctrine remained very parallel to that of the Catholics, but they ordained female clergy and believed that martyrs and those who suffered for the faith shared the role of the bishop in the Sacrament of Reconciliation – the sacramental

forgiveness of sins. They also gambled and used mascara on the eyes – which was forbidden by the Church at the time, since it was a practice of prostitutes.

Nestorianism is the opposite of Monophysitism, claiming that there are two distinct persons in the one incarnate Christ. (Remember that the Catholic teaching is that Jesus is one person with two natures.) The Nestorians believed that it is unthinkable that God was born, crucified, and died; and that Mary could not really be Mother of God, but only the mother of a human being united with God. (Its name comes from Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople in the middle of the 5th century). It was condemned by the ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431. (Monophysitism is an opposite reaction to Nestorianism.)

Novatianism originated with Novatian, a Roman priest who became an antipope, claiming the papacy in 251 in opposition to the true pope, Saint Cornelius, who was recognized as the Catholic Bishop of Rome, the pope. The Novatianists were moral rigorists, like the Donatists. Those who committed serious sins were permanently excluded from the Church. There was no reconciliation for those who committed murder or adultery.

Pelagianism is named for the British monk, Pelagius (355-425), who first taught his views in Rome, arguing against the necessity of grace. He also denied the doctrine of original sin. Basically, Pelagius taught that the human will, as created by God, was enough to live a sinless life, though God's grace could aid us in our good deeds. Pelagius did not believe that all humanity was affected by original sin (guilty in the sin of Adam's) but said that Adam had set a bad example for humanity. On the other hand, the good example of Christ gives humanity a path to salvation, through sacrifice and the training of the will. Jerome was a chief critic of Pelagianism, stating that sin is a part of human nature. The Catholic teaching follows Saint Paul: "For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:22-24)

Semi-Arianism is an attempt to reach a compromise between the Catholic position and the Arian position. It arose after the Council of Nicaea, which was held in 325. A modified form of Arianism (see above) that flourished after the Council of Nicaea had condemned Arianism in 325. The Semi-Arians wished to substitute the Greek words *homo-i-ousios* ("of like substance") or *homoios* ("similar") for the word accepted in the Catholic/Orthodox Nicene Creed, which is *homo-ousios* ("one in being" or "consubstantial") with the Father. (Thus, the Semi-Arians would still not affirm that the Son and the Father are "one in Being.")

Subordinationism is a designation for the belief of many groups of the 4th century belief who stated that the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father.

How were these controversies resolved? Are they still controversial issues?

These controversies were often debated, and just as often became political. Sometimes the politics reached the highest levels, so that emperor and patriarch were pitted against each other. Usually, the resolution came in the form of the judgment of an ecumenical council, where the bishops of the Church made a pronouncement on the authentic articles of faith. Still, some raged on for decades or centuries. Some of these controversies emerged centuries later, in the groups that separated from the Catholic tradition. We can still see some forms of these controversies in the religious groups of our time.

B. The wisdom of restraint in doctrinal pronouncements (2)

How do the bishops of the Church contribute to authentic Catholic teaching?

The bishops are the witnesses of Catholic tradition. Theirs is the role to bring unity – not only unity among the Catholic faith communities of the present, but also unity with the Catholic Church of the past centuries. They are the living witnesses of the apostolic tradition of faith.

Bishops are to work as a *collegium*, an episcopal order that is a continuation of the apostolic order. This is the reason that Catholics so highly value apostolic succession.

The tradition of faith calls us to align the lights of faith. These lights are the Scripture, the sacraments and the apostolic authority. This is all best expressed at Eucharist, when the People of God gather. Here, the Scripture is proclaimed, the sacraments are celebrated and the bishop teaches. Every Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the bishop, as noted in the Eucharistic prayer, when the bishop is remembered in prayer. The ordained and lay ministries are exercised in union with the bishop. The priests and deacons celebrate and confer sacraments by their connection with the bishop, and the local parish community is shepherded by the bishop, who is their chief shepherd. The people of each parish look to the bishop as their guide, as does the pastor of the parish community.

While each bishop leads her/his diocese, the *collegium* of bishops speaks in communion. This is a strength, for they speak as a holy order – the successors of the apostles. It is in communion

that they find the guidance of the Holy Spirit, when unity and harmony bring them into one mind and heart. In the synodal process, that unity is extended to a conversation with the clergy and laity that brings consensus to the process of discerning the will of the Spirit.

Why do the bishops sometimes take a more passive approach to controversy?

There are two reasons for restraint in Church pronouncements. The first is that there is diversity in the Church. Not all practices of the Church require uniformity, but all practices do require unity. Sometimes we are united in our diversity, so that we are comfortable with our differences.

The second reason is that some issues are not yet resolved, and further clarification is needed, as well as the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Changes in the practice of the Church need deliberation. For example, the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood required a strong consensus. In the Catholic tradition, the Old Catholics of Europe had studied the matter, and gave a strong theological explanation for the ordination of women. (This work was summarized and published in 1996 by Bishop Vobbe of Germany.) Additionally, the sense of justice was examined by many groups that embrace the Catholic and apostolic tradition – justice for women and for the entire Church. While some may have felt impatience with this development, it was necessary that the process be followed.

The Church is in dialogue with the world around it. As the world progresses, sometimes the Church is urged along, and sometimes the Church takes the lead. As we look into the history of the Church, we find its leadership in various areas. For example, in the early history of the Church, when marriage between different social classes was not civilly recognized, the Western Church took the lead in recognizing the union of a couple from different classes. This can be seen in the ancient Christian Roman Empire at the time of Ambrose and Augustine, in Milan and Rome. (Refer to the 2012 book by Garry Wills, *Font of Life.*)

C. Cardinal John Henry Newman and the development of doctrine (3)

What is the development of doctrine, and who were the pioneers of this understanding of the authentic development of the teaching of the Church?

The development of doctrine was a term used by Father John Henry Newman and other theologians in agreement with him. It describes the way Catholic teaching becomes more evident over the centuries without contradicting what came earlier. Later practices of the

Church remain consistent with earlier practices, so that a continuous thread of Catholic faith and practice may be observed. Some practices are the development of what came earlier, but were not evident. (For instance, the Sacrament of Matrimony was slowly defined and clarified over the centuries.)

The term was used in Newman's 1845 publication, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (revised in 1878). He defended specific practices of the Church as developmental, when some groups claimed that they were corruptions or innovations. Newman relied on an extensive study of early Church Fathers in tracing the development of doctrine which implicit in the Catholic and apostolic tradition which from the beginnings of the Church.

Father Newman argued that various Catholic doctrines and practices, such as devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, or prayers for the dead (implying a cleansing or “purgation” after death) had a developmental history parallel to doctrines that were accepted by both Catholics and Protestants (such as the Trinity, or the divinity and humanity of Christ).

How did Cardinal John Henry Newman contribute to the understanding of the development of doctrine?

John Henry Newman became a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately, it was during a period of great strife and competition among the various Christian denominations. Yet, Cardinal Newman was influential decades later, in the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, and his influence went much further to influence the Catholic world. Here are some of his contributions:

1. He reminded the Catholic world of the necessity of a comprehensive biblical theology as the basis for theology. In Newman’s time, biblical studies and theology were separate disciplines, in which the Scripture was used to bolster theological argument. Newman took the Scriptures as the beginning of his theology – much like the more ancient approach that had held sway from the early Church Fathers to the work of Thomas Aquinas.
2. Cardinal Newman’s understanding of the process of revelation was eventually expressed in the words of the Vatican II document, *Dei Verbum (The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)*:

This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke 2:19 and Luke

2:51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.

Compare this quote with Father Newman's own words, from the Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, # 40:

If a great idea is duly to be understood, and much more if it is to be fully exhibited. It is elicited and expanded by trial, and battles into perfection and supremacy. Nor does it escape the collision of opinion even in its earlier years, nor does it remain truer to itself, and with a better claim to be considered one and the same, though externally protected from vicissitude and change. It is indeed sometimes said that the stream is clearest near the spring. Whatever use may fairly be made of this image, it does not apply to the history of a philosophy or belief, which on the contrary is more equable, and purer, and stronger, when its bed has become deep, and broad, and full. It necessarily rises out of an existing state of things, and for a time savours of the soil. Its vital element needs disengaging from what is foreign and temporary, and is employed in efforts after freedom which become more vigorous and hopeful as its years increase. Its beginnings are no measure of its capabilities, nor of its scope. At first no one knows what it is, or what it is worth. It remains perhaps for a time quiescent; it tries, as it were, its limbs, and proves the ground under it, and feels its way. From time to time it makes essays which fail, and are in consequence abandoned. It seems in suspense which way to go; it wavers, and at length strikes out in one definite direction. In time it enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing; parties rise and around it; dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles reappear under new forms. It changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.

Cardinal Newman is arguing that change and development is not an exception, but at the heart of creedal faith. The Vatican II passage agrees with this, through the words, "For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down."

With these statements, both Cardinal Newman and the Vatican Council have connected the scriptural tradition to the Fathers of the Church as a seamless flow that is not simply to be read, but is to be followed as a guide in the trajectory of the development of each doctrine. (For instance, the teaching of the Scripture concerning the role of the laity can be traced in its seminal stages – where there is little formal Church declaration – to the pronouncements of each age, and its flowering in such documents as the Vatican II “Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.”

3. Cardinal Newman affirmed the principle that truth comes, not simply by perception of reality, but by a conditioned reception of what we call “truth.” It is not that truth is unattainable, but that it is sifted through generations of perception, and distilled again and again, by necessity. It is this constant quest that is at the heart of faith, one generation building on the next – not discarding what has been expressed. It is essential that each generation maintain what has been stated and celebrated. Then that generation will add its own voice.
4. Newman affirmed the two polarities of Catholic faith: One is the objective pole of the events of the Church. These are the historical events of the coming of Christ; the major historical events of the Church, such as its ecumenical councils, etc. The other pole is the personal assent and commitment of each person who embraces faith. So often in the past, the argumentation involved the pursuit of proving or demonstrating the objective pole of Catholic faith, with a standard expectation that the personal act of affirming the faith would be systematically accomplished (or rejected, without an examination of the conditions of that rejection).
5. Father Newman argued that the entirety of the People of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and constitute a dynamic element of unshakeable faith. This is another polarity with the more fixed pole of the teaching authority of the hierarchy. It specifically contrasts with the Roman Catholic notion of the infallibility of the Pope of Rome, in the sense that the People of God (as a continuous whole) are to be trusted as true in their perception of authentic faith.

6. Cardinal Newman sought a re-engagement of theology and culture, so that the technical language of theology is not so divorced from culture that the People of God would often compartmentalize the realms of faith and the realms of life.

Doesn't the development of doctrine mean that truth is relative?

On the contrary, the development of doctrine is an assurance that truth can be found and continuously affirmed through the examination of the contribution of each generation of faithful Catholics. In other words, we can see the truth shining through the expression of each era. For example, whether the Eucharist is celebrated in the catacombs of Rome in the 2nd century, or the cathedrals of 21st century America, the elements of authentic Catholic devotion can be recognized. The cultural element of each generation and geographical place are not a distraction from the truth, but a support of authentic Catholic faith – celebrating what all Catholics hold as dear and as essential.

D. Cardinal Newman and the witness of the laity (sensus fidelium) (4)

What is the specific understanding of the term *sensus fidelium*?

The *sensus fidelium* literally means a sense of the faithful. It is also called the *consensus fidelium*, and refers to the belief of the People of God as a whole and throughout the centuries. This is differentiated from the words “*sensus fidei*,” which refers to a sense of the faith that individuals have – a kind of intuitive and perceptive understanding of faith that guides one’s expression in conceptual terms.

Cardinal Newman cited this particular *sensus fidelium* as a guiding principle for the Church. In his essay of 1859, “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,” he elaborated on the witness of the *sensus fidelium* as a light for the Church. It is ever faithful in pointing to authentic Catholic faith.

Cardinal Newman cited the example of the Arian controversy, in which the estimate is that a sizeable number of Christian bishops held to the Arian opinion, or did not defend against the opinion, that Jesus Christ is not “one in Being” or “consubstantial” with the Father. The People of God held more strongly to the divinity of Christ than these bishops. Their devotion and faith in Jesus as the Son of God, the second member of the Holy Trinity, held sway over the movement toward Arianism.

In this quote, Father Newman explains the example of *sensus fidelium*, commenting on “*Ecclesia docta*” (the Church that is taught) and “*Ecclesia docens*” (the Church that is teaching – meaning particularly the episcopacy):

Here, of course, I must explain:-in saying this, then, undoubtedly I am not denying that the great body of the Bishops were in their internal belief orthodox; nor that there were numbers of clergy who stood by the laity, and acted as their centres and guides; nor that the laity actually received their faith, in the first instance, from the Bishops and clergy; nor that some portions of the laity were ignorant, and other portions at length corrupted by the Arian teachers, who got possession of the sees and ordained an heretical clergy;- but I mean still, that in that time of immense confusion the divine dogma of our Lord's divinity was proclaimed, enforced, maintained, and (humanly speaking) preserved, far more by the "Ecclesia docta" than by the "Ecclesia docens;" that the body of the episcopate was unfaithful to its commission, while the body of the laity was faithful to its baptism; that at one time the Pope, at other times the patriarchal, metropolitan, and other great sees, at other times general councils, said what they should not have said, or did what obscured and compromised revealed truth; while, on the other hand, it was the Christian people who, under Providence, were the ecclesiastical strength of Athanasius, Hilary, Eusebius of Vercellae, and other great solitary confessors, who would have failed without them. (Section 3, Paragraph 5, On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine)

The faith of the People of God is not a new idea. The early Church Fathers affirmed the idea that the faith is maintained in its practice, and pointed to the consistency in the Catholic faith as it was practiced throughout Europe, Africa and Asia. Cardinal Newman cites references from the Church Fathers as evidence of this consistency. However, the administration of the Church sometimes centered upon the hierarchy alone as the bearers of the faith, forgetting that it is the whole Church that carries the Catholic and apostolic tradition. The teaching office of the bishops is to be in dialogue with the entire Church in its expression of authentic Catholic doctrine. This is an obligation, and remains at the heart of the relationship between bishop and people.

How is this relevant to the authentic teaching of the Church?

Authentic teaching resonates with the People of God. An example is the belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist – that in Holy Communion we receive the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. This is doctrine and more than doctrine, for it is the devotion of the Catholic people. Any deviation from this doctrine will be rejected by the Catholic faithful at large. A few individuals may reject this understanding of the sacrament, but we may read in

the faith of many generations the consistent faith in this Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist – a beloved doctrine.

Marian devotion is another strongly held doctrine and devotion of the faithful People of God. Beyond a simple expression, it is a profound experience of the Catholic faithful to hold to such devotion to Mary, as the Mother of God and our Mother (Mother of the Church). This is a second excellent example of *sensus fidelium* as a guiding light of authentic Catholic faith.

How do we know what teaching will remain authentic?

We will follow the example of Cardinal Newman, who cited the various lights of faith, starting with the Scriptures, and examining the Church Fathers, the teachings of the ecumenical councils of the Church, the witness of the saints, the celebration of the sacraments, other teachings of the collegiums of bishops, and the *sensus fidelium*. Prayerfully aligning these lights of authentic faith will guide us in Catholic belief and practice. We may draw our inspiration from Saint Vincent of Lerins (5th century), who wrote the *Commonitorium* (Remembrance) of Catholic faith. Saint Vincent rejected the argument that scriptural reference (*sola scriptura*) is sufficient for knowing what is authentic faith. One of his quotes is often cited to express the meaning of Catholicity:

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical pravity; and I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or anyone else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church.

But here someone perhaps will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation? For this reason—because, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters. For Novatian expounds it one way, Sabellius another, Donatus another, Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, another, Photinus, Apollinaris, Priscillian, another, Iovinian, Pelagius, Celestius, another, lastly, Nestorius another. Therefore, it is very necessary, on account of so great intricacies of such various

error, that the rule for the right understanding of the prophets and apostles should be framed in accordance with the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation.

Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense Catholic, which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient [unanimous] definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors. (Commonitorium, Chapter 2, about 450)

E. Doctrine and controversy in the Church today (4)

What are the values that guide the understanding of authentic doctrine?

St. Vincent of Lerins (5th century) gives us three criteria for authentic Catholic faith:

- ❖ Universality - Is what we believe generally believed by Catholics everywhere?
- ❖ Antiquity- Is what we believe also what the Church Fathers and our "holy ancestors" understood and believed?
- ❖ Consent- Is what we believe also believed by most Catholics throughout the ages – or is it a minority opinion or an isolated case?

However, it is important to understand that the faith of the Church expands continuously, in the development of doctrine that we have discussed. This is because the implications of what we believe are examined and realized in our Catholic practice. Here are a few examples:

- ❖ In the very beginning, the Church was challenged in terms of its inclusivity. When non-Jews wanted to become Christians, the majority of Jews wanted them to become Jewish as a part of their conversion to Christianity. This was overturned by the efforts of Saint Paul, and the Council of Jerusalem, composed of the apostles and elders of the Christian community.
- ❖ The Christian community used non-biblical language for the first time at the Council of Nicaea, when it defined the Trinity in terms of Greek philosophical language (the Father and the Son were described as “consubstantial” (homoousios).

- ❖ The Western Church began to use Greek non-Christian philosophical terms to define other elements of its doctrine. For instance, the term “transubstantiation” is non-biblical, but is used to explain the change in the elements of bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Christ, during the Eucharist.

- ❖ The Eastern Church has a tradition of allowing additional marriages after the initial marriage ends in divorce – and for more reasons than adultery. Thus, two “non-sacramental” marriages are allowed by Eastern Canon law. This is a further development from the original teaching of Jesus found in Matthew 19:3-9.

- ❖ The Western Church declares some marriages to be licit, but not valid, thus stating that the couple was legally married, but that the Sacrament of Matrimony did not really become actuated.

- ❖ The Church tolerated slavery for centuries, accepting it as a fact of human society. It is only in the 19th century that the immorality of slavery became standardly accepted, after civil society began to abolish it as an institution.

- ❖ The Church condemned usury (lending money at interest) for the first millennium. In time, it not only accepted the practice, but participated in it an institution.

These examples mean that the teaching and practice of the Church can develop – not contrary to the doctrines and practices of the past, but expanding the meaning of the doctrine to become more inclusive in practice.

Does this mean that there are right and wrong understandings of Catholic faith?

It means that there are Catholic understandings of the faith, and understandings that are not Catholic. The canon of Scripture, the tradition of the sacraments, the creed, apostolic succession of bishops, holy orders, devotion to the Virgin Mary and the saints, and other ancient beliefs of the Church are established, along with the traditions that accompany these traditions. (An example is that only a bishop or priest presides at Eucharist. Another example is that baptism is necessary for entrance into the salvific life of the Church.)

With the development of the life of the Church, the challenge comes as the understanding of the ancient faith is not contradicted, but expanded. For example, two issues are now facing the Church at large: the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood, and the inclusion of same-gender couples in the sacramental life of the Church. Three questions might be added to the categories suggested by Saint Vincent of Lerins:

1. Does the expansion of the doctrine/practice harm the creedal faith or sacramental practice? If so, how is it harmed?
2. Does the expansion of the doctrine/practice affirm the creedal faith or sacramental practice, and expand its meaning with more inclusivity and a better sense of justice?
3. How does this expansion of the doctrine/practice change the theology of the creed or sacrament.

Cardinal Newman pointed out that the Church must be in dialogue with the culture around it. If the Church portrays the culture as generally hostile, it risks losing its credibility with its members. For instance, the general population of the Western world increasingly affirms the human right of determination for lesbian and gay individuals to be in committed legal relationships. This is not understood as harmful to the society, nor to the individuals themselves. Rather, it is understood as supporting the stability of that couple and their family, reducing irresponsible sexual behavior, and promoting equal justice for the couple and their family members. How can the Church answer these affirmations with credibility?

A parallel argument can be made for the rights of women. Our society now celebrates the ability of women to enter any field of endeavor on an equal basis with men. Women can become the presidents of companies, politicians, doctors, attorneys, astronauts, etc. How can the Church justify the continuation of its policy of ordaining only men to the ministerial priesthood? Its credibility is at stake, as well as its support from younger members of the Church – who are accustomed to equal treatment of men and women.

While these areas can challenge more traditional attitudes toward the meaning of Catholicity, others cannot. For instance, changing the understanding of the sacraments, the creed or the structure of the Church (lay and ordained) cannot be justified through an appeal to justice. Such changes are a departure from the Catholic tradition.

The interpretation of the tradition of Catholic faith is always the task of each generation, building upon the contributions of the previous generations, and not rejecting them. Thus, the

creed, the sacraments, etc. are understood in the light of human progress, but not altered in their continuous connection with the Catholic faith of the apostolic tradition, which stretches back nearly two millennia.

The Church can change. In the midst of a tradition that generally considered non-Christian religions to be wrong and abhorrent, the bishops of Vatican II produced this statement from *Nostra Aetate* (The Declaration of the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions):

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men. (Nostra Aetate, Article 2, 1965)

Likewise, after 400 years of bitter wars and condemnations, the bishops of Vatican II, produced this superb statement, as a step toward harmony and reconciliation with non-Catholic Christians:

The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter. For there are many who honor Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a pattern of life, and who show a sincere zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Savior. They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ. They also recognize and accept other sacraments within their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist and cultivate devotion toward the Virgin Mother of God. They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits. Likewise we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power. Some indeed He has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood. In all of Christ's disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd, and He prompts them to pursue this end. Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope and work that this may come about. She

exhorts her children to purification and renewal so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the earth. (Lumen Gentium, Chapter II, section 15)

It is possible to interpret our Catholic faith in a manner of reconciliation and inclusivity. As the Church learned to move toward the inclusion of non-Catholic and non-Christians in its understanding of the plan of salvation – as it unfolds with each passing generation – it may come to also understand the diversity among its own members, and to ask if that faithfulness to the Gospel and the Catholic tradition can be maintained by that diverse group of Catholics. The experience of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion has proven this faithfulness to be the case. Without regard to gender or sexual orientation, Catholics can be faithful to Jesus Christ and his Church, faithful to the Catholic tradition and to the Gospel of peace that surpasses all understanding.

F. The historical unfolding of specific doctrines (4)

Can you give some examples of the development of doctrine over the centuries?

- 1) The canon of Scripture is an example of the development doctrine. The list of New Testament documents took about 360 years to reach its definitive form – at the Council of Carthage in 397. For instance, the books of Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation were not widely accepted by the Church until 350.

In the first four centuries of the Church many books, such as the seven letters of Ignatius, the Letter of Clement [the fourth pope] to the Corinthians, the Didache, and The Shepherd of Hermas were considered by many Christians to be inspired but were later not included in the canon of Scripture. It was not until the Councils of Hippo and Carthage that the Catholic Church defined which books were included in the canon of the New Testament and which were not.

- 2) The Sacrament of Matrimony is also another example of the development of doctrine. In the early Church there was a variety of customs, with little formal standardization for the celebration of the sacrament. There was some theological development, with most of the attention devoted to the good of marriage, rather than the meaning or definition of marriage. Saint Augustine recognized three benefits of marriage: fidelity, children and permanence. “Fidelity” refers to the exclusive sexual relationship, “children” refers to their nurturance in an atmosphere of love, and “permanence” refers to the stability of family life.

Even though theologians wrote of marriage as a “sacrament,” there was no clear consensus that the sacrament of matrimony was considered a sacrament in the way baptism and Eucharist are considered a sacrament – that marriage is an occasion or cause of grace – until the Council of Verona in 1184. It was not until the Council of

Trent, in 1563, that marriage was defined “as truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the evangelical law, instituted by Christ the Lord” (Council of Trent, session XXIV, *De Doctrina*, c. 1) The Council of Trent also standardized and regulated the celebration of the sacrament, with conditions for its legal and valid celebration and conferral.

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the authentic teaching of the Church?

We begin with the New Testament Scriptures to find the role of the Holy Spirit in the guidance of the Church, and its authentic teaching. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. (John 16:13-15)

Jesus identifies the Holy Spirit as the Advocate – One who supports and comforts. Yet the work of the Spirit is not elaborated until the later documents of the New Testament.

- ❖ Romans 5:5 states, “And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who is given to us.”

Thus the very life of the Church, which is love, is the work of the Holy Spirit. The authentic teaching of the Church is dependent upon love as the bond of its communion.

- ❖ Romans 8:9-11 says, ‘For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”’

The Holy Spirit inspires toward dignity and freedom. The authentic teaching of the Church is meant to bring a sense of dignity and freedom to the People of God, not burdens or humiliation.

- ❖ Romans 8:26-27 states, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”

The Holy Spirit is the source and power of all devotion and worship, the guide of authenticity. It is through the prayer inspiration of Holy Spirit, and the sacraments given through the Holy Spirit, that the authentic teaching of the Church is received.

- ❖ Galatians 5:19-24 instructs us, “Now the works of the flesh are plain: sexual immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Authentic teaching will instruct the People of God in ways that produce the fruit of the Spirit. That which exploits and demeans the members of the Body of Christ is divisive and destructive. This is a test as to the authentic teaching: Does it produce the fruit of the Spirit? One may argue that the teaching must be followed to produce such results. Yet it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that such transformation happens. Therefore, authentic teaching is active on all levels, not just among the hierarchical teachers. It is in the “communion of the Holy Spirit” that true communication of the Gospel takes place. This is more than the transmission of ideas, it is the sharing of a spiritual power and experience in the Spirit – the Church’s continuing encounter with and in Christ.

- ❖ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 states, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the workings of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these

are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

Authentic teaching comes through a variety of gifts of the Holy Spirit, and is not simply dependent upon doctrinal declarations. It is the calling of the ordained leadership, and particularly the episcopacy, to promote this variety of gifts, so that authentic teaching and practice may be vibrant in the Church.

- ❖ Ephesians 4:2-6 teaches us, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

The authentic teaching of the Church is always in the context of unity. It is unity – the communion of the Holy Spirit – that is the source and hope of the Church. Authentic teaching always moves toward preserving the unity of the Church.

In his book, *Catholicism*, Father Richard McBrien writes about the Holy Spirit and the authentic teaching of the Church. Citing some of the same passages that are given above, he writes that authority in the Church is not like that in other organizations because it is a function of the Body of Christ – a new society: “Authority as a function of the Body of Christ is a new concept of authority, just as the Body of Christ is a new concept of society. Authority is an operation of the Holy Spirit, but is only one operation.” (page 742, *Catholicism*)

The New Testament conceives of the Gospel not simply as a set of teachings, but as a way of life. Thus, everything taught by the apostles (who are commissioned to teach in the name of Jesus) has the objective of Christ. Ephesians 4:20-24 even gives correction in terms of teaching and learning, but in the wider aspect of this way of life: “That is not how you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

It is important to remember that faith is more than an assent to doctrinal principles. It is a gift – the gift of the Holy Spirit – that brings us into the Body of Christ. To be “in Christ” is the fullness of the Gospel. It is the aim of all teaching – not just theological correctness. True

authority, like that of Jesus Christ, has the power of the Spirit to bestow peace and lead into the transformation of the mind and heart. It follows upon these words from the gospels: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.” (Matthew 7:28-29)

Chapter Eleven: Catholic Identity in a Pluralistic and Global Society (total 14 pages)

A. The Holy Spirit and the world (4)

How is God present in the world? How are we aware of that presence?

God is present, and that presence can be found in our awareness. From the beginning of recorded history, the great sages of the world have written of a sense of presence. It is called by many names, but is described as all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever-present. The Bhagavad-Gita of India says, “I pervade the whole universe, unseen... Yet I am not contained by anything.” (Bhagavad-Gita, 9:4)

The inspired Hebrew Scriptures maintain this sense of separation between the unperceived God of the universe and the universe itself – yet teaching that God pervades the universe (Psalm 139:7-12):

*Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,*

*even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

Our Christian faith focuses on the path to the knowledge of God:

- ❖ “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.” (John 1:18) In knowing Christ, we come to know God. That knowledge of Christ comes from being “in Christ,” which is incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church. Through the sacramental, devotional and communal life of the Church we come to the awareness of God, and fulfill our search for God’s presence.
- ❖ “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” (1 John 4:12) We are urged to remain in love, for God is love (1 John 4:8). It is in this communion of love that we experience God. All the activities of the Church must be in the context of this communion. Thus, our sacramental and personal lives of devotion, our efforts of social justice and compassion, and our efforts of Church administration and governance must be in the context of love:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the world?

The Holy Spirit is the dynamic presence of God. The Spirit pervades all and creates all that is, sustaining the universe. The Scriptures poetically point to this from the very beginning: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” (Genesis 1:1-2) The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of the Church affirms this teaching in its words concerning the Holy Spirit:

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets. (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, 381)

How does the Holy Spirit speak to people who are not Christian?

The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, speaks to this question of people who are not Christian, from the viewpoint of those who have embraced our Catholic and Christian faith:

Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Savior wills that all men be saved. Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life. (Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter II, section 16)

However, the document also gives a caution. We must not be naïve about the importance of preaching the Gospel of Christ, for it is the saving message – the light of the world and its hope:

But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator. Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," the Church fosters the missions with care and attention. (Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter II, section 16)

The Holy Spirit cannot be limited by anyone, and works in the world through creation itself, and through the revelation of Christ. Thus, the Spirit is at work in every human heart, for every person is a reflection of God, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

B. Catholic and Protestant perspectives (4)

Are there various kinds of Catholics?

There have been various branches of the Church, which have followed the apostolic tradition of Scripture, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, sacraments, three-fold ordained ministry, apostolic succession of bishops, devotion to Mary as Mother of God and to the saints, and the other traditions that align with Catholic faith. These are generally the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches of the Church.

The Western Catholic Tradition includes those ecclesial groups that follow the same tradition of faith described above. There are Anglo-Catholics, Old Catholics and other authentic Catholic Churches. In the first millennium there were many Churches that followed the Catholic tradition, which were in communion with the Church of Rome. This is evidenced by the ancient rites of the Eucharist and sacraments – Gallican, Mozarabic, etc.

Are there various kinds of Protestants?

When the Protestants initially separated from Church of Rome (generally in the 16th century) as an ecclesial body, they did not continue many of the Catholic traditions. Their separation continued as the centuries passed. The Lutheran tradition was strongest in the countries of Northern Europe. The Reformed tradition formed around the teachings of John Calvin in Switzerland. Throughout the centuries, various groups separated from these two traditions, and are called the independent branch of Protestantism – many of them are Pentecostal.

The Anglican Communion also separated from the jurisdiction of Rome, and has been impaired in its dialogue with the Church of Rome by papal statements denying the validity of its apostolic succession. However, the Anglicans maintain that the central elements of Catholic faith (Scripture, sacraments and apostolic episcopal structure).

What are some of the main similarities and differences between Catholic and Protestant understandings of Christian faith?

The Protestants and Catholics share the belief in Jesus Christ and the Trinity. Many share the sacramental ritual traditions – though the understanding of the sacraments, their number, and the naming of the sacraments differ. Both share the Scriptures as inspired by God – though again, the understanding of the Scriptures is different, especially in terms of inspiration and

interpretation (varying a great deal among Protestants). Yet, Catholics share with Protestants the belief that Christ is found in the Scriptures (especially present in their proclamation).

C. *The witness of the Eastern Church (2)*

What do the Eastern Churches share with Catholicism in terms of the elements of faith?

The Eastern Orthodox tradition and Churches share the ancient Christian faith to such an extent that there is an active dialogue among the Churches. The Scriptures, sacraments, apostolic succession of bishops, devotion to the Mary as Mother of God (*Theotokos*) and to the saints, and the teachings about the Eucharist are generally shared by these two traditions – with some differences in celebration and theology.

How are Eastern Churches different in terms of their understanding and practice of Christian faith and practice?

- ❖ The Eastern Churches do not accept the Roman Catholic understanding of the pope having universal jurisdiction over every individual of the Church. Orthodox Churches generally have a different sense of Church structure, based upon Church synods or councils.

- ❖ The rites of the Churches, and their theology of the sacraments, differ. For instance, the Eastern Orthodox celebrate and confer the three sacraments of initiation together at the time of a child's baptism.

- ❖ The theology of the Orthodox Church aligns more closely with the spirituality of the Church – thus the life of the Church is interpreted more closely with its doctrine of *theosis* – the deification of the Christian. Western teachings on grace use terms such as “sanctifying grace” and “actual grace,” whereas the Eastern tradition avoids such terms and directs its attention on theosis, the transforming presence of the Trinity in the soul. Ultimately, the two traditions share the belief that the Trinity dwells in the soul, and transforms that soul into the image of Christ.

- ❖ Generally, Roman Catholic priests are celibate, while Eastern Orthodox men may be married before they are ordained as priests. (Orthodox bishops may not be married.)

- ❖ The devotion of Eastern Orthodox Christians centers on icons, and the theology of the icon is extremely developed in the Orthodox tradition.

D. Christians and non-Christians (4)

What is the general Catholic attitude toward non-Christian religions?

Catholics generally believe that all people are the children of God, and beloved of God. Catholics do not condemn non-Christians, but center their thoughts on non-Christians as “those who have not yet received the Gospel” (Lumen Gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, section 16, Vatican II, 1964). Catholics respect the wisdom of non-Christian religions, but believe it to be incomplete, since non-Christians have yet to believe in Jesus Christ. Catholics generally believe that the sincere efforts of non-Christians are significant to their redemption:

Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. (Lumen Gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, section 16, Vatican II, 1964).

Do Catholics share some beliefs or practices with other religions of the world?

Catholics share a belief in God with many other religions, though Christian faith in God is specifically Trinitarian. The quest for wisdom and peace is also shared with most devout people. Catholics share a common heritage with the Jewish People (specifically the heritage of Abraham and Sarah, and common Hebrew Scriptures). That Abrahamic heritage is also found in the Moslem tradition as well.

Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and

the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Mohammedans, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. (Lumen Gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, section 16, Vatican II, 1964).

How can we utilize the wisdom we find in other religions in our own practice of Christian faith?

Many Christians are finding valuable wisdom and practices in other religious traditions. Most recently, the value of meditation has been shown by Asian religions, such as the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Additionally, the teachings of the illusory character of the world parallel with Catholic teaching that life “falls short” of its hopes (Saint Paul, Romans 3:23), and is in need of redemption. (For Christians, that redemption is in Jesus Christ.) Christians can share the quest for peace with non-Christians, as well as the advancement of the dignity of each person – through cooperative efforts for social justice.

Catholic Prayers (total 12 pages)

(In their traditional language setting)

The Sign of the Cross

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Our Father (Prayer of Jesus Christ)

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

The Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is
the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

N.B. The Hail Mary is taken from the Gospel of Luke:

"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28)

"Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42).

The Glory Be (Shorter Doxology)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by
the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into Hell; the third day He arose again from the dead;

He ascended into Heaven and is seated at the right hand of God
the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come
to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,
the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Catholic Grace at Meals

Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts,
which we are about to receive from your bounty,
through [Christ](#) our Lord. Amen.

The Hail Holy Queen (Salve Regina)

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!
Our life, our sweetness, and our hope!
To thee do we cry, poor banished
children of Eve, to thee do we send
up our sighs, mourning and weeping
in this valley, of tears.

Turn, then, most gracious advocate,
thine eyes of mercy toward us; and
after this our exile show unto us the
blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus;
O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

The Angelus

The Angel of the Lord declared to Mary:
And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and
blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us
sinners, now and at the hour of
our death. Amen.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord: Be it done unto me according to Thy word.

Hail Mary . . .

And the Word was made Flesh: And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary . . .

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises
of Christ.

Let us pray:

Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts; that we, to whom
the incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel,
may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through
the same Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

The Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

The Traditional Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

My soul magnifies the Lord
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
Because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid;
For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed;
Because he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
And his mercy is from generation to generation
on those who fear him.
He has shown might with his arm,
He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and has exalted the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has given help to Israel, his servant, mindful of his mercy
Even as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.

Prayer for the Deceased (In Paradisum)

May the angels lead you into paradise;
may the martyrs receive you at your coming,

and lead you into the holy city of Jerusalem.
May the choir of the angels receive you,
and may you have eternal rest with Lazarus,
who was once poor.

The Divine Praises

Blessed be God.
Blessed be His Holy Name.
Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.
Blessed be the Name of Jesus.
Blessed be His Most Sacred Heart.
Blessed be His Most Precious Blood.
Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.
Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most Holy.
Blessed be her Holy and Immaculate Conception.
Blessed be her Glorious Assumption.
Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.
Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.
Blessed be God in His Angels and in His Saints. Amen.

Prayer Attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

Lead Kindly Light (Prayer of Cardinal John Henry Newman)

"Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th'encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;

I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on.

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,

And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!

Meantime, along the narrow rugged path,
Thyself hast trod,

Lead, Saviour, lead me home in childlike faith,
Home to my God.

To rest forever after earthly strife
In the calm light of everlasting life."

Mother Teresa's Favorite Prayer for Peace (Reflecting the Hindu Upanishads)

Lead me from death to life,
from falsehood to truth;
lead me from despair to hope,
from fear to trust;
lead me from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart,
our world, our universe. Amen

Traditional Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel

Saint Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.
Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray;
and do Thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host -
by the Divine Power of God -
cast into hell, Satan and all the evil spirits,
who roam throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

The Bookmark of Saint Teresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing;
God alone is changeless.
Patience gains all things.
Who has God wants nothing.
God alone suffices.

Prayer of Saint Richard of Chichester

Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ
For all the benefits Thou hast given me,
For all the pains and insults Thou hast borne for me.
O most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,
May I know Thee more clearly,
Love Thee more dearly,
Follow Thee more nearly. Amen.

Lorica (Breastplate) of Saint Patrick (also called "The Deer's Cry")

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through a belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
Of the Creator of creation.

I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth and His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion and His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection and His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.

I arise today
Through the strength of the love of cherubim,
In obedience of angels,
In service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In preachings of the apostles,
In faiths of confessors,
In innocence of virgins,
In deeds of righteous men.

I arise today

Through the strength of heaven;
Light of the sun,
Splendor of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftness of the wind,
Depth of the sea,
Stability of the earth,
Firmness of the rock.

I arise today
Through God's strength to pilot me;
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's hosts to save me
From snares of the devil,
From temptations of vices,
From everyone who desires me ill,
Afar and a-near,
Alone or in a multitude.

I summon today all these powers between me and evil,
Against every cruel merciless power that opposes my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of women and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul.
Christ shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that reward may come to me in abundance.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through a belief in the Threeness,
Through a confession of the Oneness
Of the Creator of creation

Meditation found written on a wall in Mother Teresa's home for children in Calcutta, and credited to Mother Teresa.

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

The Miserere: Prayer of Repentance (Psalm 51:3-19)

Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness
in your abundant compassion
blot out my offense.
Wash away all my guilt;
from my sin cleanse me.

For I know my offense;
my sin is always before me.
Against you alone have I sinned;
I have done such evil in your sight
That you are just in your sentence,
blameless when you condemn.
True, I was born guilty,
a sinner, even as my mother conceived me.
Still, you insist on sincerity of heart;
in my inmost being teach me wisdom.

Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure;
wash me, make me whiter than snow.
Let me hear sounds of joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Turn away your face from my sins;
blot out all my guilt.

A clean heart create for me, God;
renew in me a steadfast spirit.
Do not drive me from your presence,
nor take from me your holy spirit.
Restore my joy in your salvation;
sustain in me a willing spirit.

I will teach the wicked your ways,

that sinners may return to you.
Rescue me from death, God, my saving God,
that my tongue may praise your healing power.
Lord, open my lips;
my mouth will proclaim your praise.
For you do not desire sacrifice;
a burnt offering you would not accept.
My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit;
A broken, humbled heart, O God, you will not spurn.

Psalm 91

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shade of the Almighty,
Say to the LORD, "My refuge and fortress,
my God in whom I trust."
He will rescue you from the fowler's snare,
from the destroying plague,
He will shelter you with his pinions,
and under his wings you may take refuge;
his faithfulness is a protecting shield.
You shall not fear the terror of the night
nor the arrow that flies by day,
Nor the pestilence that roams in darkness,
nor the plague that ravages at noon.
Though a thousand fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
near you it shall not come.
You need simply watch;
the punishment of the wicked you will see.
Because you have the LORD for your refuge
and have made the Most High your stronghold,
No evil shall befall you,

no affliction come near your tent.
For he commands his angels with regard to you,
to guard you wherever you go.
With their hands they shall support you,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
You can tread upon the asp and the viper,
trample the lion and the dragon.

//

Because he clings to me I will deliver him;
because he knows my name I will set him on high.
He will call upon me and I will answer;
I will be with him in distress;
I will deliver him and give him honor.
With length of days I will satisfy him,
and fill him with my saving power.

For Meditation: The Beatitudes of Jesus (Gospel of St. Matthew 5:3-10)

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure of heart,
for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

For Meditation: Jesus High Priestly Prayer (John 17:20-26)

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

For Meditation: The Prayer Before Communion (Usually said quietly by Priest)

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit your death brought life to the world. By your holy body and blood free me from all my sins, and from every evil. Keep me faithful to your teaching, and never let me be parted from you. Amen

For Meditation: Anima Christi (Body of Christ)

Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me

Water from Christ's side, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me
Within Thy wounds hide me
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee
From the malicious enemy defend me
In the hour of my death call me
And bid me come unto Thee
That I may praise Thee with Thy saints
and with Thy angels
Forever and ever Amen.

Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32) Recited as a Night Prayer

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace;
Your word has been fulfilled.
My eyes have seen the salvation
You have prepared in the sight of every people,
A light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people, Israel. Amen.

Appendix #1: Sample Class Outlines for Clergy and Lay Catechists

(These sample outlines are original documents, taken from the archives of Bishop Peter E. Hickman – who was the first Presiding Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion – and adapted for use here.)

Sample Class Outline #1

Revelation: the Human Encounter with the Divine

(Teacher's Guide)

I. The Dynamic of Revelation: What is the revelatory experience?

A. The revelatory experience happens in the **context** of human life. It is an **event** in which humanity becomes conscious, aware, of the **divine**.

B. In the revelatory experience humanity **perceives** the divine in the human **environment**; that is, in the material world which is accessed by the human mind through **sensory** experience, i.e., that which we can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell.

C. The five senses are the **portals** by which humanity gains **knowledge**, awareness, of itself and the world in which we live.

D. There is an **intuitive** “sense,” an **inner** knowing. However, **intuition** seems more to be a heightened ability to process information that is acquired through one or more of the five senses.

II. The Stages of Revelation: How did it happen?

Revelation is a **process** that unfolds in human history. The Biblical literature records various **levels** of revelatory experiences that **culminate** in the coming of Jesus Christ.

A. Within each human being there exists not only self-consciousness but also a mysterious **yearning**, a desire and a longing for something other than that which exists in the human environment. This yearning is a special **grace** that suggests to the human heart the existence of something **beyond** nature -- a supernatural reality we call **God**.

B. The order and design of the material world suggests an **intelligent creator** beyond nature -- a supernatural reality we call **God**.

(Romans 1:19-20; Wisdom 13:1,5)

This level of the revelatory experience is called “**natural revelation**.”

Revelation: the Human Encounter with the Divine

Page 2

C. The most common revelatory experience in the Bible is in **dreams**. Biblical examples:

1. Jacob at the shrine in Bethel -- Genesis 28:10-22
2. Joseph -- Matthew 1:18ff

Dreams are an activity of the **subconscious** mind during sleep -- highly **subjective** in nature characterized by a series of **images**.

D. **Visions**: similar to dreams in that the images emerge from the subconscious and are highly subjective. However, the visionary is not necessarily asleep but, rather, is often in a waking or conscious state simultaneous to the vision experience. At times the visionary may fall into a deeply meditative state called a trance. Biblical examples:

1. Abraham -- Genesis 15
2. Moses -- Exodus 3
3. Ezekiel -- Ezekiel 1:1
4. Isaiah -- Isaiah 6:1-9
5. Peter -- Acts 10:1-33

E. **Theophany**: a supernatural manifestation that is **observable** through the **five senses**. May be observed by more than one person. A theophany seems to be a physical manifestation. Rarely occur. Biblical examples:

1. Abraham and the visitors -- Genesis 18
2. Moses and Israel at Mt. Horeb -- Exodus 19:16-25
3. Elijah -- I Kings 18

F. **Incarnation**: God revealed in the person of **Jesus** who is identified as being God in the flesh.

1. Hebrews 1:1
2. John 1:1, 14

3. Colossians 1:15a

III. The Content of Revelation

In the revelatory experience God reveals **himself**. It is God's **self-disclosure** to humanity. God communicates **Himself** to us. By divine initiative, divinity is made known to humanity. This self-disclosure is an offer of the divine life to humanity and an invitation to humanity to offer its life back to God.

Sample Class Outline #2

The Church

(Teacher's Guide)

I. The New Humanity

A. Adam is the **archetype** of the "old humanity." He is from the Earth; he is the man of dust. The old humanity is subject to mortality as a result of Adam's sin and the subsequent **Fall from grace**.

1. Adam, through the temptation of the serpent, transgressed the divine command and thereby lost the **divine life**.

2. Having lost the divine life, Adam becomes **mortal**, spiritually **dead**. Spiritual death is the **alienation** or **separation** from God which has become the present state of humanity in Adam.

3. This state or condition of **mortality** was passed on from Adam and Eve to their children. "Having become mortal, Adam and Eve conceived mortal children." (see Romans 5:12)

4. Death is seen to be like a cosmic **disease** or **contamination**. Death is the primary **evil** emerging from an angelic person, the serpent. “Evil does not exist.” That is, it has no substance of its own, but rather, “it is only an **inadequacy** of being.” It is **diminished** existence -- lacking the divine life, the divine substance which is the **original** being, all other things are **derived** beings; death is experienced as a movement to non-being.

5. In Adam humanity exists in a state of mortality, in the realm of death, “death reigns.” (see Romans 5:14)

6. Because of this condition of death, the human descendants of Adam sinned. We sin **because** of our mortality. “Mortal beings are necessarily subject to ... fears and sorrows, to anger and hatred.”

Theodoret

7. Alienated from God, we also become **alienated** from one another. The authentic marriage of Adam and Eve is **diminished**. They see their nakedness and hide from each other. They withdraw from each other. They are afraid of each other. They lose authentic intimacy, that is, **communion**. This state of diminished communion, a condition of death, spreads to all the children of Adam. Ultimately, we are alone.

8. The old humanity is hopelessly **divided** and in constant war with itself.

B. Jesus Christ is the “new Adam,” the man from heaven, who is the archetype of the **new humanity**.

1. The divine word becomes flesh. Conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Divine Word borrows from her our **humanity**. This becomes possible through her free will, her consent, in which she becomes **Theotokos**, the Mother of God. Through Mary’s consent to become the means of the Divine **incarnation**, we see her as being representative of the entire human race. Her consent was the consent of all humanity. Having become the mother of the Savior, she becomes our mother, the new Eve.

2. The **immortal** takes on mortality. Becoming fully human he takes on a mortal body.

3. In his baptism by John, the humanity of Christ **receives** the divine life of the Holy Spirit. He is **anointed** by the Holy Spirit who will empower him to carry out his salvific mission. He is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, as a pledge of his inheritance, that will be his ultimate victory in the glory of his **resurrection**.

4. The new Adam is driven into the desert to be tempted by the serpent. Not in the paradise of a garden **untouched** by death as the first Adam, but in the desert, a place that is hostile to life. The desert is an archetype of the realm or kingdom of **death**. Within this realm of death, he is tempted to sin. He **confronts** the source of evil, the fallen angelic being Satan. He is tempted in all ways but does not sin. This marks the beginning of his salvific work. He **overcomes** the devil and his temptations to sin. He shall now **overcome** the world of death.

5. Jesus, the savior God, the divine champion of humanity, like the mythical hero confronts **ha thanatos**, the death. On the cross as he embraces death, the cosmic struggle between life and death begins. It seems at first that the death wins the day. However, having embraced death, he descends to **hell**, the realm of the dead. He storms the gates of hell, freeing those who had hitherto been held captive by death. Then in triumph he overcomes death by being raised from the dead. Now resurrected he is no longer subject to **death**. In Christ a new humanity is born -- a new humanity that is no longer mortal, a new humanity that has now received the divine life, a new humanity that has ascended, fully alive, into the heavens and now sits at the right hand of Almighty God. Humanity, in Jesus, becomes now a **companion** to divinity, sharing the divine life. Humanity in Christ now reigns with God -- a reign of life, a rule of love ... the kingdom of God!

C. In baptism we become a part of the new humanity in Christ.

1. We receive the **divine life**. We receive the Holy Spirit of promise as a pledge of our inheritance in Christ.

2. In baptism we are **baptized** into the **death** of Christ, and, having been baptized into his death, we shall likewise share in his resurrection.

3. In baptism we are **incorporated** by the Holy Spirit into the **Body** of Christ, a new humanity in which Christ is the head and we are the members.

a. Now that we are members of the **Body** of Christ, the new humanity, we are no longer subject to death, the alienation from the divine life.

b. We are now no longer subject to alienation from one another. We are now free to love one another. We have become the beloved **community**.

c. Marriage now has the potential to become authentic communion through baptism. Marriage now becomes a **sacrament**, a source of divine life. The grace of true intimacy now is possible.

II. The Messianic Community

A. The Church is a **faith community**. The disciples of Jesus, the Messiah, now live in community with one another. They now share a common life together.

1. This common life is **realized** as the disciples seek to put into practice the teachings of Jesus within their community.

2. This common life is built upon their **shared** acceptance of the faith of Jesus and their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

3. This common life is characterized by their shared experience in baptism which is seen as the means by which they have received the divine life in the Holy Spirit. Baptism is that which joins each member of the community to Christ, the Messiah, and to one another. They have become **the Messianic community**, joined to the Messiah and enjoined to carry on the **Messianic mission** in the world.

4. This common life is also characterized by the disciples' participation in the **Eucharistic** meal. This gathering and partaking in the common meal of the Eucharist is seen as the way in which Jesus is remembered and his living presence experienced within their community.

5. The disciples are members of the **Gospel** community. They seek to live a common life in accord with the Gospel of Jesus. Together they proclaim this Gospel to the world and teach the Gospel to new members of the community.

B. The Church is a Messianic community in that **collectively** and individually they have received the same **anointing** of the Holy Spirit in their baptism as did Jesus as his own baptism.

The Church

Page 5

1. The Messianic community now **participates** in the three-fold Messianic vocation of Jesus as:

a. **Prophet** -- proclaiming the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit; the Neo-Nebiim.

b. **Priest** -- becoming the means of God's saving grace through the sacramental ministry.

c. **King** -- extending the reign of God into the world; taking authority over the powers of darkness and ushering in the kingdom of light.

2. The prophetic spirit, the sacramental ministry, and the royal authority, within the Messianic community, **emanate** from Christ.

III. The People of God

A. The Church is a **new nation** like the old nation of Israel. A people created by God; a people chosen and redeemed by God.

B. The members of the Church **belong** to each other because all the members belong to God.

C. The people of God are bound to God and to one another through the **new covenant**. All the members of the people of God have an equal share in the new covenant.

D. "... You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people. Now you are God's people." (I Peter 2:9-10a)

E. All members, by virtue of their baptism, are **equal** citizens within this new nation, the Church. We are collectively the people of God. "You will be my people, and I will be your God."

IV. The Church as "Mother": Holy Mother Church

A. It is through the "**womb**" of the Church in baptism that we receive new birth. Baptism is an action of both the Holy Spirit of God and the **cooperation** of the Church.

B. The Church, like a mother, receives from God the role of **nurturer**. Like a mother, the Church imparts the **essentials** that are necessary for sustaining the spiritual life of all her children. This is done through the Church's ministry of instruction in the Gospel and in the celebration of the sacraments.

C. This feminine image of the Church is exemplified in the Blessed Virgin Mary who is seen as the **archetype** of the Church.

D. The Church is spoken of as the **Bride** of Christ. Just as Israel was espoused to Yahweh, so the Church is espoused to Christ.

V. The Church as Sacrament

A. A definition of the concept of a sacrament: A sacrament is an event or action involving the initiative of the Divine and the receptive cooperation of humanity in which God becomes **present** in the human world. God's saving presence, spirit, and/or grace, becomes **manifest** in the human situation.

1. Humanity by nature is a **material** being. Humanity can only "know" reality through the perception of the five senses. The five senses can only perceive that which is made of matter or those things that are physical.

2. God is spirit. As spirit, God is beyond humanity's capability to perceive. He is the invisible God. The Divine Nature is essentially **intangible**.

3. In order for humanity to perceive God, God must manifest himself in a **physical** form that is perceivable through the five senses.

The Church

Page 7

B. In the incarnation the invisible God becomes **visible**. In the person of Jesus God becomes physically observable. The incarnation is an event involving the divine initiative and the receptive cooperation of humanity in which God's saving presence becomes manifest in the human situation. Christ is the **sacrament** of God. Christ is the preeminent sacrament of God.

C. Christ gathered a community of followers together to form the Church. The Church is the body of Christ. Collectively, the members of the body of Christ are the hands, feet, and voice of Christ in the **world**. Jesus Christ continues his salvific mission in the world through his body, the Church. The Church is the **sacrament** of Christ.

D. The saving actions of the Church are the **sacraments**. The sacramental ministry involves the proclamation and instruction of the **Gospel** and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit through the gifts and ministries of the members and the manifestation of God's saving

presence, grace, through the use of matter (such as water, oil, bread, and wine) with the intention and form that expresses and **conveys** God's saving power in Christ.

The Church and her sacramental ministry is in reality an **extension** of the **incarnation** of God in Jesus Christ.

VI. The Four Marks of the Church: The Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic

A. The Church is One: Despite the organizational and political divisions that divide the Church, the Church is in reality One. There is only One Church, Christ is not **divided**. By virtue of our baptism we are all in the One Church. We are truly One in the Holy Spirit. Differences in canon law or doctrinal disagreements cannot in reality divide the body of Christ. All of the so-called Churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, etc.) are a part of the One Church of Christ.

B. The Church is Holy: That is, the Church is **set apart** as the unique and **exclusive** possession of God.

C. The Church is Catholic: That is, the Church is **universal**. It transcends space and time, earth and heaven. The Church includes all the

The Church

Page 8

people of God as well as the angels. The Church is Catholic in that it's not **sectarian**. A given local community is Catholic when it recognizes the inclusiveness of the Gospel and is sectarian when it becomes exclusive of other baptized Christians.

D. The Church is Apostolic: The Church is built upon the **foundation** of the Apostles. The ministry of the Apostles, the Apostolic ministry through Apostolic succession, has been passed

on to every generation of the Church. The Apostolic ministry continues through the ordained ministry of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon.

VII. The Church is a Worshipping Community

Acts 2:42 "They divided themselves to the teaching of the apostles, and to a common life (Koinonia), and to the breaking of the bread (Eucharist) and to the prayers."

A. Worship is offering sacrifices

1. I Peter 2:4-10 "You are a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices."

2. Romans 12:1 "...offer yourselves as living sacrifices...which is our spiritual worship."

3. Hebrews 13:15 "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise."

B. Worship is eucharistic -- see I Corinthians 11:17-30

C. Worship involves singing -- see Ephesians 5:19-20 and Colossians 3:16-17

Hebrews 12:28 "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."

The Church

Page 9

VIII. The Church is a Ministering Community

"For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

A. The Ministry of Jesus Christ: Luke 4:16-21

"Jesus stood up to read...'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight for the blind, to set free the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'"

Mark 10:45

C. The Church is to continue the ministry of Christ: John 14:12

"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."

C. The Great Commission: Matthew 28:18-20

"Jesus came to them and said, '...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you....'"

Acts 1:8b "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Ephesians 2:10 "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Ephesians 4:11-12 "Christ...gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of ministry, so the body of Christ may be built up..."

See also I Corinthians 12:12-14 and 27 "We are one body."

Romans 12:5-6a "We belong to one another."

Sample Class Outline #3

The Apostolic Ministry Within the Church

(Teacher's Guide)

I. Apostolic Succession

A. Jesus calls all people unto Himself to become His followers. Those responding to the invitation of Christ and become followers are called **disciples**.

1. In the ancient world a disciple was one who attached oneself to a **spiritual teacher**. A disciple was one who sat at the feet of a revered teacher or philosopher in order to receive the wisdom necessary for living the **good life**.

a. In ancient Greece many of the great philosophers had disciples. Plato was one of the disciples of **Socrates**.

b. In ancient India the **Buddha** had many disciples. **Gurus** were spiritual teachers and devotees were those who sought the spiritual wisdom of the Guru, devoting themselves to the teaching of the Guru.

c. In Israel at the time of Jesus many revered **rabbis**, teachers of the Torah, attracted disciples.

2. Disciples are **students**. The disciple is the one who **receives** the instruction. The disciple's role is to learn by **listening** attentively to the spiritual teacher and **practicing** the spiritual teachings.

a. A disciple is one who **submits** to the teaching authority of the spiritual teacher. The teacher is the **master** and a good disciple is one who **obeys** the instructions of the teacher. The word disciple comes from this practice.

b. Jesus had numerous disciples and the emerging church was essentially a community of disciples **devoted** to Jesus the teacher and to the teachings of Jesus.

3. "Go ... and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them ... teaching them to observe all that I have instructed you." Through the rite of **baptism** we become disciples of Jesus the Teacher.

The Apostolic Ministry Within the Church

Page 2

B. From among His disciples Jesus prayerfully called to Himself twelve men who were to become His **apostles** (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16):

1. Simon, son of John, Peter
2. James, the son of Zebedee
3. John, the brother of James
4. Andrew, the brother of Peter
5. Philip of Bethsaida
6. Bartholomew, Nathaniel, son of Tholomy
7. Matthew, son of Alphaeus
8. Thomas, called the twin
9. James, the son of Aphaeus
10. Juda Thaddeus
11. Simon the Zealot
12. Judas Iscariot

1. An apostle is one who is **sent**. An apostle is one who is sent to speak and act on behalf of the one who sent him. An apostle is one who has been given authority to **teach** and to **lead** their brothers and sisters who make up the community of the disciples. In one sense, an apostle is an authorized **ambassador** of Christ.

2. Jesus sent the apostles:
 - a. to proclaim the Gospel
 - b. to heal the sick
 - c. to deliver the oppressed (exorcism)
 - d. to teach

- e. to serve
- f. to forgive sins and to facilitate reconciliation
- g. to preside at the Eucharist and the prayer liturgy of the church

3. In calling forth and appointing apostles, “Jesus formed a permanent community of **leadership**.” This community of **leadership** forms a “college” in order to provide **pastoral care** for the church, the community of the disciples of Christ.

The Apostolic Ministry Within the Church

a. The apostles thus formed, nonetheless, **remain** disciples and are still members of the community of the disciples.

b. It is the responsibility of the apostles to maintain **unity** within the church by remaining in **union** with one another and with Christ. This unity is maintained by actively fulfilling Christ’s command to love and to serve one another.

4. This Apostolic Ministry was to be permanent and was maintained as the original apostles appointed their **successors**. Thus, the apostolic ministry was passed on from generation to generation in what is called **the Apostolic Succession** (see Acts 1:15-26, Mathias succeeds to the place of Judas Iscariot).

5. Apostolic Succession is seen as being realized through a sacrament called **holy orders**. It is through the sacramental action of the laying on of hands that the ordination occurs and the apostolic ministry is then **passed on** to another. It is the faith of Catholicism that the church of the present is organically **connected** to the original apostles, and therefore to Christ, through this chain that stretches through time by means of the actual laying on of hands.

6. Those who exercise the apostolic ministry are called **bishops**. The bishops possess full apostolic authority and responsibility. The role of the bishop ... flows from the relationship of Jesus to his original apostles to their successors.

a. “With **priests** and **deacons** to help them, the bishops preside over the people of God.”

b. Bishops are a sign of unity within their own **diocese** (community or local church).

c. Christ is **fully present** in each local community when that community is united to its pastor, the bishop. The bishop is the **vicar** of Christ within his own faith community. The bishop is an **icon** of Christ. St. Ignatius of Antioch (110 AD) said, “Where the Bishop is there is the Catholic Church.”

C. Who are the apostles? The eye witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. The Twelve
2. Mathias (Acts 1:15-26)
3. Saul of Tarsus/Paul
4. Mary Magdalene
5. Andronicus
6. Joanna/Junia (see Luke 8:3 and Romans 16:7)
7. James, the brother of our Lord

Sample Class Outline #4

Revelation: the Human Encounter with the Divine

Moral Theology – How Should We Then Live?

(Teacher's Guide)

- I. Christian Morality has its roots in **Ethical Monotheism**.
 - A. Ethical monotheism emerged out of the religious experience of the ancient **Hebrews**.
 1. Among the Hebrews it was believed that their ancient ancestor, Abraham, had entered into an exclusive **relationship** with his God, El Shaddai.
 - a. This relationship between Abraham and El Shaddai was formalized through a social custom of that time and culture called a **covenant**.

b. The social covenant between Abraham and El Shaddai was **binding** between both parties. It was also **binding** between El Shaddai and the descendants of Abraham, his heirs.

c. The Abrahamic Covenant consisted of mutually binding **obligations, promises, and conditions**. These are called the **terms** of the covenant.

d. This social covenant between Abraham and his god, El Shaddai, implied not only a belief in a supernatural being but also in a belief that a god had an interest and concern in the moral **behavior** of a human being.

2. Through the dramatic events of the **Exodus**, the nation of Israel was formed at Sinai.

a. Following the pattern of their ancestor, Abraham, the people of Israel entered into a **covenant relationship** with the God who saved them from slavery in Egypt, Yahweh.

b. The Mosaic Covenant **bound** Israel to Yahweh forever.

Moral Theology: How Should We Then Live?

Page 2

c. The terms of the Mosaic Covenant consisted of obligations imposed upon both Yahweh and the people of Israel; A **total commitment** between both parties.

3. The Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, sums up the entire body of obligations imposed upon the people of Israel. All the other commands and regulations of the Mosaic Covenant are an **interpretation and application** of the Ten Commandments:

i. “You shall have no other gods before me...” The people of Israel would have an exclusive **devotion** to only one God, Yahweh.

ii. “You shall not make for yourselves any idols.” **Prohibition** against idols and idolatry; i.e., the worship of false gods.

iii. “You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.” Prohibition against making **false** promises or oaths in the name of God. Prohibition against using the name of God in a **profane** way. Prohibition against **invoking** God’s name in cursing another.

iv. “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.” The seventh day, one day out of seven, is to be **given** totally to the **Lord**. No work of any kind, no worldly pursuits, were to be done. A day of rest, a day of prayer.

v. “Honor your father and your mother...” As long as one is living within one’s parents’ household one is **obliged** to obey one’s parents. One is also economically **responsible** for one’s aging parents. Respect for the elderly is implied by this commandment.

vi. “You shall not kill.” not all killing is prohibited, i.e., self-defense, only **unjust** killing, i.e., murder.

vii. “You shall not commit adultery.” A man must not **violate** another man’s marriage by sexual relations with another man’s wife.

Moral Theology: How Should We Then Live?

Page 3

viii. “You shall not steal.” One may not **unjustly** take or use another’s property or possessions.

ix. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Lying with **evil or malicious intent** is prohibited.

x. “You shall not covet...” **Harboring** desires for that which belongs to your neighbor is prohibited. The only commandment that speaks directly to **the intentions** of the human heart.

All the other laws and regulations of the **Torah, the Tanakh,** and **rabbinic** literature are interpretations of the Ten Commandments which form the heart of the religion of Israel.

B. The Way of Jesus

1. Jesus, following the rabbinic practice of his time, **interpreted** the Torah. The Sermon on the Mount is essentially his own rabbinic **commentary and interpretation** of the Torah.

2. Jesus’ interpretation of the Torah is a radical **departure** from that of his contemporaries.

3. Jesus claims an authority that **exceeds** Moses.

4. Jesus attacks the **legalism** that often characterized Jewish religious practice and observance.

5. Jesus claims to have established **New Covenant**.
6. Jesus introduces a new **paradigm** shift in his understanding of human morality.
7. The basis of all human morality is to be **love**.

Moral Theology: How Should We Then Live?

Page 4

- a. We are to be **compassionate** as God is **compassionate**.
- b. Love is to be the basis of all human **relationships** and **conduct**. Any moral action apart from love is sin.
- c. Love is the **greatest** commandment.
 - (1) Love God with all your **being**.
 - (2) Love your neighbor as **yourself**.
- d. Love **always** forgives, love **always** gives, love never fails.

C. The Life of the Spirit: “If we have life by means of the Spirit, then let us also walk by means of the Spirit.” Galatians 5:25

1. The Works of the Flesh: (Galatians 5: 19-21a; Romans 1:28-32)

Depraved αδοκιμον adokimon, not standing the test

Unrighteousness αδικια adikia, injustice

Wickedness πονηρια poneria, spiritual evil, diabolical behavior

Greed πλεονεξια pleonexia, covetousness inordinate desire to possess

Evil κακια kakia, evil in character, base

Envy φθονου phthonon, jealousy, a desire to deprive another of what he has in order to have for oneself

Murder φονου phonou, to slay, to slaughter, to kill

Strife εριδος eridos, enmity, contentiousness, prone to argue

Deceit δολου dolou, to cheat, to beguile, to trick for unjust gain; to con

Malice κακοηθειας kakoetheias, viciousness, mean spiritedness

Gossip ψιθυριστας psithuristas, to secretly slander, to expose another's moral failings behind one's back

Slander καταλαλους catalalous, backbiting, to speak evil against another, to injure another's reputation

Haters of God θεοστυγεις theostugeis, aversion to, unjustifiable and malicious feelings toward God

Insolent υβριστας ubristas, violently injurious of another

Arrogant υπερηφανους uperayphanous, to treat with insulting disdain, to elevate oneself by belittling others

Boastfulness αλαζονας alazonas, to glory in one's self, to brag

Inventors of evil εφευρετας κακων epheupetas kakown, contrivers, to scheme against another, to conspire evil actions for the destruction of others for one's own gain

Disobedient to parents γονευσιν απειθεις goneusin apeitheis, obstinate rejection, unpersuadable, unteachable

Without understanding ασυνετους asunetous, without discernment, thoughtlessness

Untrustworthy ασυνθετους asunthetous, covenant breakers, not keeping one's word, cheating on agreements

Unloving αστοργους astorgous, without natural affection for one's children, child abuse

Unmerciful ἀνελεμονας anelemonas, unforgiving, without empathy, devoid of compassion, contemptuous, pitiless

The Flesh (sarx) is the human soul that has her orientation toward the body (soma). 1 John 2:16
“The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes (the senses), the boastful pride (hubris) of life (bios).”

2. Legalism: the effort to bring the works of the flesh under the control of the human will by the meticulous observance of a code of ethics. However, legalism is, in itself, a work of the flesh. Legalism is the absolutizing of the Law. It is ultimately an idolatry of the Law, the substitution of a created thing for the Creator. One’s god is the ultimate concern, the absolute standard/criteria, one holds and which behavior and choices are determined. Like other works of the flesh, legalism only produces death. (see Romans 7)

3. Walking in the Spirit (Romans 8: 1-15)

a. It is by means of the Holy Spirit that we are able to put to death the deeds of the flesh.

b. “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” The spirit and the flesh are a war with each other within the human heart. (Galatians 5:17)

c. The Fruit of the Spirit

Love agape, based in the will, altruistic, perfect, divine

Joy chara, a state of bliss, blessedness, deep delight “my heart soars like a hawk.”

Peace eiraynay, calm born of harmony in relationships, friendships. Sense of well being and wholeness

Patience makrothumia, longsuffering, forbearance, self-restraint in the face of provocation, long tempered, enduring with good attitude

Kindness chraystotays, good hearted, gracious, willingness to serve, pleasant

Goodness agathosunay to be of high moral character

Faithfulness pistis, reliable, worthy of trust, consistency of character, loyalty

Gentleness prautays, equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, forgiving, carefulness, to be at ease

Self-control egkrateia, well mannered and disciplined, Self giving, selfless.

Sample Class Outline #5
Eschatology – The Last Things
(Teacher’s Guide)

I. Definitions:

A. Eschatology is traditionally defined as the doctrine of the “last days.”

1. In regard to the individual, Eschatology would comprise:

a. Death

b. Resurrection

c. Judgment

d. Afterlife

(1) Heaven: the beatific vision

(2) Hell the realm of the dead;

(a) Hebrew: Sheol

(b) Greek: Hades

(c) The Second Death

(3) The Intermediate State: Purgatory; Paradise

2. In regard to the world, Eschatology would comprise:

a. Cataclysmic end of the world, the end of the age (aeon) and the events that immediately precede the end of history.

b. The Day of the Lord

c The Second Coming of Christ/ The Parousia

3. "En tais eschatais hemerais -- in the last, or latter, days."

"That which is yet to come, the hereafter."

Eschatology: The Afterlife

Page 2

II. Eschatology in Relation to the Individual

A. Death:

1. The destruction of the body. The human body is subject to corruption. At death the human body rapidly decomposes. The body returns to dust, returns to the earth from which it came (see Genesis 3:19, Job 34:14-15, Ecclesiastes 3:19-20, Sirach 10:9-11 and 14:17-19).

2. The human person is an integration of body, soul, and spirit. At the moment of death the spirit of the person departs from the body.

a. There is part of the human person that survives the death of the body (see Sirach 38:23, 1 Samuel 28:8-20, also the Transfiguration).

b. The spirit begins its return journey back to God (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7, Luke 16:19-31, Philippians 1:21-24).

3. What about burial or cremation?

a. The ancient Hebrew people, like the Egyptians, buried their dead in tombs (Genesis 23:1-20).

b. The bones of Joseph were brought back from Egypt during the Exodus to be buried in the Promised Land.

c. The preservation of the body was believed to be important and perhaps necessary in order to ensure one's survival into the hereafter.

d. Other peoples, most notably the Hindus, practiced cremation. Hindu belief in the soul's propensity to remain in close proximity to the body after death led to the practice of cremation whereby, it was believed, the spirit was set free and would hasten to its next reincarnation.

Eschatology: The Afterlife

Page 3

c. The Romans practiced cremation. As increasing numbers of Romans converted to Christianity, they adopted the Jewish practice of burial in part to distinguish themselves from the Roman Pagan practice of cremation. Burial was also the preferred practice among Christians in view of the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body.

d. Christians practiced burial exclusively until relatively recently when many churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, permitted cremation as an optional practice.

B. "I believe ... in the resurrection of the body."

1. The resurrection of the body is the reintegration of the body, soul, and spirit of the human person (see Ezekiel 37:1-14, Daniel 12:2, 2 Maccabees 7:9,11,14,23).

2. The resurrected body is a glorified, incorruptible body. It is of a different order of existence from our earthly body.

a. It is like the angels (Matthew 22:23-33).

b. It is described as an incorruptible and spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

c. It is a transformed and immortal body (1 Corinthians 15:50-55).

C. Judgment of the individual person: There will be personal accountability for how one lived one's life (2 Corinthians 5:10).

“When you come to this point, you see there are only two things that are relevant: the service you rendered to others, and love. All those things we think are important, like fame, money, prestige, and power, are insignificant.”

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Eschatology: The Afterlife

Page 4

D. The Afterlife

1. Heaven is a state of being in which the human person has fully realized God's ultimate predestined will. The

a. Heaven is vision (Matthew 5:8, 1 Corinthians 13:12, and 1 John 3:2) “The Beatific Vision” is the ultimate revelation of God to the human soul.

b. Heaven is union (John 17:21, Colossians 3:3-4, and 2 Peter 1:4). This union is called theosis: the divinization of the human person.

“The Word became human in order that humanity might become divine.”

St. Athanasius

c. Heaven is eternal life (John 3:13 and 16, and John 10:10). Eternal life, zoe, is a different kind of life ... the divine life. It is indestructible life. It is the abundant life, the grace-filled life.

2. Hell is the state of being in which the human person is willfully separated from God. It is the state of total alienation from God. As long as one opposes the will of God, one remains in the state of hell. As long as one is in willful opposition to God, one remains in hell. One cannot ever be in heaven and be in willful opposition to God. As long as one is in a state of willful opposition to God, then one is always in the state of hell. In this way hell is eternal.

“The doors of hell are locked from the inside.”

C. S. Lewis

a. Hell is not God’s will for any human person.

b. Hell is ultimately a state of total torment and false promise.

Eschatology: The Afterlife

Page 5

c. Hell is death, hell is also the abode of the dead, and “the Lake of Fire” is described as the second death.

3. Purgatory is the state of being in which the human spirit is in transition between death and heaven.

a. It is the journey of the soul to God.

b. It is a time of continued growth, progression, and perfection.

III. Eschatology in Relation to the World

A. The world, universe, as we know it is passing away (Revelation 21:1, 5).

1. With the coming of Jesus Christ we have entered into the last days. For the last 2000 years we have been in the latter days. We are coming to the end of the present age (aeon).

2. With the coming of Jesus Christ in history, the new age has already begun.

3. Prior to the end of the world there will be great tribulation (2 Peter 3:10, Matthew 24).

4. The whole of creation awaits the end of this age and the coming of the new age (Romans 8:19-24).

5. Death and all the powers opposed to God will be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Eschatology: The Afterlife

Page 6

B. The Day of the Lord

1. It is the day God will judge the world. The day God will deliver creation from evil.

2. It is the inauguration of God's kingdom (rule) in all its fullness.

3. The entire universe will acknowledge the reign of God.

“Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess.”

4. All injustice will end, all evil will cease.

5. The dawn of the new age will come.

6. Death will be done away with.

7. The Messiah will be the divine agent who will usher in the Day of the Lord.

8. The Year of Jubilee is a prophetic type of the Day of the Lord.

C. The Second Coming of Christ

See Acts 1:6-12

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

I John 3:2-3