



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Big Book - Volume 12

THE CHURCH AND SPIRITUAL CONVERSION



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Credible Catholic Big Book

Volume Twelve

The Church and Spiritual Conversion

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Part Two – The Celebration of the Christian Mystery**

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, as well as spiritual and moral conversion.

Part One from the CCC is titled, ***THE PROFESSION OF FAITH***. The first 5 Volumes in the *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Credible Catholic Little Book* fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY***. This is covered in Volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is ***LIFE IN CHRIST*** and information related to this topic will be found in Volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Book Volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **Christian Prayer**.

The Big Book can also be divided into two major movements – the rational justification for God, the soul, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (Volumes 1 through 6), and life in Christ through the Catholic Church (Volumes 9 through 20). If you would like a preview of this dynamic, please go to Volume 6 (Chapter 7) at the following link – [Chapter 7 – Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?](#)

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven..."

If we don't respond to these secular myths, who will?

Table of Contents

NOTE- References to “section(s)”, throughout all volumes, refer to the “sections” denoted by Roman numerals under each Chapter title.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NEED FOR THE CHURCH	7
I. The Catholic Church as Jesus’ Guide to Theological Truth	10
II. The Mystical Body of Christ – the Inner Church and the Outer Church	15
CHAPTER TWO: THE GIFTS OF THE INNER CHURCH	16
I. The Sensus Fidei	17
II. The Sensus Fidelium	20
III. The Sense of Spiritual Community	21
CHAPTER THREE: THE OUTER CHURCH AND SPIRITUAL CONVERSION	23
I. Four Services of the Outer Church Leading to Spiritual Conversion	26
II. Contemplation and Personal Relationship with the Lord	35
III. Availing Ourselves of Complementary Inspiration	52
IV. Three Services of the Outer Church Leading to Moral Conversion	59
CHAPTER FOUR: DEVOTION TO MARY, THE SAINTS, AND THE HOLY EUCHARIST	61
I. The Legitimacy of Praying to Mary, Angels, and the Saints	61
II. Corroboration by Miracles	66
III. Marian Devotion	67
IV. Intercessory Prayer to the Saints	86
V. Eucharistic Devotion	91

CHAPTER FIVE:

SACRAMENTALS, SYMBOLS, AND HOLY PLACES **100**

I.	Blessings	100
II.	Exorcisms	101
III.	Popular Devotions	103

Note: No reference pages are given at the end of this document, because complete citations for all references are given in the footnotes.

Volume Twelve

The Church and Spiritual Conversion

Up to this point, we have devoted one volume to justifying the Catholic Church as the one intended by Jesus to be His ultimate interpreter and juridical authority (Volume 6) and three volumes to the sacramental life offered by the Church (Volumes 9-11). This gives us the foundation for explaining what might be called “religious or spiritual conversion.” Bernard Lonergan distinguished among three kinds of conversion—intellectual, religious (spiritual), and moral.¹ Intellectual conversion arises out of a pursuit of rational, empirical, and interior evidence sufficient to make a reasonable and responsible act of faith in God, a transcendent soul and Jesus Christ. Today, intellectual conversion is necessary for spiritual and moral conversion in about 50% of the population (particularly those who are analytically, scientifically, and rationally oriented).

Religious or spiritual conversion (hereafter, “spiritual conversion”) begins with the selection of a church community needed to interpret the words of Jesus, to give doctrinal and moral guidance, to administer sacraments, and adjudicate disputes. In light of the evidence for the Catholic Church (given in Volume 6) and the contemporary scientifically validated miracles specifically associated with the Catholic Church –i.e. Mary, the Saints, and the Holy Eucharist (given in Volume 3, Chapter Nine), spiritual conversion can reasonably and responsibly be vested in the Catholic Church. Yet spiritual conversion goes far beyond joining the Catholic Church and even participating in Mass on Sundays. It involves exploring the graces and ministries of the Church (and taking advantage of them) as well as understanding the Church’s theology and developing a personal and communal life of prayer. The purpose of this volume is to give an overview of the information needed to begin this process of deep spiritual conversion. As will be seen, it will be brought to fruition through moral conversion (which will be discussed in Volumes 13-17, particularly Volume 16).

In this volume, we will address the best means to know, choose, and live our true identity – redeemed creatures made in the image of God. As we shall see, this is best done through faith in Jesus and participation in the Church initiated by Him, built on the rock of St. Peter and his successors. The more we participate in the services and sacraments of that church, the more we draw closer to the heart of Christ; and the more we draw closer to the heart of Christ, the more we can know, choose, and live the truth about ourselves – our creatureliness, our transcendence, our sinfulness, and our redemption by the Son of God.

As will become clear, spiritual conversion has two dimensions:

1. Relationship with the Lord through the Church and its community (Volumes 9-12).
2. Relationship with the Lord through personal prayer (Volumes 18-20).

¹ See Bernard Lonergan 1990; *Method in Theology*, vol. 14 of *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. by Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp. 144-155, 153-154, 204-205, and 220-239.

Readers may be wondering why we divided the two presentations and inserted the volumes on moral conversion (Volumes 13-17) between them. The simple answer is because the *Credible Catholic Big Book* follows the four parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Since Part Two of the *Catechism* addresses the Church, the sacramental life, and spiritual conversion through ecclesial communion, we dedicated Part Two of the Big Book to this dimension of spiritual conversion. Similarly, since Part Four of the *Catechism* is concerned with personal prayer, we dedicated Part Four of the Big Book to this theme as well.

This volume will be divided into five chapters:

1. Our Need for the Church.
2. The Gifts of the Inner Church.
3. The Outer Church and Spiritual Conversion.
4. Devotion to Mary, the Saints, and the Holy Eucharist.
5. Sacramentals, Symbols and Holy Places.

Chapter One

The Need for the Church

[Back to top](#)

If Jesus had not initiated the Church by creating a supreme teaching and juridical office on the foundation of St. Peter and his successors (Mt 16:18), then we would have to wonder why he did not, because the Church, as Jesus created it (with its supreme teaching and juridical authority) is precisely what we need not only to prevent a needless proliferation of distinct Christian churches,² but also to help us form our conscience.

Jesus intended to give us not only his “outer word” (his teaching interpreted by the church that comes to us, as it were, from outside of us), but also his “inner word” (the intuitions, feelings, inspirations, and guidance of the heart that encourage us, incline us, guide us and deepen us through participation in the church).³ We might at first think that the “inner word” is at best vague and obscure, and at worst, non-existent, but nothing could be further from the truth. The “inner word” takes us into the domain of the heart—the domain of love, goodness, beauty, spirit, and transcendence that goes far beyond the domain of the mind (what can be grasped through concepts, logic, and empirical verification).⁴ Bernard Lonergan describes the distinction as follows: “the outer word of the Gospel and the inner word of the Spirit—the word that took flesh in Jesus Christ and was expressed in the public world of human history in his words and

² This has certainly been demonstrated over the last 500 years in the Protestant Reformation that opened the way to the creation of 33,000 distinct Protestant Denominations during that period – see <http://www.biblicalcatholic.com/apologetics/a120.htm>.

³ This distinction is made implicitly in the gospel of John where Christ is portrayed at once as “the word” and the inner light of human beings (Jn 1:1-7) is implicitly taken up by the church fathers and is explicitized by St Augustine in *Tolle Lege where he says*, “The sound of our word strikes your ears, but the Master is within you.” The distinction then becomes a touchstone for medieval theology and spirituality – particularly in St. Catherine of Siena, St. Thomas a Kempis, and Jan van Ruysbroeck

⁴ The great mathematician and spiritual writer Blaise Pascal recognized this when he asserted that “The heart has its reasons that the mind knows not of.” See Blaise Pascal 1958 *Pensees* 277 p.78.

deeds, death and resurrection, and the word that is spoken in the silent depths of our hearts, where what is most personal, most distinctive, most defining about ourselves is determined.”⁵

We need the inner word as much as the outer word, because we are not reducible to our minds. Indeed our higher nature is characterized more markedly by our heart -- the various intuitions, desires, feelings, and decisions related to love, goodness/morality, beauty, spirituality, and transcendence which factor prominently in our faith, relationship with God, struggle with evil, and sharing of faith with others. This is why Lonergan (following Aquinas) contends that we need not only intellectual conversion (the mind’s reasons) but also spiritual conversion⁶ and moral conversion.⁷ If we in our transcendent nature are called to these three kinds of conversion, then Jesus would have to give us more than His “outer word,” He would also have to help us in the deepest domains of our heart – and would therefore have to be present to us as the “inner word.” He provided for this in two ways – through the gift of the Holy Spirit who clearly works within the inner recesses of our heart, and by incorporating us into His risen body that unifies all believers through His heart. With respect to the inner word of the Holy Spirit, Paul writes:

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-13).

Yet the Lord has given us more than His Spirit (which is at once the Spirit of His Father), He has also brought us into His risen body – which refers not merely to His external form, but to everything He is – His mind, and above all, His heart. That is why St. Paul insists that the Spirit of God works in and through the risen body of Christ:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor.12: 12-14 & 26-27).

⁵ Bernard Lonergan 1967 *Verbum: Word and Idea Aquinas* ed Frederick Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) p.13.

⁶ Lonergan sees moral conversion as not only a conversion of conscience and adherence to principles (“the good” or “the just”), but also a conversion in the distinctive kind of love that Jesus identified with the highest commandment and virtue – *agapē* (see Chapter 7).

⁷ Bernard Lonergan 1990 *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) pp. 150, 161, 217-235.

For an excellent analysis of the progression of Lonergan’s thought in this area, see Robert Doran 2011, “What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by ‘Conversion’?”

<http://www.lonerganresource.com/pdf/lectures/What%20Does%20Bernard%20Lonergan%20Mean%20by%20Conversion.pdf>.

The Holy Spirit works in us individually *and* through our unity with one another in the risen body of Christ – and also in the whole body of Christ through each one of us. We vastly underestimate the activity of the Holy Spirit when we reduce it to the Spirit’s action within each individual – ignoring how the Spirit works in individuals through the Church and how the Spirit works through individuals for the Church.

Why did Christ provide both of these gifts – the Holy Spirit and His own risen body to convey His inner word to us? Wouldn’t the Holy Spirit alone have been sufficient? This question arises frequently within our culture which tends to emphasize autonomy and individualism instead of our interpersonal and societal (communitarian) nature. Yet we are not mere individuals – our own islands in the midst of a vast ocean – we are inescapably interpersonal (requiring complementarity from others, naturally empathizing with others, and desiring deep friendships with others), and we are also social and communitarian (desiring participation, the exchange of ideas, and common cause within community and societal groups for the common good). We are interpersonal, social, and interdependent by both nature and necessity. Thank God Jesus recognized this and bestowed His inner word on us, not only individually, but in unity with one another – not only giving each individual His Holy Spirit, but giving us His risen body through which the Holy Spirit can work through the whole Church through us and through us to the whole Church.

We began this chapter by saying that if Jesus did not initiate the Church in the way that He did, we would be compelled to ask, “Why not?” For if we really are both mind and heart, then we will really need His outer word and His inner word, and if we really are interpersonal and social-communal, then we will not only need that inner word through His Holy Spirit in our individual hearts, but also through our unity within His risen body – the Church. Of course Jesus instituted the Church in this particular way – through the outer word of His gospel and the unity of its interpretation through the teaching and juridical authority of St. Peter – as well as the inner word of the Holy Spirit speaking to each individual and also the unity of that inner word through His own risen body – the mystical unity of the Church. Complex as this may seem, it corresponds precisely to the complexity in every one of us who are unities of mind and heart – unities of individual parts and wholes – individual, interpersonal, and social-communitarian.

One last point deserves consideration. We sometimes think that being integrated into Christ’s risen body is simply being integrated into an interior unifying fabric or substrate, but Jesus’ risen body (*soma*⁸) is far more than an interior unifying substrate. It refers to everything He is in His risen state – that is not only His glorified body (flesh – *sarx*), but also His glorified heart, mind, and spirit. Thus Christ’s risen body is not merely our unifying substrate. When we are incorporated into Christ’s risen body, we share directly in His heart and mind – the beginning point of what John Henry Newman called, “*Cor ad Cor Loquitur*” (“heart speaks to heart”).

⁸ St. Paul uses “*soma*” to refer to Jesus’ risen body in both 1 Cor. 12: 26-27 and Romans 12: 4-5 – the passages where he refers to Jesus’ risen body as the unity of the Church. It should be noted that “*soma*” in the New Testament often refers to the whole person (like “body” in the English words “everybody” and “somebody”) while *sarx* generally refers to the flesh or the physical form of the body. See Strong’s Concordance 4983 (for *soma*) <http://biblehub.com/greek/4983.htm> and 4561 (for *sarx*) <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=nasb&strongs=g4561>.

We may now come back to our main point – that Jesus’ gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Church enable us to enter into the heart of Christ with one another – not only by providing an inspired and unified interpretation of the outer word He gave us through the New Testament (particularly the Gospels), but also through four gifts of the inner word so that we might know, love, adore, and serve that word from the depths of our hearts.

I.

The *Catholic* Church as Jesus’ Guide to Theological Truth

[Back to top](#)

As noted above, the Church is indispensable in our deepening conversion and our struggle against spiritual evil through its charism and authority to give a definitive interpretation of the outer word of Jesus Christ (in the New Testament). The true meaning of the New Testament is not self-evident to every believer at every level of theological education and spiritual development. It is not even self-evident to individual believers at the highest level of theological and spiritual development, because we have limited perspective, limited experience, limitations in mind and heart, and we are subject to sinfulness and egocentricity, leading to every form of rationalization, self-serving, and even hypocrisy. The idea that Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to sort all of this out and give every person a clear and definitive interpretation of the Bible, is erroneous, for we would have to be freely and perfectly open to the Holy Spirit to obtain this definitive interpretation – and I would submit that none of us can possibly make such a claim. Speaking for myself, I can see a myriad of ways in which my egocentricity, inauthenticity, human weaknesses and proclivities toward sin can obscure, block, or even undermine a proper interpretation of scripture. I have a principle that I teach frequently to my students called “Spitzer’s principle of infinite rationalization” – “Give me five minutes and enough reason to *want* to bend the truth to fit my strongest egotistical desires, and I will find an appropriate rationalization for it.”

If our personal limitations are not enough to persuade us that we all need an objective definitive interpretation of scripture, then the aforementioned proliferation of 33,000 Protestant denominations in 500 years should provide ample reason for subscribing to this need – and if that is not enough, then we might ask ourselves how we are going to consistently resolve all of the seeming conflicts among dozens if not hundreds of scripture passages in an objective way. Does anyone really believe that they have discovered the definitive hermeneutic for the objective resolution of all the seemingly conflictual passages in the scripture? If so, how can you be so sure that you haven’t left out anything – or let your personal preferences be your guide – or were simply limited in your rational capabilities? I don’t think anyone can achieve such certitude without gross overestimation of personal and human potential.

So if a definitive interpretation of scripture and an objective resolution to seeming conflicts among scriptural passages is beyond any one person’s spiritual, intellectual, scholarly and moral capacities, then how will we ever be able to guide ourselves into deepening intellectual, moral, and spiritual conversion? Will we rely on a large group of really really smart and seemingly spiritual and honest individuals? That has never worked in the past, for

immediately upon gathering together as a group of intelligent, scholarly, and spiritual people they find themselves vehemently disagreeing with one another, which has led historically not only to the proliferation of scriptural interpretations, but the proliferation of denominations, congregations, and churches. Since my collegiate days, I have not been able to believe that Jesus, His Father, and the Holy Spirit left us victims of our own personal limitations, inauthenticity, and moral and spiritual immaturity – not to mention the limitations of our historical time and culture. I cannot believe that the triune God would leave us bereft of a way to discover the *truth* about how we are to conduct and develop our moral and spiritual lives – and so I cannot believe that Jesus did not anticipate the need to establish a Church that would give a definitive interpretation to his sayings, and the written documents (e.g., the New Testament) that would surely be part of his initial legacy. Furthermore, I cannot believe that Jesus would not have anticipated what would be required to give a definitive interpretation of His words not only in the immediate aftermath of His resurrection, but also for the decades and centuries which He would have surely anticipated. There is ample reason to believe that Jesus did anticipate the need for a definitive interpretation and a succession of definitive interpretation in the New Testament—see Volume 6, Chapter 2).

So what kind of church and church authority would be needed to give a definitive interpretation of scripture for many generations beyond Jesus' immediate one? At least two conditions could be easily foreseen by any student of history having far less wisdom, divine inspiration, and spiritual authenticity than Jesus:

1. A supreme and definitive juridical and teaching authority ultimately invested in a *single* person having a special charism for this definitive authority.
2. An *office* of highest juridical and teaching authority, guaranteeing that successors of the first office holder would be able to carry on this function until the end of the world

It can scarcely be believed that Jesus did not anticipate the first condition because he would have seen it manifest in Judaism – not only in his own time, but throughout the course of history. The many factions – Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and others – and the factions within the factions would not have failed to impress on Jesus the need for a supreme authority to resolve the inevitable disagreements, disputes, and outright conflicts that would naturally follow upon His death and resurrection. Indeed He saw this at the beginning of his ministry where he selects Peter out from among the other disciples again and again. Not only to receive privileged teachings and revelations, but to be a successor to his role as definitive authority. True – Jesus was *the* definitive teaching authority, but Peter was clearly being groomed as a definitive interpreter of that teaching and a definitive resolver of disputes. In all four New Testament accounts, Peter is mentioned more often than the other apostles, is given more time and attention, is singled out for more special revelations, and is given more responsibility for the mission.⁹ Why would Jesus do this unless He was grooming Peter for a leadership position? And why would He be grooming Peter for a leadership position, knowing full well of His impending death, unless He intended to make him the leader of the Church which was to succeed Him? All the evidence appears to point to Jesus' intention to invest Peter with a definitive interpretive teaching authority after His death and Resurrection. This inference is confirmed by the logion in Mt 16:18:

⁹ See McKenzie 1965 *Dictionary of the Bible* p.663

“you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hades will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven”

In Volume 6, Chapter 2, I show that this special commissioning of Peter is not limited to Matthew’s Gospel; it is also found in the Gospel of John, the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul’s Letter to the Galatians. Furthermore, the reference “the keys to the kingdom of Heaven” very probably refers to an office of definitive authority (such as, Prime Minister) implying that Jesus is creating an office with definitive teaching and juridical authority not only for Peter, but for his successors (see Volume 6, Chapter 2, II-III). This is confirmed by the likelihood that Jesus expected the Church to last far beyond Peter (see the interpretation of the Eschatological Discourses in Volume 6, Chapter 2, Section I) and that He foresaw the need to have a definitive authority to resolve doctrinal and juridical disputes in the post-Petrine era.

This supreme teaching and juridical office is further validated by Peter’s obvious primary authority in the early Church as McKenzie notes:

In the first Christian community of Jerusalem Peter appears as the leader immediately after the ascension of Jesus and retains this position through AA 1-12. He proposes the election of a successor to Judas in the Twelve (AA 1:15-26). He is the spokesman of the disciples at Pentecost (AA 2), after the cure of the lame man (AA 3), and before the council (AA 4; 5:29). He more than any other exhibits the healing power of Jesus (AA 3; 5:15; 9:32-43). In the episode of Ananias and Sapphira he is the spokesman of the community (AA 5:1-11) and he rejects the proposal of Simon Magus (AA 8:20-24). His leadership is not exercised in a monarchical manner, and it is said that he and John are sent to Samaria to confer the spirit on the disciples (AA 8:14). He is the first to preach the gospel to Gentiles (AA 10) and explains this as the result of a heavenly revelation (AA 11:1-18). The same attitude is shown in his discourse at the council of Jerusalem (AA 15:7-11). Paul likewise attests his importance in the primitive Church both in Jerusalem and elsewhere.¹⁰

Peter exhibits definitive and universal authority in the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-12)¹¹, and Pope Clement of Rome (the second or fourth Pope after Peter—depending on the source) believed himself to have authority over all other bishops and to order them under pain of sin (see Volume 6, Chapter 2, Section V). Likewise, St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Irenaeus believed that the holder of the See of Rome had definitive authority over other bishops to resolve doctrinal and juridical disputes (see Volume 6, Chapter 2, Section V). How would it be possible for Pope Clement and these early church fathers to declare the office of Peter as supreme if there were no strong apostolic tradition going back to Jesus himself? Can it be believed that Matthew, John, Paul, Pope Clement, St. Ignatius of Antioch, and St. Irenaeus simply made it up—and the Church and the other bishops simply acceded to it? If this is beyond the rational pale, then it is likely that Jesus created an office of definitive doctrinal and juridical authority in Peter, with the

¹⁰ Ibid pp 663-664

¹¹ See Volume 6, Chapter 2, Section IV.

intention of conveying this authority to his successors. If He did, then the promise made to Peter would also apply to them throughout the remaining life of the Church: “and the gates of Hades shall not overcome it.” The last 2000 years has borne out the veracity of this promise throughout countless persecutions, conflicts, doctrinal heresies, and foreign invasions.

The famous historian of culture and civilization, Arnold Toynbee, changed his personal position from agnosticism to Christian faith on the basis of his study of the effects of religion on civilization, and the enduring paramount effect of Christianity on world civilization. He even declared that “the greatest new event in history was the Crucifixion and the Crucifixion’s spiritual consequences.”¹² In his essay “Christianity and Civilization” (from his book *Civilization on Trial*), he points to the remarkable enduring character of the Catholic Church, implying that it has a providential character enabling it to do what no other institution or civilization has been able to do—and to influence the world in ways that no secular civilization could do:

The Church in its traditional form thus stands forth armed with the spear of the Mass, the shield of the Hierarchy, and the helmet of the Papacy; and perhaps the subconscious purpose --or the divine intention, if you prefer that language-- of this heavy panoply of institutions in which the Church has clad herself is the very practical one of outlasting the toughest of the secular institutions of this world, including all the civilizations. If we survey all the institutions of which we have knowledge in the present and in the past, I think that the institutions created, or adopted and adapted, by Christianity are the toughest and the most enduring of any that we know and are therefore the most likely to last --and outlast all the rest...¹³

We might ask ourselves why the Catholic Church as an institution has outlasted every other institution in human history? Was this because of the administrative expertise, flexible structures, and impeccable wisdom of its leaders? I do not think anyone is willing to concede this or any other human cause for this remarkable historical persistence, continuous growth, and adaptability to multiple cultures and historical epics, and so we might infer, as did Toynbee, that there is very likely a supernatural agency behind it. Jesus identified this supernatural agency with His own risen body (the new universal temple) and the Holy Spirit. It seems that Jesus’ promise to protect the Church He built upon the rock of St. Peter and his successors from the gates of Hades has been continuously kept, and still holds true today. Given all of this, it is reasonable and responsible to conclude that the Church truly is the community built upon the risen body of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and that it holds the key not only to the interpretation of Jesus’ word, but also to the administration of the sacraments He initiated and His grace to develop within our moral and spiritual lives.

History has shown that the only Christian church to have maintained unity throughout the centuries is the Catholic Church. The apparent reason for this is that definitive juridical and

¹² John Wendon, *Christianity, History, and Mr. Toynbee*, The Journal of Religion, v. 36 no. 3, July 1956, 147.

¹³ Arnold Toynbee 1948 “Christianity and Civilization” in *Civilization on Trial* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/toynbee.html>.

teaching authority is vested in the holder of the office first occupied by St. Peter. No other Christian church has such a definitive teaching and juridical office – and no other can trace their office holders back to the first one – Saint Peter – who was appointed by Jesus at the very inception of the office itself. Yes, there were deliberate breaks from this Church, but those breaks occurred because an individual or group of individuals deliberately broke with the supreme authority legitimately holding the office of Peter that had been initiated by Jesus.

In light of the above, it is reasonable and responsible to conclude the following:

- We need a church for moral guidance, and therefore for moral conversion.
- The Catholic Church was initiated by Jesus who bestowed a definitive teaching and juridical authority upon Saint Peter and his successors to guide it until the end of the world.
- Historical evidence strongly suggests that Jesus kept His promise to be with the Church and to protect it from error and spiritual evil.

Some people may be disturbed by three spiritual and doctrinal contentions of the Catholic Church rejected by the Reformers – the Blessed Virgin, intercessory prayer of the saints, and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (all of which are considered in Chapter 4 below). A myriad of books have been written on the appropriateness of the Catholic Church's teaching on these beliefs and spiritual practices,¹⁴ but for those who want a validation of them through scientifically assessed miracles, please read Volume 3, Chapter 9 – *Scientifically Validated Miracles*. That Chapter looks into the scientific assessment of miracles themselves, presents five Marian miracles, three miracles associated with contemporary saints, and one Eucharistic miracle overseen by Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio (now Pope Francis).

In view of all this, it is reasonable and responsible to conclude that Jesus intended to initiate His Church under the supreme teaching and juridical authority of St. Peter and his successors, and that this Church as legitimate magisterial authority in all areas pertaining to virtue, human rights, and the salvation of souls. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes this as follows:

The Church, the "pillar and bulwark of the truth," "has received this solemn command of Christ from the apostles to announce the saving truth." "To the Church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgments on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls."¹⁵

¹⁴ See the recommended books lists from Catholic Answers – at www.Catholic.com.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2032.

II.

The Mystical Body of Christ – the Inner Church and the Outer Church

[Back to top](#)

If the gospel and explicit Church teaching provide the outer word of Jesus, how does the inner word of Jesus come to us? Initially it comes to all religious believers through the numinous experience, the intuition of the sacred, and our sense of transcendence, religious mystery and the cosmic struggle between good and evil (discussed in detail in Volume 2 of the Quartet¹⁶). After baptism, Christians receive the Holy Spirit and are incorporated into the mystical body of Christ. When this occurs, we are introduced into a whole new domain of God’s consciousness going far beyond the numinous experience and the intuition of the sacred—being brought into the heart and risen body of Christ and the collective heart of the communion of saints and members of the Church in the world. Before discussing what we will call the “inner church” and the “outer church,” it may prove helpful to understand the origin of the doctrine of the Church as the “mystical body of Christ” in the thought and words of Jesus.

As Jesus anticipated His death, resurrection and ascension to the Father, He intended to make His risen body the foundation of the new universal Church—uniting all of its members on earth and in heaven through his own risen presence when He proclaimed prophetically that “the stone rejected by the builders would become the cornerstone of the Church” (Mt. 21:42). He intended to make His body the mystical unification of a universal Church (Jn. 2:21). This would not be a “temple created by human hands” (Jn. 2:19)—situated in a particular place like Jerusalem but a temple made by God for everyone everywhere. St. Paul recognized Jesus’ intention to do this and referred to the Church as the “Body of Christ.” (I Cor 6:15; 12:27, Rom 12:5).

In order to make Himself the universal temple—the unifying body of the Christian church—Jesus knew He would have to leave His disciples, but intended to give them the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22 and Acts 2:1-4) to guide them and their successors to “Go and make disciples of every nation” (Mt.28:19-20). Thus Jesus certainly intended to start a church. Indeed he intended to make Himself the very body of that church, and to give his Spirit to his disciples to govern and teach within that church.

We may now proceed to the two interrelated essential elements of the Church (the mystical body of Christ) – the inner church and the outer church. Extending the analogy of the inner word and the outer word given above (Section I), we might define the “inner church” as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit connecting us to the heart of the risen Christ, imparting spiritual gifts of peace, guidance, and discernment as well as a profound sense of theological truth and spiritual guidance. Using the same analogy, we might also define the “outer church” as the services offered to the faithful through the ministry of the visible Church, such as the administration of the sacraments, the proclamation and explanation of Jesus’ word, instruction in doctrinal and moral truth, the administration and nourishing of the Church community, and the commissioning of religious art, architecture, music, literature, and poetry for the purposes of

¹⁶ See Spitzer 2015 (The Souls Upward Yearning) Chapters 1-2.

liturgy, devotion, and spiritual inspiration. We will first discuss the inner church (Section IV) and then the outer church (Section V), showing how each assists us in moral, spiritual, and intellectual conversion.

Chapter Two

The Gifts of the Inner Church

[Back to top](#)

When we are baptized we become part of the mystical body of Christ and are thereby connected with the heart of Christ through the Holy Spirit. When we are united with the heart of Christ, His heart speaks to our heart – at first subconsciously with desires, feelings, symbols, and notions, but as we make our faith more explicit, discursive, and conscious, His heart becomes progressively more manifest. What we first understand as mere feelings and desires becomes enhanced by a nuanced and discursive awareness of his love and goodness, the direction in which he is leading, and the way to deepen our conversion intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

There are a myriad of interior gifts from the Holy Spirit that come with this integration into Christ’s mystical body. We might classify them into six areas¹⁷:

1. The guidance, inspiration, and protection of the Holy Spirit arising out of what we call “the conspiracy of Divine Providence” (discussed thoroughly in Volume 14, Chapter 1).
2. Peace beyond all understanding during times of tribulation and suffering (discussed thoroughly in Volume 14, Chapter 1).
3. Interior transformation in the heart of Christ through our assent to Church teaching and our attempt to genuinely follow his moral and spiritual precepts (discussed thoroughly in Volume 14, Chapter 1).
4. The *Sensus Fidei* -- interior sense of truth within the individual believer (discussed below in Section I)
5. The *Sensus Fidelium* (the sense of truth within the community of believers – the Church).(discussed below in Section II).
6. The sense of spiritual community – *Koinōnia*. (discussed below in Section III)

Since we will discuss the first three interior gifts of the Holy Spirit coming through the mystical body of Christ in Volume 14,Chapter 1, we will restrict ourselves to the latter three gifts here:

- The *Sensus Fidei* (in Section II.A),
- The *Sensus Fidelium* (in Section II.B), and
- The sense of spiritual community – *Koinōnia* (in Section II.C).

¹⁷ St. Paul discusses these gifts within the mystical body in 1 Cor. 6 & 12, and in Romans 12. See also the discussion in Pope Pius XII 1943 *Mystici Corporis Christi* http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html

I. The *Sensus Fidei* [Back to top](#)

The *Sensus Fidei*¹⁸ -- the sense of truth within the individual believer -- is a central grace given to all members of the mystical body. It enables us to intuit the truth or falsity of doctrine through a sense of interior conviction (in the case of truth) or a sense of interior disturbance or repulsion (in the case of falsity). There are two levels through which this grace is given:

1. Conscience – a grace given to *all* human beings for basic moral awareness and impetus.
2. An additional grace to all baptized believers to have a general sense of the truth or falsity of theological ideas and imperatives within the Christian tradition.

We will briefly discuss each dimension of this interior grace below.

Conscience was discussed earlier in the Credible Catholic Big Book – (Volume Two, Chapter 3, Section III), and the following represents the pertinent points of that discussion.

Plato believed that the highest reality was the good itself,¹⁹ and that the good itself was present to human beings, and that we could know it through questioning and dialectic. St. Paul brought these considerations to a whole new level by showing that all human beings could know the good (as well as evil) through their *consciences*. In the Letter to the Romans, he reflects on the Gentile’s ability to know God’s law without having the benefit of Judeo-Christian revelation:

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences [συνειδήσις] also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them (Rom 2: 14-15).

For St. Paul, “the law” is *God’s law*, and he asserts that God writes this law on the hearts of all people so distinctly that it accuses and defends them.

St. Thomas Aquinas concurred with St. Paul, and formulated a general explanation of conscience which has become a cornerstone of philosophy up to the present time. Recall from Volume 2 (Chapter 3) that conscience has two components:

1. What Aquinas called “*synderesis*” (an attraction to and love of the good and a fear of and repulsion toward evil), and
2. Awareness of certain *general* precepts of the good.

¹⁸ “*Sensus Fidei*” often has the same meaning as “*Sensus Fidelium*,” the sense of a *group* of believers about the appropriateness of a particular theological or spiritual idea. I am using it in a distinctive way here to refer to the interior sense and conviction of an *individual* believer about the appropriateness of a theological idea.

¹⁹ Plato 1961 (b), Bk. VII.

With respect to *synderesis*, our attraction to and love of the good leads to feelings of nobility and fulfillment when we do good (or contemplate doing it). Conversely, our fear of and repulsion toward evil leads to feelings of guilt and alienation when we do evil (or contemplate doing it).²⁰

Conscience not only has the above emotional and personal component, it also has an intellectual one. We have a sense of *what* is good or evil (in a general way). These precepts might include do good, avoid evil, do not kill an innocent person, do not unnecessarily injure another, steal from another, or otherwise unnecessarily harm another; give a person their just deserts, and be truthful to yourself and others.

Aquinas associated these precepts of conscience with the natural law, holding that the natural law is part of God's eternal law:

Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: *and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law.*²¹

Immanuel Kant and John Henry Newman use conscience as a basis for inferring the presence (and therefore the existence) of a divine authority (God) within it. Newman shifts Kant's emphasis from an "obligation-imposing Subject outside ourselves" to an "interpersonal, caring, fatherly authority who is the source of goodness and law." He uses five existential inferences to move from the subjective feelings of conscience to the presence of God within it.²² Given at least partial veracity of Newman's inference and the Catholic philosophical tradition from Saint Paul to Saint Thomas Aquinas, we can reasonably conclude that God is quite active in our conscience in our transphysical soul through our conscience.

The *sensus fidei* has a deeper and more extensive effect than conscience in baptized and practicing Christians. At baptism, the Spirit heightens the function of our conscience by connecting it with the heart of Christ. The more we open ourselves to Christ in faith, the more His heart can speak to our conscience – awakening it with greater intuitions of God's love, knowledge, wisdom and will. This has effects beyond the ordinary functions of conscience, helping us to sense or intuit the appropriateness or inappropriateness of theological ideas, interpretations of doctrines, as well as moral and spiritual advice and direction. Many of us have had the experience of reading an excellent work of theology, morality, spirituality, or religious philosophy -- such as G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, Josef Pieper, John Henry Newman, etc. – and found ourselves in profound agreement with its contents while being moved to deeper faith.

²⁰ "...[I]t is fitting that we have bestowed on us *by nature* not only speculative principles but also practical principles...[T]he first practical principles bestowed on us by nature, do not belong to a special power but to a special *natural* habit, which we call *synderesis*. Thus *synderesis* is said to incite to good and to murmur at evil, inasmuch as we proceed from first principles to discover and judge of what we have discovered." Aquinas 1947, p. 407 (ST, 1, Q. 79, Art 12). Italics mine.

²¹ *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q. 91, art. 2.

²² See Boekraad and Tristram 1961, *The Argument from Conscience to the Existence of God* (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts).

Sometimes the essay or book does not provide all the evidence needed to justify these ideas; yet even without the evidence in place, our conviction of its truth remains quite strong. Later we discover the evidence for a complete justification of the ideas, making us wonder why we were so certain about their truth before we knew all of the evidence.

Of course our conviction might have been borne out of a careless leaping non-sequitur, but if you are anything like me, such insufficiencies of evidence generally cause caution – not conviction, which leads back to the question of why we have conviction in our hearts when we do not yet have conviction of the mind. Is it merely wishful thinking – we feel conviction because we want this idea to be true? Again, if you are anything like me, the recognition that I want something to be true causes me to refrain from assenting to its truth without the evidence in place. So where does this conviction of the heart (without concomitant conviction of the mind) come from? I strongly suspect that it is the gift of the Holy Spirit manifesting the heart of Christ.

Practicing, baptized Christians may also feel the opposite pull from the one mentioned above when confronting theologically and spiritually erroneous ideas. Many have been the times – particularly in college and my early years in the Jesuits -- when I was reading or listening to a theological or spiritual presentation, and suddenly I began to feel a sense of disturbance or alienation – not simply a lack of conviction, but a negation of my ordinary sense of peace. Since I had not yet studied very much theology, I was vulnerable to somewhat erroneous theological or spiritual ideas. I never had much of a problem recognizing obvious heresies or negations of major doctrines, but the more subtle suggestions or arguments undermining doctrines were not yet within my grasp. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit (communicating the heart of Christ) was acting quite strongly in my consciousness, and so I was able to recognize these more subtle underminings of faith through the disturbance and alienation I felt. Looking back on it, I really did not know the reasons why these particular ideas were incorrect or would undermine my faith, but I *felt* a sense of danger about assenting to them.

I compare it to times in my life when I had been hiking, encountered an intriguing new trail, but felt a sense of foreboding when I was about to embark on it. I did not know that there would be something dangerous on the trail, but felt that I should avoid it – and did. There were plenty of other trails that didn't give me that sense of danger, and so there was no need to empirically discover if there was anything on the trail that could harm me.

In the case of theological and spiritual ideas, I do not believe that I manufactured my sense of foreboding or danger either consciously or subconsciously. As I noted above, I did not have adequate knowledge to make a conscious judgment of error, and the ideas in question did not trigger a subconscious response of danger in a non-theological context. Thus I believe that the Holy Spirit manifesting a heart of Christ enabled me to feel and recognize a danger beyond my natural abilities.

Evidently, the *sensus fidei* is very important in recognizing doctrinal and moral errors, which is, in turn, essential to moral conversion. We would be remiss to ignore the Holy Spirit's and the risen Christ's movements within our hearts, because these loving divine actions can show us theological truth and error when our natural faculties are ignorant of them. As Jesus promised:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (Jn. 16: 13-15).

II. **The *Sensus Fidelium*** [Back to top](#)

The *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful) is a consensus of the faithful—from the Pope through the laity-- about the truth of a particular doctrine, interpretation of a doctrine, or extension of a doctrine. According to *Lumen Gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, Vatican II):

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.²³

The Vatican Council declared that the whole people of God when guided by the Holy Spirit, the Magisterium and previous tradition can, as a whole, discern matters of faith and morals more extensively than might be found in scripture and previous Church doctrine. Thus the whole faithful – from the Bishops to the last lay person—through their common agreement and consent can declare the truth of a particular teaching which is not properly found either in sacred scripture or previous tradition (doctrine). In order to do this, the faithful—from the Bishops to the last lay person—must have substantial agreement, adhere to the Magisterium, be faithful to all past tradition (doctrine), and listen attentively to the Holy Spirit moving through the Church as a whole. If these conditions are met, a truth like that of the Immaculate Conception can be discerned, and then declared a doctrine infallibly by a Pope or an ecumenical council. Without this infallible declaration by a Pope or ecumenical council, the people's discernment is only a strong consensus. In order to be defined as a dogma, it must be declared so infallibly by a pope or ecumenical council.

²³ Documents of Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium* (promulgated 1964) trans by official Vatican website (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) par 12.

III. The sense of Spiritual Community (*Koinōnia*) [Back to top](#)

The Church's view of spiritual community (*Koinōnia*) may well be lost on contemporary culture, but a brief overview of this profound may help readers recognize the even more profound reality into which they have been incorporated at their baptism. This will help us understand how spiritual community can protect us from the deadly sins and spiritual evil.

The term "*Koinōnia*" is used in the New Testament to refer not simply to the gathering of Christian believers, but to the spiritual gift that each believer contributes to the group and receives from the group when two or more are gathered together (see Acts 2:42, Phil 2:1 & 3:10 1Cor 1:9, 10:16, 2Cor 6:4, 8:4, 9:13, 13:13 Gal 2:9, Rom 15:26, & Eph 3:9). When believers are baptized and then gathered together to practice their faith (in mass, prayer, study, service common, etc) the Holy Spirit conveys not only a sense of unity through the mystical body of Christ, but also a sense of increased faith, peace, encouragement, inspiration, and belovedness through that communion. The more we gathered together with believers to practice our faith, the stronger the sense of unity and the spiritual gifts accompanying it.

These spiritual gifts were quite palpable in the early church which had an overtly charismatic character; however, they might seem quite intangible to believers in our less charismatic and more secular, materialistic world. We can reclaim and rebuild them by recalling simple experiences we may have taken for granted. Have you ever felt a deeper than usual closeness with people who are your friends from church? When you are gathered together with friends to practice your faith (in prayer, study or service) have you experienced a deep sense of Christ's presence—or the presence of a saint (e.g., the Blessed Virgin Mary) within the community gathering? Again, have you had the experience of praying, for example, a group rosary when you were quite troubled by one of life's challenges, mentioned your problem to no one, and walked away from that rosary far less troubled and with a strong sense of peace? Conversely have you ever been present at a gathering of believers and found yourself feeling encouraged and inspired when you were trying to help somebody else? Again, have you ever had the experience of "being bombarded" with a myriad of ideas and inspirations—one following upon another—while participating in a group devotion or Bible study? The list could go on and on, but the point is that gathering together to practice faith frequently leads to an unexpected and somewhat mysterious sense of peace, security, consolation in times of trouble, edification and inspiration of faith, a sense of being at home—in our true home--and an increased resolve to strengthen our moral life and character and to deepen our conversion.

These kinds of experiences are so common among believers who practice our faith that we can scarcely call into question Jesus' promise that "If two or three of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:19-20).

This sense of unity, peace, spiritual camaraderie, true home, inspiration, edification, and resolve toward deeper conversion occurs not only on a personal level, but also on a universal one. Strange as it may seem, we have a tacit awareness that our personal spiritual edification or

decline involves everybody else in the church—including the whole communion of saints. Catholics may seem peculiar to the modern world, because we naturally believe that heaven is not simply, “God and me alone,” but a family – starting with the Holy Family at Christmas and burgeoning into a huge family, having saints of every kind, personality, apostolic strength, and historical background in its membership. We not only naturally feel this diverse richness within the body of Christ, we feel close to many of the individuals within it. I must admit that I naturally believed this since my earliest memories of childhood – when I gazed upon a Christmas Kresch scene and felt right at home in it – and looked at my little book of saints, and felt almost mystically at home with so many of them, sensing a mystical familial relationship with them going far beyond mere identification with a character in a story. I would then go to church and feel that same sense of “true home and spiritual friendship” by simply walking into the building or in the courtyard. I still have this experience of spiritual home, holiness, and friendship with the saints when I read about particular saints, visit older churches and monasteries, and remember my childhood feelings – but I really don’t need to arouse this awareness by doing these things. They simply occur at random times when I’m saying my rosary, praying a Psalm, or going to the chapel. It is almost as if the Blessed Virgin or particular saints are tapping me on the shoulder reminding me that they are here. If Catholics don’t drum this natural sense of the mystical body and the communion of saints out of themselves, and if they are trying to stay on the path to salvation, they are likely to become reacquainted with what they naturally knew as children. But I must get back to the main point.

How does our unity with the communion of saints and the universal church affect our moral conversion and struggle against spiritual evil? When we are feeling strengthened, inspired, and resolute toward conversion, we feel like the whole church is strengthened by it, producing a feeling of closeness to Christ and the communion of saints – like being in our true spiritual home. Conversely if we begin to lessen the practice of our faith, we feel not only a sense of personal emptiness and alienation, but also the emptiness and alienation of the wider church. Though our culture encourages us to believe that our destiny is our own, it is certainly not the case. The whole church and communion of saints longs for the salvation of all of us—and if we are Christian, longs for our participation and edification with *them*. Thus we should not be surprised if our feelings of spiritual closeness and camaraderie have “intonations” of the communion of saints and the universal church beyond the group of believers with whom we are gathered—nor surprised that the feelings of emptiness and alienation arising out of our spiritual decline would have intonations of emptiness and alienation experienced by the communion of saints and the universal church.

It is difficult to describe what these intonations of spiritual closeness and camaraderie or the intonations of emptiness and alienation on the part of the communion of saints and the universal church feel like. Perhaps we might compare the feelings of spiritual camaraderie and closeness to being at home with beloved holy friends and family members – and conversely, the feelings associated with spiritual decline to losing connection with friends and family members in our true home – i.e. “spiritual alienation.”

I would not blame anyone in our culture for doubting the above-mentioned tacit awareness and feelings of the communion of saints and the universal church within our feelings of spiritual camaraderie and spiritual alienation, for we have been trained to eschew such

mysterious and subjective states of mind—particularly if they are not reducible to specific brain functions or the physical processes constituting them. However, if you the reader have had even a glimmer of this universal spiritual awareness associated with the communion of saints and the universal church, then fasten onto it and remember it, because I guarantee that it will occur again, and when it does you will begin to recognize it more easily until it becomes like an old friend who has been silently accompanying you throughout your spiritual journey.

We cannot underestimate the importance of Christ's, the communion of saints', and the universal church's presence to us in our struggle against the deadly sins and spiritual evil, for as we begin to easily recognize the feelings of spiritual home and spiritual camaraderie when we are progressing in the spiritual life, we will also easily recognize the feelings of spiritual alienation (the loss of connection with our true home) when we are falling off the path of conversion. These feelings of spiritual alienation act like an alarm bell—alerting us to the increased power of spiritual evil in our lives as well as the decreased presence of the communion of saints within our hearts. These feelings can be so poignant that we are immediately inclined to reverse our decline and return to our path of conversion. Most spiritual writers mention the importance of these changes in our spiritual state and feelings, because they play such an important part in our spiritual development.²⁴

Chapter Three

The Outer Church and Spiritual Conversion

[Back to top](#)

As noted above, the “outer church” refers to the services and structures of the visible church that lead to deepened moral, spiritual, and intellectual conversion. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes the importance of these services in both spiritual and moral conversion:

It is in the Church, in communion with all the baptized, that the Christian fulfills his vocation. From the Church he receives the Word of God containing the teachings of "the law of Christ." From the Church he receives the grace of the sacraments that sustains him on the "way." From the Church he learns the example of holiness and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary; he discerns it in the authentic witness of those who live it; he discovers it in the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints who have gone before him and whom the liturgy celebrates in the rhythms of the sanctoral cycle.²⁵

The following nine services are among the most important for our spiritual development:

²⁴ Spiritual writers, such as St. Benedict and St. Ignatius of Loyola, speak about these feelings under the general categories of spiritual consolation and desolation. With respect to *Koinōnia* we might nuance these categories by using the terms of spiritual camaraderie, communion, and closeness (with respect to consolation) and spiritual alienation from the communion of saints (with respect to desolation).

²⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2030.

1. Makes the grace and power of the sacraments present through priests and other qualified ministers.
2. Proclaims the word of God not just doctrinally but evangelistically, catechetically, pastorally, and spiritually.
3. Provides moral instruction, and sacraments of forgiveness and reconciliation to deepen our moral conversion.
4. Inspires spiritual and theological aesthetics – sacred art, architecture, music, and poetry.
5. Celebrates liturgies filled with diverse prayers, symbols, proclamations, and homilies.
6. Forms a sacred community not only for purposes of worship and teaching, but also for service and support.
7. Brings sacramental consolation and temporal assistance to those who are sick, in mourning, and in need.
8. Provides a rich variety and depth of spiritual, devotional, and liturgical traditions to deepen our spiritual conversion.
9. Inspires intellectual tradition integrating not only philosophy and theology, but also the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts to deepen our intellectual conversion.

When believers avail themselves of the above outer church services, they awaken and deepen the inner word -- the heart of Christ – that is integral to the mystical body of Christ – the inner church. The more believers avail themselves of the services of the outer church, the more explicit the heart of Christ (the inner word) becomes. When this occurs, we become free to grow in our trust and love of the Lord, which in turn gives the freedom to deepen our moral and spiritual conversion.

We sometimes think that moral conversion is merely a matter of studying the virtues and then disciplining ourselves to make them habitual (through a stoic act of will), but this is far from the truth of Christ and the Catholic Church which is not stoic and has never recommended willing oneself to virtue like a shot out of a cannon. Jesus Christ, first and foremost, is concerned with *freedom* – not simply “freedom from,” but “freedom for.” Freedom for what? The freedom to grow in trust and love of Him. In order to do this, we will have to let go of our fears (that make us trust only in ourselves), our egocentricity (that makes us act only for ourselves), our resentments (which compel us to seek retribution), and our pride (which makes us want to dominate others). Now that’s a tall order! How in the world will we achieve the freedom to let go of our fears, anxieties, egocentricity, resentments, and pride? The “world” will provide very little help here, but with God all things are not only possible, but highly probable.

So how does God help us to let go of these negative states that hold our psyches captive – and block the inner word (the heart of Christ) from speaking to our hearts? The answer given implicitly by Christ and explicitly by the Catholic Church for 2,000 years is really quite simple – to avail ourselves as much as possible of the major services provided by the outer church (given in the list above).

Woody Allen once said that “80% of success in life is just showing up.”²⁶ Though this is not exactly the case with spiritual and moral conversion, we might say that much of our conversion does not come from heroic efforts, but from simply availing ourselves of the above-

²⁶ <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/06/10/showing-up/>

mentioned church services. “Showing up” requires effort and some sacrifice, but not onerous burdens – for “Christ’s yoke is easy and His burden is light.” What happens when we avail ourselves of the above services of the Church? In a phrase, the *freedom* to let go of the above mentioned fears, anxieties, egocentricity, resentments, and pride – which almost immediately opens the way to another freedom – to trust and love the Lord more deeply. When we deepen our trust and love of the Lord, we awaken the heart of Christ within us – and then His heart begins to speak eloquently to our heart – and this brings with it yet another level of freedom – the freedom not only to deepen our moral and spiritual conversion, but freedom to follow the path of a heroic self-sacrificial love for God, his kingdom, and his people that moved the great saints before us. Thus the above seven ecclesiastical activities provide three levels of freedom:

1. Freedom to let go of our fears, anxieties, egocentricity, resentments, and pride,
2. Freedom to trust and love the Lord more deeply,
3. Freedom for moral and spiritual conversion opening upon heroic self-sacrificial love in imitation of the saints.

When we have removed the obstacles to the inner Word’s capacity to dialogue with our hearts, the most amazing things can happen – not only for the acquisition of virtue and the resistance to deadly sin, but also for the awakening of heroic self-sacrificial love and mystical prayer.

We might adduce from the above that spiritual and moral conversion are intertwined, because spiritual conversion leads us to greater detachment from our fears, anxieties, worldly goods, power and prestige which facilitates our capacity to choose virtue over the deadly sins for the sake of Christ and the good itself. The natural virtues of temperance (saying “no” to the deadly sins) and fortitude (saying “yes” in a courageous and committed way to virtue) are important to moral conversion, but they are not enough. Their power is limited by the effects of our attachments, fears, and anxieties within our psyche. Spiritual conversion (coming from participation in the major services of the Church) gradually frees us from these attachments, fears, and anxieties, allowing us to say “no” to the deadly sins and “yes” to Christ and virtue with ever greater facility. The greater our spiritual conversion, the greater our spiritual freedom, and the greater our spiritual freedom, the greater our facility to reject vice and embrace virtue. Yet spiritual conversion is not enough. We must apply the above fruits of detachment (freedom) to specifically moral objectives – that is to specific decisions of saying “no” to the deadly sins and “yes” to virtue and ethical actions. We might say that spiritual conversion plus the natural virtues of temperance and fortitude equals deep moral conversion and a virtuous life.

Spiritual conversion (which leads to greater love of and attachment to Christ) must move toward moral conversion (detachment from the fears, anxieties, and things of this world), and this spiritual-moral freedom must be applied to specific moral decisions (saying “no” to the seductions of the deadly sins and “yes” to virtue). If spiritual conversion does not move toward moral conversion, it does not achieve its natural and supernatural objective. It is like a person with exceptionally high intelligence refusing to go to school to learn how to use this gift for himself and others – or a remarkable athlete who refuses to train and practice a particular sport. The ability lies fallow and great potential is wasted. As the Lord frequently noted – belief is important but it is not enough – it must be used to follow His commands (Mt. 7: 24-27).

Let us now return to the services of the outer church mentioned above. Participation in four of these services facilitates spiritual conversion (love of and attachment to Christ) and three of them are directly concerned with moving spiritual conversion toward moral conversion (detachment from the fears and things of this world) and practicing the moral life (facility for habitually saying “no” to the seductions of the deadly sins and “yes” to virtue). The four services connected with spiritual conversion are:

1. Receiving the Holy Eucharist and the other sacraments—and if possible, daily Mass.
2. Listening to the proclamation of the word of God in its many manifestations.
3. Praying individually (or with family) daily – and participating in community devotions (e.g., Stations of the Cross during Lent, Eucharistic Adoration, High Liturgies during the Easter Triduum and Christmas, etc.).
4. Finding ways to edify our faith through spiritual reading, theological reading, lives of the saints, religious art, religious music, and religious pilgrimages.

The three services that move spiritual conversion to moral conversion are as follows:

1. Learning the moral teaching of the Church.
2. Participating in the sacrament of Reconciliation.
3. Participating in Church service or charitable service according to God’s gifts to us.

Since spiritual conversion should ideally precede moral conversion to reap the full benefits of faith in Christ, we will first examine the importance of the four services (Section I) connected with spiritual conversion and then proceed to the three services connected with moral conversion (Section II).

I.

Four Services of the Outer Church Leading to Spiritual Conversion

[Back to top](#)

As noted above, we can deepen our spiritual conversion by availing ourselves of the following four services of the outer church:

- Reception of the Eucharist and participation in Holy Mass (Section I.A).
- Listening prayerfully and attentively to the word of God (Section I.B).
- Forming a habit of daily contemplative prayer and devotion (Section II).
- Availing ourselves of complementary inspiration—spiritual reading and religious art, music, and literature (Section III).

I.A

Reception of the Eucharist

The first and most important habit for deepening our spiritual conversion is participation in the Eucharistic liturgy and reception of the real presence of the Lord at Communion. As explained in Volume Nine, the Eucharist connects us directly with the heart of Christ and

galvanizes the six spiritual gifts of the inner church within our souls – peace, guidance by the Holy Spirit, transformation in the heart of Christ, the *sensus fidei*, the *sensus fidelium*, and the sense of spiritual community (*Koinōnia*). The more we receive the Holy Eucharist with prayerful attentiveness, the more manifest and powerful these gifts become in our interior lives. Evidently, being intimately connected with the heart of Christ and experiencing these six spiritual gifts builds a strong foundation for moral freedom (detachment). The closer we are to Christ in our hearts and the greater our sense of divine peace, guidance, and community, the more cognizant we will be of Christ’s loving presence, and the more confident we will be in his desire to forgive, heal, and save us. This strong interior grace is what enables us to detach from fear, anxiety, and reliance on our own power and resources – which frees us to abandon ourselves to His care and to pursue His word and way to salvation. Jesus makes this promise explicit in the Gospel of John:

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me (Jn. 6: 54-57).

Even though it is difficult to see or feel the above graces at the time we receive the Eucharist, they are evident when we look back on our lives over the long term. When I was in college, I began to go to daily mass during lent because of a friend’s challenge. When I started university studies, I was a bit of a utilitarian “numbers guy” interested in money and prestige, but after participating in daily mass over a two year period, people began to comment that I was “really changing for the better.” I practically had to insist that I was the same old utilitarian person I always was, but they would retort that I really wasn’t – and that I was getting a heart. As I look back on it now, I did not do anything intentionally to become more empathetic, open, and compassionate to others. Indeed, I almost avoided such “touch-feely” endeavors, preferring to focus on “serious matters.” Nevertheless, my friends were right – I was changing – and did in fact change for the better. I can identify only two possible causes of this unintended change – my increased faith in God (through mostly intellectual conversion) and my participation in daily mass. Since the former focused mostly on my head – and the latter, mostly on my heart, I came to the conclusion that Christ’s heart in the Holy Eucharist was subtly working its way into my heart, and despite my ignorance of the process, I was allowing myself to be pulled ever more deeply into a realm of empathy and care that went beyond anything I had hitherto intended.

This miracle of connection to and transformation in the heart of Christ through the Holy Eucharist is available to anyone who receives the Eucharist, confidently believing that it is really the crucified and risen body of Christ. Much of the grace of this sacrament occurs simply from receiving it in faith – with almost no contribution from our own intentionality or actions. Yet it must also be stressed that *conscientious* and *reverent* reception (involving our intentionality) enhances the efficacy of the Eucharist’s power of peace and transformation through the heart of Christ.

Daily reception of the Holy Eucharist builds a very strong foundation for moral freedom, but as we shall see in the next chapter, it is not enough, because moral freedom requires that we

concertedly apply this deeper connection with and transformation in the heart of Christ to the area of *detachment* from fears, anxieties, and worldly things. We will examine how to accomplish this through what St. Ignatius called “the Examen Prayer” (Volume 16, Chapter Three).

I.A.1 The Holy Mass

As can be seen from the above, reception of the Holy Eucharist is intensely individual, intimate, and transformative, but it is also communal – spiritually communal and even eschatologically (heavenly) communal. Since the apostolic period, the celebration and reception of the Holy Eucharist was not limited to the reenactment of the Last Supper and the reception of communion – though this certainly lay at its center. It was a communal liturgy that incorporated a rite of preparation and a Eucharistic (thanksgiving and praise) prayer into this central rite (see Volume 9, Chapter Two).²⁷ Later in the 1st Century and in the early 2nd Century, the liturgy was expanded again to incorporate a penitential rite and an expanded Eucharistic prayer.

The *Didache* (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*) – an early work (written toward the end of the first century – c. 90 A.D.) is the first complete catechism of the Christian Church. It contains a wealth of information about church rituals, authority, ethical norms, disciplinary practices (e.g. fasting), and church organization. It contains two full early Eucharistic prayers, an identification of the Eucharist with sacrifice, and an identification of who was celebrating this sacrificial reenactment of the Last Supper (see Volume 9, Chapter Two).

With respect to the identification of the Eucharistic (thanksgiving) commemoration with sacrifice, the *Didache* notes:

Gather together on the day of the Lord, break bread, and give thanks, but first confess your sins, so that your *sacrifice* may be pure.²⁸

The *Didache* not only uses the word “sacrifice” to describe the commemoration, it tells how important this interpretation of the commemoration was – for it required the early Christians to insert a penitential rite (a confession of sins) to assure that the celebration of the sacrifice by the congregation was pure – not defiled -- in conformity with the pure sacrifice of Malachi (see Mal. 1:11, 14).

The *Didache* also tells us *who* was celebrating the Eucharistic commemoration in the earliest times -- apostles and prophets.²⁹ Evidently the apostles were given authority by Jesus to preside over the Eucharistic commemoration. But why does the *Didache* mention prophets? As noted in Volume 9, Chapter Two, the prophets are not necessarily people who foretell the future, but rather those appointed by Yahweh to speak on His behalf (Exodus 7:1). Sometimes this involves foretelling the future or initiating a direction of the future, but not always. Prophets in the early Christian Church were designated as those having a charism of the Holy Spirit to speak

²⁷ Josef Jungmann, *The Mass: an historical, theological, and pastoral survey* (St. Paul, MN: The North Central Publishing Company), p. 20

²⁸ Anon. *Didache* Ch. 14: 1.

²⁹ See *Didache* 10:7 – “But suffer the prophets to hold Eucharist as they will.”

for God – delivering messages and teachings for the good of the Church. The early Church believed that Jesus is the Son of God,³⁰ and therefore believed that prophets had the charism to speak on behalf of Him as well – to reenact His Eucharistic words. In Paul’s ranking in 1 Corinthians 12, they are listed as second in authority, immediately after the apostles (see 1 Cor. 12: 28). Given their charism to speak in place of God, they were naturally thought to have the charism to speak the words of commemoration on behalf of Christ (along with the apostles). Thus, they were viewed as acting *in the place of Christ* in the reenactment of Christ’s self-sacrificial words.

As noted above, the *Didache* indicates that in missionary territories, itinerant apostles and prophets celebrated the Eucharistic commemoration.³¹ However, as churches became more stable, they had their own local authority structure that replaced itinerant apostles and prophets.³² These local authorities having the power of apostles and prophets – by ordination – are called *Episcopoi* (overseers) and *Presbyteroi* (elders). Later, *Episcopoi* were given the role and function of bishops and *Presbyteroi* the role and function of priests.

The transition from *Presbyteroi* to priests has produced confusion, because there is no clear mention of a ministerial priesthood in the New Testament. Though there is reference to the priesthood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7) and the royal priesthood of the faithful (1 Peter 2:9), there is no clear expression of priesthood with respect to Christian ministry. Why didn’t the early Church clearly associate prophets and presbyters with “priests” who were designated as “offerors of sacrifice” in the Old Testament? After all, Jesus³³ (and His followers³⁴) clearly associated the Eucharist with His self-sacrifice -- and the authority to celebrate that sacrifice (the Eucharist) was given to the apostles and prophets, and then to the *Presbyteroi*. The basic reason is that the Christian Church did not want to confuse the priesthood of Jesus or the *Presbyteroi* with the Jewish priesthood. Around 200 A.D. this confusion was no longer a major issue in the Church, and the terms “priest” and “priesthood” are used by the church fathers such as Origen (see Volume 9, Chapter Two).

We may now return to the development of the Mass. In about 150 A.D., Justin Martyr indicates that the Christian Church also incorporated a scripture service – in imitation of synagogue custom – before the Eucharistic prayers.³⁵ Old Testament passages (including Psalms) were an essential part of the scripture service, and as the Christian canon became better known

³⁰ See Volume III of the Quartet (*God So Loved the World*) which is dedicated to elucidating the evidence used by the early Church to ground their belief in Jesus’ proclamation to be the exclusive Son of the Father (see the Q Logion in Mt. 11:26-27 and Lk. 10:21-22). This evidence includes not only Jesus’ preaching, but also His resurrection in glory, gift of the Holy Spirit, His miracles by His own authority, and the power of His name after the resurrection (see Chapters 4-6). Additionally, the Church’s understanding of Jesus’ preaching of the unconditional love of the Father (see Chapter 2) was completely compatible with the unconditional love He demonstrated in His passion and death (see Chapter 3).

³¹ In *Didache* Chapter 11, a set of rules is given to distinguish true apostles and prophets from false apostles and prophets, with the implication being that there were itinerant apostles and prophets who had to be tested before they would be allowed to celebrate the Eucharist (see *Didache* 10:7) and instruct the faithful.

³² See *Ibid.*

³³ See Chapter Three, Section I.A above for a complete explanation.

³⁴ See *Didache* 14:1 – as explained above in this section.

³⁵ Jungmann, *The Mass* p. 156.

and distributed – New Testament scriptures as well. The continued development of the Mass is discussed thoroughly in Volume 9, Chapters Two and Four.

The Holy Mass weaves together nine “symphonic” movements around the central rite of the reenactment of Jesus’ Eucharistic words and the reception of the Lord’s body and blood:

1. The *Penitential Rite* is meant to bring the Lord’s forgiveness and reconciliation to the congregation before entering into the celebration of the Eucharist. It recites the ancient Greek formula *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy), *Christi Eleison* (Christ have mercy), *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy). It then concludes with a virtual rite of absolution – that was a real rite of absolution prior to high scholasticism³⁶ -- “May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.”
2. The *Gloria* – a hymn to the Trinity with special emphasis on the redeeming glory of Christ is generally sung and is meant to convey majesty, joy, and praise for the salvation brought through the love of the Trinity, particularly Christ the Incarnate Savior.
3. The *Liturgy of the Word* which generally proclaims passages from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the New Testament Epistles, and the Gospels so that congregants might celebrate God’s work in salvation history and embrace the Lord’s words of hope, encouragement, and instruction. This is followed by a homily based on the scripture readings and aimed at edification and instruction – mostly the former.
4. The *General Intercessions* – prayers for the Church, the world, and the congregation, bringing contemporary concerns into the offering that will take place through the Eucharistic Prayer which is about to be offered.
5. The *Offertory* using the ancient Jewish formula – “Blessed are you Lord God of all creation...” was part of Jesus’ words and actions at the Last Supper. It was meant to introduce the Eucharistic Prayer that would lead to Jesus’ words of Institution. Sometimes it is solemnized by additional prayers and incensing, but is meant to be a pathway into the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
6. The *Rite of Institution* – the reenactment of Jesus’ Eucharistic words giving rise to the real presence of His body and blood on the altar.³⁷
7. The *Eucharistic Prayer* that surrounds the *Rite of Institution*, including the *Sanctus* (a 1st Century hymn combining words from Isaiah’s vision and Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem, as well as praise and thanksgiving for creation and Christ’s redemption and prayers for the Church, the deceased, and the congregants.
8. The *Communion Rite* – during which the Lord’s body and blood are shared with the congregants.
9. The *Concluding Rite* and *Benediction*.

There are many other parts, such as the introductory rites, *The Lord’s Prayer*, and the *Agnus Dei* that introduce or conclude the above nine movements.

³⁶ Jungmann *The Mass* p. 164.

³⁷ Jesus intended that the reenactment of His words collapse the time between the priest’s reenactment and that of the Last Supper so that the bread He offered to His disciples (that brings His future body and blood on the cross into the species of the bread and wine through His prophetic action) will be present in the bread offered by the priest. This two-fold collapse of time – Jesus’ prophetic collapse of future time between His offering at the Last Supper and His crucifixion – and the priest’s collapse of past time between His offering and Jesus’ offering at the Last Supper -- is explained in Volume III (*God So Loved the World*), Chapter 3. Section IV.A.

Recognizing that many readers select a liturgy that best suits their families, and that family participants can present a myriad of distractions – and recognizing that some priests may be less interesting homilists or less prayerful celebrants – and recognizing that some congregants may have experienced or are about to experience incredible stresses in their lives -- the Holy Mass still provides a rich variety of prayers, music, scripture readings, and above all, the very body and blood of Christ that will allow even the most distracted congregant to enter, at least superficially, into its connection with the Lord. Sometimes, the *Penitential Rite* or the reception of Holy Communion can break through the fog of stress, anxiety, distraction, and boring interludes with peace, reconciliation, and hope. This breakthrough makes participation in Sunday mass worthwhile – not only for the practical benefit of restoring calm and hope, but also for reconnecting the congregant with the Lord in ways that will not become apparent until later in the week – or in the long term. Those who drift away from the mass for superficial reasons (e.g. boring homilies or “the same old prayers”) do themselves a terrible disservice by disconnecting themselves from an immense source of peace, reconciliation, hope, and connection with the Lord. I would ask any reader who is on the brink of giving in to apathy to reconsider any such move, to trust in the Lord’s promise to bring gifts of peace, reconciliation, and consolation through His body and blood, and to resist the false teachings of the current culture that “if you don’t feel it now, there is no benefit.” There is a benefit even if we can’t feel it – a benefit now, throughout the week, and throughout our lives.

I once had a student at Georgetown University who indicated that he no longer found the mass interesting because homilies had limited intellectual content and the prayers seemed quite repetitive. I asked if he saw anything at all in the mass that might be beneficial to him or the people around him. He obviously had not thought about this question because he looked somewhat startled and at a loss for words. I tried to give him a quick course on how spiritual consolation works – that it can be quite subtle at first, that its effects are frequently not felt, but manifest themselves in our psychic outlook and the quality of our actions. I also emphasized that spiritual consolation (e.g. peace, hope, reconciliation, and confident connection to God) had a cumulative effect – that is, they increase over the course of time – over the course of faithfully participating in many masses. He responded that this explanation seemed ethereal, to which I responded, that the only possible way he could verify that this ethereal explanation was true is if he trusted the Lord and me, and puts it into action. I assured him that if he tried it, he would discover that my ethereal response was far more real than the tangible sports program on television that he was substituting for the mass.

He asked if there was some way of enhancing his participation in the mass – to which I responded that the mass has the above nine movements, and if he opened himself to each of those movements as they were occurring – that is reflectively thought about what was going on in those movements (and the effects that they had on two millennia of saints and ordinary congregants), he would “get” far more out of the mass. I would recommend this to every reader. Allow me to explain.

As the mass begins, prepare yourself to enter into the penitential rite considering sins of the past week or areas in which you need reconciliation and healing – then as you recite the words, “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy...” and hear the words of virtual absolution, “May

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life,” you will receive that reconciliation more profoundly, taking it with you into your week.

Similarly, when you hear the cantor sing, “Glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth...” enter into the Spirit of giving praise to the Father for creation – including the creation of your soul – to the Son of God for His redemption – including your redemption unto eternal life. There is no better way of loving the Lord who has love you than to express thanks and praise for that love in the beautiful words provided by this hymn.

Again, prepare yourself for the liturgy of the word. Try to shake off the stresses and distractions of the week and try to understand the passages of scripture being proclaimed. There is something truly marvelous about having the word of God read to us almost like listening to our parents reading us our Catholic picture bibles – we can simply relax and put ourselves on “absorb.” Of course all kinds of questions will come up about how to interpret the passage. Sometimes the priest will cover these difficult issues in his homily, but if he doesn’t, let this be an occasion to study the passages in question after the mass. There are all kinds of resources that can be used to attain a deeper understanding of these passages. I would recommend a good study bible, such as *The Catholic Study Bible* (The New American Bible translation) which contains excellent introductions to each book and explanatory footnotes for difficult passages.³⁸ If you have questions about particular readings, simply go to the USCCB website and click on the readings of the day. This will give you the precise citations for the scripture passages you heard; then go to *The Catholic Study Bible* and look up the footnotes for those passages. There is a pretty good chance that you will find at least a partial answer to your questions. The more you study the scriptures, the more it embeds itself in your conscious and unconscious psyche.

Preparation for the general intercessions is quite simple – in addition to supporting the prayers read by the lector, add your special prayers of petition in your mind, for these will all be added into the prayer of the congregation by the priest when he concludes the rite by saying, “Grant these petitions and those unmentioned within our hearts through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

As you listen to the offertory, recognize that you are entering into the Liturgy of the Eucharistic, and position yourself within the tradition going back over 2,000 years starting with the Jewish table blessings to Jesus’ Eucharistic blessing, and two millennia of blessing within the Christian Church. As you proceed to the Sanctus, recognize the majesty and the glory of the angels and the heavenly chorus in Isaiah’s vision (Is. 6:2-3) and the crowd acclaiming Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey – “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Mt. 23:39). This ancient hymn is a preparation and invitation to adore the Lord in the Holy Eucharist which is about to become present in the words of Institution.

Now, prepare yourself for the central rite of the mass – the reenactment of Jesus’ Eucharistic words. If possible, recall what He intended in His Eucharistic words – to give us His crucified body, risen body, and unconditional love. Recall also the significance of the blood – that He intended to become a definitive sin offering for us, the blood of the paschal lamb (leading to definitive liberation from evil and death), and to provide the blood of the new covenant, guaranteeing eternal life for those who are trying to follow God in sincerity and true

³⁸ Donald Senior, Gen Ed. 1990, *The Catholic Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press).

repentance. As the priest raises the host, consider that this really is His crucified and risen body that will lead to forgiveness, freedom from evil, and eternal life (see John 6). If it helps, you may want to read about the Eucharistic miracle overseen by Jorge Bergoglio (now Pope Francis) in Buenos Aires in 1996. It is summarized in Volume 3, Chapter 9 (Section III).³⁹ This Eucharistic host was transformed into a piece of flesh from the left ventricle wall with an abundance of white blood cells still present (indicating that the tissue was taken from a living, beating heart). Moreover, there were several signs that the heart was under severe stress, seemingly from torture.⁴⁰ Try to imagine that the host you are seeing is not only substantially changed, but changed in appearance, revealing the self-sacrificial body of the Son of God. As the priest raises the host, it is appropriate to adore and give thanks to the Lord of unconditional love. When we really know what is going on in the mass, it is difficult to claim, as my student did, that it is boring. It is the unfolding and reality of the drama of salvation through the self-sacrificial love of God – nothing less.

Again, we need to prepare ourselves for the other parts of the Eucharistic prayer – participating in the priest’s proclamation of praise and thanksgiving for creation and redemption – and entering into the prayers for the Church, the deceased, and the congregants – including ourselves.

As we prepare to receive Holy Communion, we will want to pay special attention to the Our Father and the three petitions of the Agnus Dei – “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us -- have mercy on us -- grant us peace.” As you see the body and blood of Christ raised up again with the priest’s words – “Look, this truly is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, happy are we to be called to His supper,” consider the Lord of love that you will be receiving -- the Lord who will grant you mercy, peace, healing, and transformation in His own image, then meaningfully pray, “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.”

We have already discussed the grace of receiving the Holy Eucharist (above in this section). As you return to your seats after receiving the Lord’s body and blood, pray for those graces – an intimate and close connection with the Lord of love as well as the six gifts of the inner church. I assure you that if you do not feel anything at the moment you receive the Lord, the effects will gradually manifest themselves – a strengthening of confidence, peace, hope, and reconciliation, as well as healing and loving transformation in the long term. Even if the homilies are less than scintillating and the music less than symphonic, you will still derive eternal benefit,

³⁹ See the You Tube and article about this miracle and the reasons for its acceptance among many in the medical community in Fr. M. Piotrowski in 2013 “Eucharistic Miracle in Buenos Aires,” <http://absoluteprimacyofchrist.org/pope-francis-eucharistic-miracle-in-buenos-aires-argentina/>

⁴⁰ The well-known cardiologist, Dr. Frederic Zugib performed the pathology tests on the unidentified samples of the host (now turned into tissue) sent to him from Buenos Aires. He concluded, “*The analyzed material is a fragment of the heart muscle found in the wall of the left ventricle close to the valves. This muscle is responsible for the contraction of the heart. It should be borne in mind that the left cardiac ventricle pumps blood to all parts of the body. The heart muscle is in an inflammatory condition and contains a large number of white blood cells. This indicates that the heart was alive at the time the sample was taken. It is my contention that the heart was alive, since white blood cells die outside a living organism. They require a living organism to sustain them. Thus, their presence indicates that the heart was alive when the sample was taken. What is more, these white blood cells had penetrated the tissue, which further indicates that the heart had been under severe stress, as if the owner had been beaten severely about the chest.*” Ibid.

dispel the darkness that may be in your hearts, put the evil spirit to flight, and enter more resolutely on the road to salvation. You will be connected to and transformed by the Son of God who came to be with you, to enter into you, and to love you into His eternity.

We have already discussed the sacrament of reconciliation in Volume 10 (Chapter 3) along with the other sacraments (in other chapters of that Volume) which are also exceedingly important to our spiritual conversion and Christian life – baptism, confirmation, marriage, Holy Orders, and Sacrament of the Sick. I would recommend referring to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Part Two, Section Two – Paragraphs 1210-1666) to obtain a good overview of these sacraments.

I.B

Attentively Listening to the Word of God

The full manifestation of the word of God – Jesus Christ – is given to us in the New Testament, specifically in the gospels. When we make a concerted effort to read the word of God, trying to understand its meaning and significance for our lives, it will transform us. St. Ignatius recognized the power of reading and reflecting on the Gospel narratives which help us to understand who God is, what He desires for us, and where He is leading us. In Chapter One, we discussed the outer word and the inner word, noting how the outer word gives a discursive understanding of the mind while the inner word (coming through Christ's mystical body and the Holy Spirit) gives an intuitive awareness of the love, goodness, beauty, and holiness of the Lord who is the source of that word. As with receiving the Holy Eucharist, reading the word of God transforms our hearts even if we do not fully understand the methods of exegesis – such as form and redaction criticism – Biblical Greek, literary genre, and hermeneutics. There is something about the way Jesus preached and the way the New Testament was written that hits us directly in the heart – if we want to hear it. If we do desire to understand it, then the Holy Spirit will make certain that its significance will as it were leap off the page. As Jesus said:

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Mt. 7: 7-8).

The one condition needed to receive the fruit of the Gospels within our hearts is to *desire* to understand Jesus' meaning. If we really want to know what he means and we really want to follow Him and His words, then they will transform us – even if we do not intentionally try to transform our hearts according to His heart. It is sufficient to attentively read the scriptures while desiring to understand and follow the Lord, for then *He* will begin the process of transforming our hearts – and we will allow Him to do it, because we trust Him and desire to imitate Him – imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. Just as we unconsciously imitate those whom we love and admire, so also we unconsciously imitate the Lord who we love and admire through both the Holy Eucharist and His word. If we are hesitant about trusting or following the Lord – or fearful of changing our ways, then the word of God will have very little effect on us consciously or subconsciously.

In sum, if we desire to understand God's word in the Gospels, the Holy Spirit will give us sufficient understanding of the heart to be transformed in the image of Jesus, but if we do not really desire to understand, we will remain ignorant of the most important message ever revealed from the word of God who came down from heaven. As this word sinks into our hearts and transforms us, it will assure us of the love of Christ and His Father and inspire us to imitate them, which in turn will free us to detach ourselves from the fears, anxieties, and "things" of the world.

Though the effects of reading God's word are similar to those occurring through the Holy Eucharist (described above), the process is slightly different. Reception of the Holy Eucharist in faith *directly* connects us with the heart of Christ which *immediately* galvanizes the six spiritual gifts of the inner church within us. Cognitive understanding is not required except to assent willingly to the Lord's presence in faith. However, listening to God's word *does* require a process of mental cognition with a concomitant desire to understand Jesus' true meaning – so it is slightly more difficult to obtain the fruits of transformation from it.

I noted above that the more often we receive the Holy Eucharist, the more efficacious will be its effects on spiritual conversion and even to some extent on moral conversion. The same holds true – though in a slightly different way – for reading the word of God. Some individuals devote over an hour per day to *Lectio Divina*,⁴¹ which can no doubt be beneficial. However, this is not required to receive transformative grace from reading the word of God. If we spend a short amount of time, say on the Gospel of the day, sincerely opening ourselves to the word and will of Christ within it, then we will connect more deeply with Him, become transformed by Him, which will help us to be detached from worldly fears, goods, power and prestige (the beginning of moral freedom). For those who cannot attend daily mass, I recommend using the Gospel reading of the day from the USCCB Daily Readings online (which is free of charge).⁴²

II.

Contemplation and Personal Relationship with the Lord

[Back to top](#)

I am using "contemplative prayer" here in the most general sense – that is, any form of prayer open to direct connection with the Lord for enough time to establish intimacy. In my view, this would have to be for more than fifteen minutes continuously per day. By "intimacy" here, I mean personal familiarity, closeness, and caring, but not necessarily the tender or even romantic affections intrinsic to some forms of Christian mysticism.

I cannot exaggerate the importance of personal contemplative prayer because it complements the public forms of prayer (i.e. the sacraments, liturgy, and penance services) by opening our hearts to the Lord in deep and close personal relationship. This relationship brings freedom, peace, and wisdom into our active lives which ultimately transforms us in virtue and

⁴¹ See the explanation below in Section II.C.

⁴² <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/080417.cfm>

There is also a free APP for daily mass readings that can be obtained through the APP store on your iPhone under "USCCB".

holiness. There is a spiritual adage that expresses this explicitly: “A person can live for a while both praying and sinning, but eventually he will get rid of one of them.” This shows the power of personal prayer in our active lives, for it is radically opposed to sin (a turning away from God). If we assent to the power of close relationship with the Lord in prayer, then it will eventually lead us away from sin. However, if we assent to sin, it will eventually lead us away from close relationship with the Lord in prayer.

We will address contemplative prayer in three sections:

1. Getting started on a life of contemplative prayer (Section II.A).
2. The Second Stage of Contemplative Prayer – Extended Discursive Prayer (Section II.B).
3. The Third Stage of Contemplative Prayer – Meditative and Non-discursive Prayer (Section II.C).

II.A

Getting Started on Personal Contemplative Prayer

I devote the majority of Volume 18 to this topic, and so I will be quite brief here. My purpose is to give a simple overview of how to get started in personal contemplative prayer, and will save the explanation and elaboration of this presentation for Volume 18. There are three major principles of the spiritual life that are essential to doing this. I will briefly discuss each in turn.

II.A.1

The First Principle of Contemplative Prayer -- Consistency

First, *consistency* is the most important dimension of establishing a personal relationship with the Lord. In this respect it resembles all personal relationships. We need dedicated time and presence to others to get to know and appreciate them better. Normally, this brings us closer to them, and we begin to commit ourselves more fully to them. Eventually our commitment becomes strong enough to prioritize them in our lives, to care about their welfare, to care for them, and ultimately to sacrifice ourselves for them. The more time and presence we consistently bring to our relationships, the stronger our bond in friendship and love becomes. The same holds true for our relationship with God.

One might object that our human friends are visible and affectively responsive, but the Lord is invisible and frequently silent, so there must be some difference between the dynamics of divine and human friendship. True enough, but make no mistake about it – the Lord’s presence, though invisible, can be quite palpable. As we acknowledge His presence and love to us and proceed to our contemplative prayers, we might feel relief from emptiness, loneliness, and alienation, or feel a subtle sense of peace that calms us and leads to trust. We might also have a subtle awareness of God’s sacredness and/or love. These are some indications that we are not alone, and that another profoundly transcendent interpersonal consciousness has drawn close to us in His compassion and peace. If we remain close to Him for the set time of our prayer, day after day, we can be sure that He will make His presence more profoundly felt, and above all, He will transform us through our relationship with Him.

Now, take a few moments to consider what a good time might be for consistently committing yourself to a minimum of fifteen minutes of personal prayer every day. It is just as important to avoid making your prayer time too long as making it too short. Fifteen minutes is a great starting time for those who are beginning personal contemplative prayer, but avoid any time period that is too long to be sustained over the course of time. If you select an initial prayer time of say thirty minutes, and you suddenly find yourself bored, distracted, or sensing that it is unmanageable, then back away from this, and go to twenty minutes, and then test it. Consistency and manageability is far more important than the initial length of time given to prayer. Don't worry – your prayer period will grow over the course of time (see below).

If you are anything like me, there is no substitute for the morning – immediately after getting out of bed. Be sure to wake up early enough so that you will not feel rushed by the impending requirements of the day, and if possible leave a little extra time for your prayer to go longer than you might have thought. Slip away to a place where you have some privacy, and then *stick to it every day*. There may be some days when this will be difficult, because of early morning commitments – such as plane travel at early hours. If you do have to sacrifice this time for such occasions, provide some way of making up for it during the day. If we are to be contemplatives in action – the ideal of Christian life – we must protect the time to be with the Lord in prayer so that our activities won't eclipse the contemplation that will bring us closer to Him in love and transformation.

II.A.2

The Second Principle of Contemplative Prayer: Freedom and Grace for Moral Conversion

The second principle requires considerable nuance – the majority of the positive effects of prayer will occur after your contemplative time. Sometimes, people who initiate personal contemplative prayer expect to feel intimacy with the Lord almost immediately during their time of prayer. Though this certainly can and does occur, it frequently does not. Instead of feeling the Lord's presence, we become more familiar with Him, at ease with Him, and more comfortable with His healing hand amidst our sin and imperfection.

Sometimes when we begin the contemplative life we might have a sense of shame, guilt, or fear that makes us very uncomfortable – even ready to bolt – when we allow the Lord to draw close to us. Though shame, guilt, or fear might be appropriate from the vantage point of our actions or lifestyle, do not avoid being in personal relationship with the Lord. When He comes close, He means only to heal us and save us – to draw us away from our enemy, the evil one, who will use every suggestion of your unworthiness to incite shame so that you will want to avoid the One who can save you. Remember, it is not the Lord who is screaming, “You unworthy wretch – I'm disgusted with you.” This is the accuser – your enemy, the evil one.

If you allow the Lord to draw close to you in your sin and imperfection, you will feel a sense of shame that will no doubt be uncomfortable, but this is not because the Lord is angry or disgusted with you, but only because He wants to heal you and rescue you from your enemy. Instead of avoiding the Lord or finding some way of distracting yourself from your prayers, make an act of trust, such as, “Lord Jesus, I place my trust in you,” or “Have mercy on me, Lord,

for I am a sinful man/woman.” Repeat it again and again until the urge to flee or find a distraction lessens. When you can sense God’s benevolent, loving, and healing presence, consider what He is suggesting to you. Be sure of this – He will suggest something to you in a very non-judgmental way that is quite manageable. It may seem like a hurdle, but it will be a manageable one. This is the critical moment of free choice, if the suggestion truly is manageable, then ask the Lord for the grace to undertake it. Don’t worry – the Lord does not expect you to be perfect. He knows you will likely fall many times, but the important thing is to try to accommodate His suggestion. I assure you that if you stay faithful to your contemplative prayer, and try to accommodate the Lord’s suggestion, *it will* get easier and easier to the point where you will find yourself becoming freer and freer from the sinful proclivity that was undermining your relationship with Him.

The reader might be thinking, “I have a hundred questions about that last paragraph.” I cannot answer all the questions now, but I must address one question whose answer must be correct if we are to advance in contemplative prayer and moral life -- what do I mean by “the Lord making a suggestion?” Will the Lord be as it were, standing outside of me saying, “Bob here is what I am suggesting to you”? Obviously not. Instead, the Lord is likely to incite a thinking process that culminates in a desirable course of action – “*I would really like* to be more patient or compassionate or generous or chaste, etc. in certain specific situations.” Notice that this is quite different from, “*I should* be more compassionate,” or “*I better* be more compassionate” which implies judgment by the Lord.

The Lord is not interested in judging you, and then pushing you or forcing you to obey lest He bring down the hammer. Any such suggestion is from the evil one. Instead, the Lord wants you to see that some mode of conduct is leading you into darkness and endangering your soul – even to the point where you would actually choose the darkness over the light of love and even over the light of His heavenly Kingdom. He wants you to sense the danger posed by your enemy’s grip on your freedom, and after recognizing it, to call to Him (the Lord) for help to lead you out of the darkness. At this juncture *you* will desire to change your conduct precisely because it is so dangerous to your state of being and even your salvation. If you resolve to follow your desire to get out of the darkness, the Lord will give you the grace to keep that resolve going. Yes – you might fail many many times, but if you get up, ask for forgiveness, make an act of trust in the Lord, and continue to follow your resolve (all the while maintaining your daily practice of contemplative prayer), then I guarantee you will get better at what the Lord is suggesting to the point where you will be able to leave the darkness behind and enter more fully into His light.

I recall my novice master, Fr. Gordon Moreland, telling this sage story about how the Lord feels as we begin the process of personal contemplative prayer, spiritual conversion, and moral conversion. As we begin, the evil one sweeps in immediately and plants the image of a really angry parent who discovers that we have habituated ourselves to some form of darkness and sin, and screams at us that we better get our act together right now or he will abandon us or even condemn us. In contrast to this, the Lord – through the Holy Spirit – presents the image of a parent who walks into a room and sees a snake lying in the bassinet next to us – His beloved, precious, and fragile child. Instead of being angry, judgmental, and condemnatory, the parent is terrified by the impending danger lying next to us, and has only one thought in mind – to remove

the danger. This is precisely how the Lord of unconditional love feels – just like the father of the Prodigal Son – yet in the case of our moral lives, He must operate within the contours of our freedom. He can't simply pick up the snake and get rid of it, He has to show us how dangerous the snake is so that we *will want* to avoid it, even though the snake has convinced us that he is quite harmless, and wants only to make us happy and fulfilled.

Does the Lord always present such suggestions to us during our contemplative prayer? Sometimes, but by no means, always. Sometimes, the Lord will influence a dream in which an image or a narrative informs us of the mortal danger of a specific kind (or kinds) of conduct or attitude. When we awaken from that dream, we will likely remember it and be quite disturbed by it. Notice that we are disturbed not by the Lord's anger or judgment, but by the impending danger and darkness into which we have entered into our conduct or attitude. When the Lord has made the point about the danger, it is incumbent upon us to recognize the gift we have been given (even though it is disturbing), and then to pray the prayer of St. Peter as he sank into the water while attempting to walk – “Lord, help me!” If we recognize the danger (instead of running from it) and ask the Lord for help to overcome a destructive form of conduct, He will help us by *gradually* leading us to little improvements in our attitude or conduct. If we really follow through on these small steps, away from the sin and danger, your desire for that sin becomes tempered – and eventually you will lose interest in what had formerly fascinated you, and even transfixed you. Again, it may take many attempts and subsequent failures, but eventually the desire for the sin will lessen to the point where it is no longer desirable.

When I began this discussion above, I mentioned that the majority of the positive effects of prayer occur outside of prayer. The above discussion shows how the Lord accomplishes this. So long as we remain faithful to our daily contemplative prayer and follow through on the suggestions from the Lord that come to us during prayer, in our dreams, when we are awakened at 3 o'clock in the morning, or by the voices of other people, we can be sure that our desire for the darkness (of sin) will gradually subside, while our desire for the light will intensify. When this occurs, our love for the Lord will also intensify, and we will want to draw near Him in contemplative prayer for additional time, which in turn will motivate us to separate ourselves from the darkness even more – and the cycle will continue. Contemplation leads to reform within our active lives while reform of our active lives leads to deeper contemplation and love of the Lord. We might conclude this discussion by reiterating three points. First, the above life of grace and sanctity begins with fidelity to contemplative prayer every day – even if it is for only fifteen minutes. Secondly, we should expect that the majority of the fruit of prayer will occur outside of prayer. Finally, as we begin the contemplative life, contending with feelings of shame, guilt, or fear, we must trust that the Lord's sole intention is to love and heal us, and then to make acts of trust in Him so that we can remain faithful to our contemplative prayer (instead of fleeing or finding a distraction). We must then be alert to the suggestions the Lord will make through our contemplative prayer, our dreams, our feelings of cosmic emptiness, loneliness, and alienation, and through the voices of others. When we sense the impending danger and darkness of our conduct or attitudes, we will want to respond with the plea, “Lord, help me!” And the Lord will infuse His grace into our desire to flee the danger of our sin. We will ultimately succeed, because the Lord's grace will not be insufficient to flee from the darkness.

II.A.3

The Third Principle of Contemplative Prayer – Selecting Times and Prayers

The third principle of the spiritual life is more practical than the previous one. It concerns setting out the kinds of prayers you will want to say as you begin the spiritual life, and progress in it. As you begin your contemplative prayer life, you might find that praying an entire rosary or the Divine Office is difficult to engage in a time period of 15 – 20 minutes. Since the objective of contemplative prayer is to come into loving connection with the Lord and open ourselves to His suggestions, I would recommend shorter prayers that can do this in a relatively short time. Therefore I would recommend five kinds of “short prayers:”

1. Snippets of the rosary.
2. Spontaneous prayers (a list is given in Volume 18, Chapter Three).
3. Common Catholic prayers (a list is given in Volume 18, Appendix I).
4. Some profound, well-known Psalms of praise, thanksgiving, petition, and repentance (a list is given in Volume 18, Appendix II).
5. The prayer of gratitude for all blessings.

I would recommend using combinations of these prayers and Psalms sufficient to fill about 75% of your allotted time of contemplation. Leave 25% of your time for conversation with the Lord about some concerns of the day or week as well as responding to some of the suggestions you sense He is giving to you.

As you can see, beginning a contemplative life requires a bit of homework, because you will want to familiarize yourself with the spontaneous prayers, Psalms, and common prayers on the lists in Volume 18, and then make a selection of an appropriate number corresponding to the time you have allotted for contemplative prayer. Stay with the same prayers each week. If you want to change them every week, feel free to do so. But staying with the same prayers means that you can devote yourself to connecting with the Lord in prayer instead of spending time and psychic energy on deciding what and how to pray.

Before moving to your selection of prayers, you will want to begin with the first step of all contemplative prayer -- recognizing the presence of the Lord or the Blessed Virgin. I typically use the prayer, “Lord, I know you are here and that you love me” (or if praying to the Blessed Mother – “Mother Mary, I know you are here and I know you love me).” I repeat this prayer until my consciousness is open to His (or her) presence – and He is filling me with it. This “being filled” with the Lord’s presence need not have any emotional content, but oftentimes does – a feeling of peace or the sense of being near a profound friend. At the very least, I have a tacit awareness that I am not alone. When you are in this connected interpersonal state, proceed to your selection of psalms and prayers. Remember, the point is not to get through all of them, but rather to say them deliberately and lovingly while recalling His presence and love for you.

As noted above, most of the grace of prayer occurs after your prayer session is completed. Keep alert to clues about where the Lord might be leading – interior clues as well as exterior ones. If you sense new freedom to detach from the world or one of the 8 deadly sins, take note of it and bring it back to your contemplative prayer to ask for the grace to increase that freedom until the attachment has subsided.

Some people may find themselves in a state of “prayer block” (much like writer’s block). The reason for this might stem from sinful proclivities or habits that may have been a problem in the past and continue to be so in the present. This may require a turning moment *to begin* the process of opposing those sinful proclivities or habits. The best way of doing this is to avail oneself of the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) which has the particular grace of quickening our resolve to oppose a sinful proclivity – though such opposition may only be partially or even minimally successful at the outset. If you go to confession with the intention of beginning a process of opposition to a sinful proclivity, and find that you have only a little success in contending with it, do not grow discouraged, but instead resolve to go to confession on a monthly basis. The combination of the sacrament of confession and the contemplative prayer life you are initiating will help you to break the spell and the habit of that particular sin which will in turn decrease its influence in your life. Confession tends to lessen the “prayer block” which in turn enables you to initiate a habit of contemplative prayer, which in combination with the grace of confession, tends to lessen the influence of sinful proclivity. Repeated confessions, fidelity to contemplative prayer, and speaking to the Lord about your struggles with a sinful proclivity during contemplative prayer, weaken sinful proclivities and habits. The longer we engage in the process the more we gain freedom in resisting the proclivity.

There are some other complementary steps we can take from contemporary psychology – namely, visualizations and affirmations – which have proven to be quite successful in changing our subconscious identity (discussed in detail in Volume 16 – Chapters 2-3). When these are combined with the sacrament of reconciliation and a contemplative prayer life, success in breaking the spell of the proclivity is likely to occur – though it may be a long process. As the proclivity weakens, your relationship with the Lord through contemplation will strengthen – and as a result, you will bring that relationship into your active life – your apostolate, your family, your workplace, etc. At this point, you will be progressing toward the Ignatian ideal of being a contemplative in action.

If you are anything like me, the time of your contemplative prayer will begin to *naturally* expand. If you start off with, say, 15 minutes, you may notice that you *desire* to finish your prayers, after which you discover that it took 20 or 25 minutes – and you did not notice the extra time. When this begins to consistently happen, add an extra 5 or 10 minutes to your allotted prayer time to accommodate what you desire – to be lovingly in the presence of the Lord. Do not force yourself to move to 25 minutes. Wait until the 25 minutes happens naturally. If you force yourself, you will turn your “*wanting* to pray” into “*having* to pray,” which will undermine the relationship with the Lord you are trying to cultivate. Remember -- when you have completed your selection of Psalms, spontaneous prayers, and common prayers. Devote at least 5 minutes to loving conversation with the Lord. Asking Him what His desires are for you – your spiritual development, moral development, as well as life and relationship issues. When your conversation is complete, conclude with a “Glory Be.”

As noted above, when your life of contemplation becomes more habitual, you will naturally desire to spend more time in prayer. Sometimes affective desolation may cause dryness which may increase distractions. This is explained in Volume 15 (Chapter Two, Section III). Prescinding from affective desolation, the desire to be with the Lord in contemplative prayer

tends to increase (along with detachment from sinful proclivities). As this occurs, you will probably experience little moments of affective consolation (see below) and will be drawn to additional spontaneous and common prayers.

Let us now return to the subject of selecting particular prayers. The saints of the Catholic Church throughout the centuries—such as St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Ignatius Loyola, and many more -- have written literally hundreds of prayers and litanies that constitute the vast repertoire of Christian devotional prayers available today. There are many excellent prayer books that provide a large number of these prayers at a reasonable cost.⁴³ I recommend that readers purchase one or two of these prayer books and mark the pages of prayers that have potential to connect you intimately with the Lord during your daily prayer session. I have provided several of these prayers in Volume 18 to get you started, but these barely scratch the surface of our huge Catholic repertoire.

The prayer of gratitude is particularly important and has been recognized by virtually every spiritual master as foundational to the contemplative life. Gratitude is an acknowledgement that we have been blessed by the Lord which makes us aware of His presence and love in our lives. When we say “thank you Lord,” it is generally infused with the recognition of His love as well as our love for Him. When we are grateful, we take nothing for granted which frees us from the entitlement mentality and from resentment toward others and God for what we do not have. There is much to be grateful for in all of our lives if we focus on what we have rather than what we do not have – our families, friends, opportunities at work and in community, and above all for our creation, redemption by Jesus, and the Church community. Though suffering can reach critical points in our lives, this too can become a blessing to help us toward our salvation – and even to help others toward their salvation.

It is best to begin the prayer of gratitude with recent blessings – perhaps the success of a child at home or an accomplishment at work or a new opportunity in the community or work, or a spiritual insight from Church or from a book. We can also be thankful for natural beauty or the weather or little acts of friendship and love.

You might also see the blessings in some of the challenges of life, particularly how those challenges led to detachment from a sinful proclivity or caused a change in life’s meaning or direction. Don’t force yourself to think of things for which to be grateful if nothing is coming to mind. Instead, focus on some more general dimensions of your life, such as your spouse, children, friends, gifts and talents, faith, residence, and even the blessings you have received in the past. I recommend making a little “Book of Gratitude” that details the many areas where we may find the Lord’s providential hand helping us. Volume 18 has a detailed explanation of both the prayer of gratitude and Book of Gratitude that will help reader’s engage in this practice on a regular basis.

When you become accustomed to some of these prayers (common prayers, spontaneous prayers, psalms, and the prayer of gratitude), you may notice little lucid moments of the Lord’s

⁴³ A simple web search for “Catholic Prayer Books Amazon” will give at least 40 excellent reasonably-priced prayer books from which to choose. The descriptions given indicate fairly clearly whether these are more traditional or contemporary prayer books.

(or the Blessed Virgin's) presence and love (called "affective consolation"). This presence may be quite subtle—like a tacit awareness or a memory of a past moment when His presence was evident. Sometimes His presence will be more than tacit, and you will be aware of a sense of peace or "being at home" that goes beyond purely natural manifestations of these feelings. Sometimes you may feel a sense of holiness, sacredness, and unity that is quite other worldly, and sometimes you may feel a combination of these feelings along with a sense of supernatural love and joy. You may also notice that when these feelings occur, they incite desire for more within you—and when they fade, you are left longing for the divine presence that so animated and fulfilled you. C.S. Lewis described this profound combination of feelings, filled with intense desire for the Divine Presence as "a stab of joy," using the following words:

As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's 'enormous bliss' of Eden (giving the full, ancient meaning to enormous) comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but of desire for what? Not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past---and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing which had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison."⁴⁴

Most of the time, our contemplative prayer will not elicit this type of profound feeling, but it is not unusual for the Lord to provide a tacit awareness of His presence and Love when we recall His presence and pray in the words the saints have given us. Though this feeling can be quite subtle, it deepens our conscious and subconscious sense of the Divine Presence that carries over into the rest of our day, and provides the basis for detaching ourselves from the things of this world (moral freedom). It might be helpful to scrutinize one or more Catholic prayer books and study some of the prayers given there until you land upon one or more that resonates with you. Remember, before praying, call to mind the presence of the Lord or our Blessed Mother and affirm their love for you, using a prayer similar to this—"Lord, I know you are here and I know you love me." Do not think about your feelings or how the Lord might be interacting with you during the prayer, simply pray it, trying to intend what its saintly author meant to express. Even if we do not notice the above feelings or effects on a daily basis, we may be sure that we will notice them over the long term, for contemplative prayer provides a very powerful foundation for transformation in the heart of Christ, catalyzing the transformative power of the Holy Eucharist.

If you remain faithful to this contemplative prayer life, whether it be 15 minutes or 45 minutes, you will begin to make spiritual progress – more aware of the Lord's love for you and even your love for Him, a greater sense of freedom to detach oneself from the world and deadly sins, a greater sense of the Lord's presence to you during the day, and a transformation in the quality of your actions -- most especially with the virtues of love mentioned by St. Paul in Corinthians 1:13 – greater patience, kindness, and compassion as well as greater control over

⁴⁴ C.S. Lewis 1966 *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of my Early Life* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich) pp 22-23.

anger, boasting, rejoicing in evil, etc. Regular contemplative prayer is a game changer, because simply being present to the Lord or the Blessed Virgin makes their presence “rub off” on us. Their presence and love transform our hearts precisely in the manner described by John Henry Cardinal Newman – “*Cor ad cor Loquitur*” – “heart speaking to heart.”

As your contemplative prayer life expands, you may want to move into one of the more lengthy forms of contemplative prayer listed below.

II.B

The Second Stage of Contemplative Prayer – Extended Discursive Prayer

As we advance in contemplative prayer, we become progressively more aware of the loving presence of the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Blessed Virgin to the point where we desire (are drawn into) deeper prayer – beyond 20 minutes (as might be the case with the prayer methods mentioned above). At this juncture, we will probably want to add a more extended form of prayer and meditation to the spontaneous prayers, common prayers, and familiar psalms mentioned above. What kinds of prayer can lead to an intimate (close and caring) connection with the Lord? There are literally dozens upon dozens of such prayer forms, but I will address two that have been particularly helpful to me – the rosary (Section II.B.1) and the divine office -- Liturgy of the Hours (Section II.B.2).

II.B.1

The Rosary

The rosary is one of the most powerful vehicles for initiating and maintaining contemplative prayer. Every recent pope and canonized saint has recommended it repeatedly, and it has been part of every major Marian apparition of the 19th and 20th centuries – e.g., Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje. The Catholic spiritual tradition has, since its inception, integrated Marian spirituality into the foundation of its prayer – both communally and individually. Icons and prayers to Mary are found in the art and inscriptions of the catacombs – and in every artistic era since that time. The rosary does not exhaust Marian spirituality in the Catholic Church. There is a richness of Marian reflection (Mariology), Marian feast days, litanies, novenas, hymns, special prayers, and extra-liturgical celebrations. Several of the Marian pilgrimage sites – particularly Lourdes, Fatima, and Guadalupe have miracles associated with them (see Volume 3, Chapter 9) – and Lourdes has a permanent medical-scientific commission (the Lourdes International Medical Bureau) permanently set up to assess and archive those miracles (see Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section I for details on this).

In the midst of this plentitude, the rosary still stands out as spiritually significant, because it is so helpful for initiating and maintaining a contemplative life. It incorporates the motherly love of the Blessed Virgin into praise and prayers to the three persons of the Holy Trinity in a simple, repetitive, and diverse way. The presence, love, and assistance of the divine persons and the Blessed Mother are evident – which makes it an ideal foundation for contemplative prayer.

The rosary is also an invitation into meditation on the major events in the life of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin. There are four major sets of meditations, called “mysteries” that most of us are familiar with and can focus on while reciting the “Hail Mary”:

1. The Joyful Mysteries—The Annunciation, The Visitation, The Birth of Jesus, The Presentation, and The Finding of Jesus at the Temple.
2. The Luminous Mysteries—The Baptism of Jesus, The Wedding Feast at Cana (First Miracle), The Preaching of the Kingdom of God, The Transfiguration, and The Holy Eucharist.
3. The Sorrowful Mysteries—The Agony in the Garden, The Scourging of Jesus, The Crowning with Thorns, The Way of the Cross, and The Crucifixion.
4. The Glorious Mysteries—The Resurrection, The Ascension, The Gift of the Holy Spirit, The Assumption, and the Coronation of Mary

There is much to be said about meditating on these mysteries and familiarizing yourself with them, but that is beyond the scope of this short explanation on one of the Church’s foundational forms of extended contemplative prayer. I would recommend getting one of the many books written on this, such as, *Scriptural Rosary* (by Christianica), *The Contemplative Rosary with St. John Paul II and St. Teresa of Avila*, or *Pray the Rosary* (St. Joseph Edition).

It is more important to pray the rosary thoughtfully and intentionally than to “get it all done.” Though meditating on the mysteries can be an excellent complement to the prayers of the rosary, the prayers themselves are more than sufficient to establish intimate connection with the Father, Jesus, and the Blessed Virgin. As I am praying the well-known words of the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be, all kinds of other words, feelings and intuitions seem to pop up through inspiration of the Holy Spirit or through my subconscious mind. Thus it is not unusual for me when I am saying, “Hail Mary full of grace,” to be thinking or feeling, “Gentle Mary full of grace,” or when I am praying, “the Lord is with thee” to be thinking or feeling that the Lord is with *me* through her. Similarly, I can be saying or feeling that “I love you” or “I thank you” or “I am happy to be with you” as I am saying the seemingly unrelated words, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” The point I am trying to make here is that we need not focus on the precise discursive words of the prayer, but on the spirit of giving praise to the Lord or the Blessed Virgin through the prayer which opens us in turn to the inspirations coming from the Holy Spirit or from our own conscious or subconscious inclinations. When this happens, we are making an intimate connection – establishing familiarity, close friendship, and care for those to whom we are praying.

Sometimes contemplative prayer goes beyond the feelings and intuitions of intimate connection with the Lord or the Blessed Virgin – because *they* make their presence felt in a more evident way than simple tacit awareness. Sometimes we can feel the immensity of their presence or the beauty of their holiness and virtue, and sometimes we can feel the intensity of their love filled with unity, joy, mystery, and holiness. These more intense experiences are more rare than the less passionate awareness (or tacit awareness) of the Lord, but their episodic occurrence assures us of the Lord’s deep love and care for us. Though these more intense experiences are important for our close connection with the Lord, they are not necessary for moral freedom and moral action. The simpler kinds of awareness or tacit awareness are sufficient for this.

Contemplative prayer brings us close to the Lord and to the Blessed Virgin, assuring us of the fact that we are loved and cared for by an affectionate, humble, gentle, compassionate, and forgiving Father, mother, and brother. This is essential for letting go of our fears, need for control, and obsession with establishing “our place in the world” (moral freedom). It should be noted that contemplative prayer and the Eucharist go hand in hand. The Eucharist connects us with the love of Christ in the depths of our hearts (transforming us and filling us with spiritual gifts) while contemplative prayer explicitizes this connection with the heart of Christ, making conscious (or at least tacitly conscious) the profound reality of Christ lying in the depths of our hearts. As such, contemplative prayer explicitizes the profound loving and transforming power of Christ in the Eucharist while the Eucharist deepens the intimate loving presence of the Lord coming from contemplative prayer. When the Eucharist and contemplative prayer complement one another, they provide a strong foundation for the detachment needed for moral freedom. It should be remembered, that spiritual conversion – even this very powerful kind of spiritual conversion – is not enough for detachment and moral freedom – we must also concertedly direct our awareness of Christ and His loving way to the process of detaching ourselves from the things of this world.

The rosary is not the only way to make an intimate connection with the Lord in contemplative prayer. The Divine Office (Section II.B.2) and non-discursive contemplative prayer (Section II.C) also provide a meeting space for the Lord to manifest his familiar caring presence. Just as the words of prayer in the rosary incite words, feelings, and intuitions of God’s mysterious, holy, and loving presence, so also the words of the psalms and devotional prayers go beyond themselves. Though we can concentrate on the words of these psalms and devotional prayers – they will frequently lead – thanks to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the memories of our subconscious psyche – to new layers of awareness of the Lord’s love that elicit responses instead of expressions of gratitude and love in return.

II.B.2

The Divine Office and Psalms of Praise

Though the Divine Office (sometimes called the “Breviary” or “Liturgy of the Hours”) is a part of the Church’s official public worship, it can also be said individually, and can be used as a part of our contemplative life. The Divine Office has been an integral part of the Church since the 1st century, and took its inspiration from the Jewish division of a day into “hours of prayer.” Though priests are obligated to pray the Office, and most monastic religious communities pray it in common, the laity is not so obliged, but is invited to do so if they wish.

The Divine Office is split into four parts – (1) Advent and Christmas, (2) Ordinary Time I, (3) Lent and Easter, and (4) Ordinary Time II. It is a terrific resource for seasonal readings, antiphons, and prayers. It is organized into a four-week cycle called the Psalter, but the prayers for the Season can be substituted by psalms, prayers, and antiphons for feasts, the memorial of saints, and other occasions. The majority of the prayers are psalms with some Old Testament canticles and New Testament canticles interspersed throughout. For readers who do not have the time to pray the Divine Office, there are a few publications that provide an abridged psalm-based

resource with seasonal antiphons and reflections, the most popular of which is the *Magnificat*.⁴⁵ For readers seeking a non-psalm based prayer cycle based on the mass readings and meditations on them, see *The Word Among Us*.⁴⁶

Since the Divine Office is psalm based, it is incumbent upon readers to learn how to read the psalms in their historical context, and to “update” some of the images of ancient Israel in the psalms to reflect the reality of the modern Christian church.⁴⁷ For example, you can substitute the Catholic Church or the Mystical Body of Christ for the many references to the City of Jerusalem or to the nation of Israel.

Why does the Church still use these ancient psalms as the basis for its official public and private prayer? Beyond the fact that the psalms are part of Divine Revelation and the Catholic Canon of the Old Testament, they are truly inspired hymns of praise, gratitude, and trust. The psalmists almost always seem to be in a state of wonder and awe at God’s creation, His providential care for Israel (and the Church), and His desire to lead all of us to justice, virtue, and piety. It is inconsequential that the psalmists’ view of nature is non-scientific and his view of God’s providential care lacking the revelation of Jesus and the Church. The revelation and view of creation he does have is marked by wonder and awe, which is precisely the view we should all have of nature and human beings which is especially seen through the lens of modern science. Furthermore, his view of God’s providential care is intimate and filled with thanks, which again is precisely the view we all ought to have. In light of the many documented and undocumented miracles and healings which are quite prevalent. I am unbothered by what a scientist would consider a naive view of nature because I am overwhelmed by the psalmists’ passionate correct view of nature and human beings as mysterious, wonderful, and crafted with love. If readers can overlook some of these anachronistic features and update the psalmists’ images of Israel, the Temple, and Jerusalem, the experience of praying the psalms will likely be significantly enhanced.

I tend to personalize the psalms (when I say the Breviary by myself) by changing the impersonal “the Lord” into the personal, “you Lord.” Hence when the psalm says “the Lord is my rock and my shield,” I substitute, “you Lord are my rock and my shield.” I have been doing this so long that I don’t have to think about it anymore, and it helps me to make a personal connection with the Lord by speaking my praises directly to Him. As noted above, it does not take long for certain phrases of the psalms to leap off the page as personally meaningful, and sometimes, I feel the Lord’s presence and consolation welling up through my prayer. These feelings of consolation may or may not be related to the words of the psalms, because they are caused by the Lord who chooses to make His presence felt on the basis of many factors beyond the words of the psalms and my capacity to understand. Invariably, when I feel His loving presence—even if it be as slight as a gentle breeze—I respond with closeness, trust, and love.

⁴⁵ There is a free app for the daily Breviary. Go to the app store on your smart phone and subscribe to the breviary app. Simply put in the date you are using it, and the rest is automatic.

⁴⁶ <https://wau.org/>

⁴⁷ See for example, Charles Miller 2004 *Together in Prayer: Learning to Love the Liturgy of the Hours* (Wipf and Stock Publishers).

For those who are not used to praying the psalms, it is important to recognize that some parts and phrases in the psalms were constructed during the time when Israel was a warrior society, and so there might be stanzas that appear to be quite violent and incongruent with the teachings of Jesus. These phrases probably *are* incongruent with the teachings of Jesus because they were formulated within a cultural context that did not know the fullness of Jesus' revelation of the unconditional love of His Father or His unconditional self-sacrificial love for the world.

There is a principle of New Testament interpretation that we might call "Asymmetrical Hermeneutics" ("one-directional interpretation") (see Volume 7, Chapter One). This principle recognizes the development of doctrine from the Patriarchal period to the Mosaic period to the period of the Judges (a warrior society) to the Davidic kingdom to the exile to the Second Temple and finally to the fullness of revelation in Jesus. It declares that we can look *backwards* from the fullness of New Testament Revelation to the partial revelation of the Old Testament, but not vice-versa. There is no problem with seeing the Old Testament within the much fuller framework and categories of the New Testament, because we can interpret the places of tension in favor of the New Testament. However, we cannot do the opposite—that is, interpret the fullness of Revelation in the New Testament through the much narrower framework and categories of the Old Testament. This would be like putting new wine into old wineskins. The old wineskins cannot hold it, and the new wine will burst the old wineskins leading to the loss of both (see Mt 9:14-17).

For example, Psalm 139 is one of the most beautiful, spiritual, loving psalms in the Old Testament Psalmody. However, one stanza appears incongruent with the teaching of Jesus and the rest of the psalm: "If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty! They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies" (Ps 139:19-22). How can we reconcile this stanza of the psalm with Jesus' command to love our enemies and do good for those who hate us in imitation of His heavenly Father (Mt 5:43-48)? We must give priority of interpretation to Jesus' commandment, and mitigate the importance of this stanza accordingly. I use this principle when I encounter these kinds of stanzas not only in the psalms, but in other Old Testament passages that are clearly incongruent with Jesus' teaching. The Breviary (and the *Magnificat*) does most of this editing work for us, but occasionally some phrases stand out as dissonant. When this occurs, I simply skip over them and proceed to the next stanza of the psalm. If you are praying the psalms in community, you cannot do this, but when you are using the psalms for your own contemplative prayer to connect intimately with the Lord, it could prove quite helpful.

For the most part, the psalms are inspired prayers that manifest a pure love and trust of God, and honest portrayal of emotion, and a beautiful insight into His providential care. This is why the Church still uses them as the foundation for priestly and religious prayer, and recommends them wholeheartedly to the faithful. If you are not used to the psalms, you might want to start with a few psalms that are familiar and can be said on a daily basis, such as Psalm 8, Psalm 23, Psalm 51, Psalm 103, and Psalm 139. I have provided these "starter psalms" for your convenience in Volume 18 of this book.

II.C

The Third Stage of Contemplative Prayer from Discursive to Meditative and Silent Prayer

The third stage of contemplation is constituted by one of the following three prayer forms:

- *Lectio Divina*,
- meditation/contemplation on the gospels (e.g. Ignatian meditation) or other suggested themes from spiritual masters,
- the prayer of silence (listening and intimate connection).

Lectio Divina was originally a Benedictine practice to hear the word of Christ speaking specifically to an individual through the scriptures. It was not intended as a method of study or exegesis, but as a way to deepen communion with God and to follow His way through reading, meditation, and listening. The Benedictines and others have articulated several steps to help individuals orient themselves toward the message in the scripture passage for them from the Lord. There are several popular works that might help readers to enter into this meditative practice such as Michael Casey 1996, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, and also Dr. Timothy Gray 2009, *Praying Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*.

Ignatian meditation provides a good method for entering into an encounter with Jesus in the gospels. The point of the contemplation is to be with Jesus in the scene, to recognize the quality of His love for others (as manifest through their reaction to Him), and to love Him in return. His love for us is infectious, and induces us to imitate Him, because we enjoy being like the one we love. There are several excellent books on this subject that help beginners enter into several gospel narratives through the Ignatian method of meditation, such as, *Meditation and Contemplation: An Ignatian Guide to Praying with Scripture* by Timothy M. Gallagher, and *An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer: Scriptural Reflections According to the Spiritual Exercises* by Timothy M. Gallagher.

The Prayer of Silence is described in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as follows:

Contemplation is a *gaze* of faith, fixed on Jesus. "I look at him and he looks at me": this is what a certain peasant of Ars in the time of his holy curé used to say while praying before the tabernacle. This focus on Jesus is a renunciation of self. His gaze purifies our heart; the light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all men. ⁴⁸

Since this prayer form is virtually non-discursive, few books are written about it. The only way to truly understand it is to experience it. The objective of this kind of prayer is simply

⁴⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* Section 2715

loving and trusting communion with the Lord which opens us to His suggestions and graces, His love and holiness, His peace and unity, and sometimes His silence. The Lord's silence should not be interpreted in any way as rejection by Him or indifference to us, but rather as a call to trust Him radically as He leads us and purifies us of our ego-centricity and self-concern so that we can enter more fully into the mystery of His love, holiness, and home.

There are several doorways into the Divine Mystery through silent prayer--simply resting with the Lord, adoring Him in the Blessed Sacrament (see Eucharistic Devotion—Chapter Four, Section 5), adoring the Lord in an image of the Sacred Heart or a sacred icon, or simply sitting in a sacred place to sense the Holy Mystery of the One who comes to us. These doorways lead us to the Lord who can manifest Himself in many affective and intuitive ways—both subtly and explicitly. As we rest in His presence, we open ourselves to Him in an act of self-surrender and attentiveness.

As we rest in the Lord and open ourselves to Him through self-surrender, we let Him come to us and lead us to where we cannot lead ourselves. Sometimes we will have a subtle experience of His loving holiness and sometimes a powerful one; sometimes a sense of His call or guidance, and sometimes mere silence. As noted above, the Lord's silence does not mean indifference or rejection, but instead, purification of our egos to enter more fully into His loving mystery. Christian mysticism is focused on this journey into the mysteriously loving heart of the Lord through the fluctuations between silence and the experience of loving holiness, between desolation and consolation, being emptied and being filled, and being alone and being at home.

Volume 20 (Chapter Three) gives an explanation of this journey called “Christian Mysticism” through the works of the two great Carmelite mystics—St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila.

Let us now return to the subject of the third stage of contemplative prayer.

As the reader may have discerned, these three forms of prayer are *less discursive* than the ones mentioned in the first two stages of contemplative prayer, and shift the focus toward meditation, non-discursive contemplation, and reverent silence.

Most lay people who are constrained by family and work commitments will find it difficult to move into this stage of contemplative prayer because it requires additional time and private space if one is to maintain a commitment to some spontaneous prayers and the rosary or the Divine Office. If lay people are serious about making this kind of commitment, they might want to do it on a retreat or devote some time to it on a weekend once per month – or whatever may work in their schedule.

It might be best to ease your way into the third stage of contemplation by retaining some of the more discursive prayers from the second stage, and then adding a time for *Lectio Divina*,

Ignatian meditation, or the Prayer of Silence. Stay with this combination of discursive and non-discursive prayers until you sense a distinctive call from the Lord to move further away from discursive prayer to more meditative or silent prayer. Some of the signs of the Lord's call to do this are mentioned in Volume 20, along with an explanation of these three prayer forms.

One way of initiating a less discursive, more meditative kind of prayer through either *Lectio Divina* or Ignatian meditation is to focus on the Passion of Jesus. This meditation has been central to Christian spirituality since the apostolic age, because it manifests clearly the unconditional love that the Lord has for each of us, and His desire to save us. When we personalize the Passion, it is one of the most intimate communions we can have with the one who spared nothing to rescue us from evil and bring us into the light of His salvation.

The Passion Accounts are by far the most detailed narratives in all four gospels, and the Passion itself lies at the heart of the Pauline and Petrine epistles. Reverence for the crucified Christ is expressed not only in the New Testament, but in practically every form of religious art from the Crucifix (positioned at the center of the Church) to the Stations of the Cross that adorn its walls. During the Middle Ages, Christ's Passion was fixed at the center of art and iconography—and the wounds of Christ factor prominently into every image of the Sacred Heart (see the explanation of these images below in Chapter 5). Christ's complete self-sacrificial love manifest in the Passion lies at the center of the spirituality of almost every Catholic saint, providing the impetus to follow and love Him out of sheer gratitude. When we realize that He truly is the Son of God, and that He truly wanted to completely sacrifice Himself in love for us, it is difficult to resist His call to follow. Each dimension of the Passion Accounts reveals yet another length to which the Lord was willing to go to reveal His love and salvific intent. As we consider what He was thinking and feeling as He endured the pain and humiliation to give Himself totally to us, we are moved to respond with thanks and love.

The centrality of the Passion is not restricted to the saints—it is everywhere present in the Church itself. There are so many devotions to the Cross, the Sacred Heart, the Crucifix, and the Stations of the Cross that an outside observer could not help but notice it. Why is this? As implied above, the Passion is not only the ultimate symbol, but the ultimate reality of the love of Jesus—which is unconditional and totally self-sacrificial. If we want to know how much we are loved by God, we need only gaze upon the Crucifix or a picture of the Sacred Heart. As we do this, His love for *us* leaps out of the symbol upon which we are gazing. The time between the actual event and the current age seems to collapse as the crucified Christ gazes on us—as He did to St. Francis in the Church of St. Damiano. The symbol connects us with His actual crucifixion 2000 years ago and if we attend to it, we are almost like the women and the beloved disciple standing at the foot of the Cross. It is not difficult to hear Him saying to us that He is willingly doing this for us because He loves us. We can hear echoes of the mystical vision of St. John of the Cross in which Christ makes known to him the love He has for us:

...[S]ince He is the virtue of supreme *humility*, He *loves you* with supreme humility and esteem and *makes you His equal*, gladly revealing Himself to you in these ways of knowledge, in this His countenance is filled with graces, and telling

you in this His union, not without great rejoicing: ‘*I am yours and for you and delighted to be what I am so as to be yours and give myself to you.*’⁴⁹

The meditation on the Passion of Christ is so central to my own spirituality that I would recommend it to anyone as the subject of prayer at least one time per week. Some people believe that the place to start is contemplation on the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. If this helps to galvanize the momentousness of the Passion Event and the love of the Lord within it, then by all means do it. I have also derived great benefit from slowly reading the Passion Account in one of the Gospels.⁵⁰ I take only one scene at a time starting with the Garden of Gethsemane, and as I slowly reflect on what is taking place, I pause to give thanks to the Lord who did this for me and all humanity. I then proceed to the betrayal by Judas, pausing once again to thank the Lord for enduring this humiliation and betrayal. I don’t rush to finish the whole account but take only as much as I can fruitfully contemplate in one session of prayer. When my prayer session is completed, I express my love for His self-sacrificial redemptive love for me, and then pick up the Passion Account where I left off in my next prayer session. If you are anything like me, this meditation will bear fruit in connecting you to the Lord, helping you to sense His loving presence, moving you to gratitude and love, and inspiring you to imitate and follow Him. This will provide a strong basis from which to pursue detachment from the world (moral freedom), which will in turn provide the foundation on which to ground resistance to the deadly sins and the pursuit of moral actions.

An extended explanation of the above three meditative prayer forms -- *Lectio Divina*, Ignatian meditation, and the prayer of silence – is given in Volume 20 of the *Credible Catholic Big Book*.

III.

Availing Ourselves of Complementary Inspiration--Spiritual Reading, Hagiography, and Religious Art, Music and Literature

[**Back to top**](#)

Since its inception, the Church has emphasized the fullest expression of sacred and contemplative life. As a result, artists, artisans, musicians, hagiographers, poets, and litterateurs have been inspired to devote their craft to explicitizing the history, holiness, mystery, beauty, majesty, goodness, and love of Jesus and His Father. We still see remnants of this art in the catacombs and in the churches and cathedrals built throughout the centuries. The sheer proliferation of this art, architecture, music and literature makes one stand and wonder—and it bespeaks the richness with which the church has always celebrated the mystery and love of Christ.

⁴⁹ Saint John of the Cross. 1979. “The Living Flame of Love.” In *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications), p. 613 (*italics mine*).

⁵⁰ Some of you might know that I am nearly blind and maybe wondering, how does he meditate on the Gospel narratives? Simple answer is -- I have audible recordings of the New Testament that I can easily access.

We have already discussed how the Eucharist, the Word of God, and contemplative prayer incite us to a close connection with the person and heart of Christ which leads to the six spiritual gifts of the “Inner Church.” We might be asking how spiritual reading, liturgy, and the fine arts and literature could possibly add to the power of the Eucharist, God’s Word, and contemplative prayer. Well—in the mystery of God’s plan, they do! The Eucharist and the Word of God are clearly foundational, and contemplative prayer complements and enhances them. Complementary inspiration enhances this triad with an overflowing richness and diversity of beauty, drama, edifying life experiences, symbol, and splendor—pointing to the mystery, glory, and majesty of God and His Incarnate Son. Just as contemplative prayer brings out the depth of love present in the Holy Eucharist and the Divine Word, so also complementary inspiration brings out the glory, mystery, splendor, beauty, and majesty of this triad manifest in the inspired creativity and drama of the Living Church throughout history. Just as the Lord favors overflowing abundance, richness, elegance and beauty in creation, He does so also in the living tradition of the Church.

There are so many dimensions of complementary inspiration that we will have to limit ourselves to only general observations about spiritual reading, hagiography, and religious art, architecture, music and literature. Any attempt to give a detailed explanation of these areas would require an encyclopedia. I would suggest using your internet search engine to probe these areas more fully, and I will restrict myself to how they complement the triad of the Holy Eucharist, the word of God, and contemplative prayer, focusing specifically on how they can edify our faith. I will discuss each area in turn.

III.A Spiritual Reading

I am using “spiritual reading” here in a most general sense – to refer to the Church’s collective approved writings in theology, philosophy, spirituality, history, and literature. The Catholic Church has a vast intellectual tradition, consisting not only of these five areas, but also literature, natural science, the social sciences, and fine arts. It is no exaggeration to say that there are tens of thousands of volumes devoted to these pursuits. As such, “spiritual reading” includes not only spiritual and moral conversion, but also intellectual conversion.

Some people must begin their spiritual reading with works devoted to intellectual conversion in order to break free from the physicalist and materialist perspectives of our culture. If they do, then they should concentrate on this until they are satisfied with the probative evidence of Christian faith (see Volumes 1-6). Though some individuals do not need as much evidence to break free from the grip of cultural materialism, a large percentage of our culture really does. Without a thorough presentation of this evidence, a faith life is almost impossible for them. They are incapable of directly intuiting the presence of God from the numinous experience, their intuition of the sacred, their sense of beauty and elegance of creation, and even the remarkably creative and transcendent character of each individual human being. Jesus and the Catholic Church (throughout its history) have never expected anyone to do this. Jesus provided us with remarkable clues of His transcendence, in His resurrection, miracles, and gift of the Spirit – and the Church since the 1st Century has provided philosophical and theological apologists to overcome materialistic and naturalistic perspectives.

Readers who are beset or bothered by doubts will want to devote at least 30 minutes every day to the pursuit of intellectual conversion. There is so much evidence for a theistic and Christian perspective, that there is no real need to be beset by doubts if you are open to belief. If this is a problem for you, I would ask you to thoughtfully read Volumes 1-6 of the *Credible Catholic Big Book* which contains a comprehensive array of evidence for God, the soul, and Jesus from science, medicine, logic, history, and exegesis pointing probatively to the reality of the presence of the Holy Trinity to our individual and collective souls. Readers wishing additional information may want to consult the following four books by me that attempt to comprehensively explain the above evidence:

1. *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy* (Eerdmans) concerning scientific evidence for an intelligent Creator and three contemporary philosophical proofs of God.
2. *The Soul's Upward Yearning: Clues to Our Transcendent Nature from Experience and Reason* (Ignatius) -- concerning contemporary peer-reviewed medical studies of near death experiences, contemporary studies in the philosophy of mind concerning the transcendental nature of human mathematical intuition (Gödel's Proof), self-consciousness (David Chalmers), the transcendental nature of conceptual ideas (Sir John Eccles), the transcendental nature of our unrestricted desire to know (Bernard Lonergan), and our four other transcendental desires (Rahner, Newman, and Lewis).
3. *God So Loved the World: Clues to Our Transcendent Destiny from the Revelation of Jesus* (Ignatius) -- concerned with the historical investigation and validation of Jesus' resurrection (N.T. Wright and the scientific examination of the Shroud of Turin), Jesus' miracles by his own authority (John P. Meier), the gift of the Holy Spirit in the early Church, and today (James D.G. Dunn), and the preaching, passion, and Eucharist of Jesus (Joachim Jeremias, N.T. Wright, and John P. Meier).
4. *The Light Shines on in the Darkness: Transforming Suffering through Faith* (Ignatius) -- concerning why an all-loving God would allow suffering and how to suffer well through Christian faith.

Though these books present a clear explanation of the evidence, they present a comprehensive array of footnotes and references enabling the reader to access primary sources for the scientific, philosophical, historical, and medical evidence. Hence they are a good place to begin the process of intellectual conversion in a contemporary light.

Readers who have a strong conviction about faith (unbothered by doubts or reservations) will probably want to focus their spiritual reading on spiritual or moral conversion. This could include a vast array of topics in the areas of theology and spirituality such as *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, scripture studies, systematic theology, spiritual theology, moral theology, church history, philosophical theology, apologetics, and fundamental theology (such as the four books mentioned above). Some readers will want to emphasize combinations of subjects, such as theology and culture, the Church and culture, theology and science, theology and political theory, theological anthropology, theology and psychology, spirituality and psychology, theology and sociology, theology and social ethics, etc. There are many books of various

scholarly quality published annually in most of these areas, and hundreds of books spanning the last ten years.

For those who are just getting started on non-theological and non-spiritual parts of the Catholic intellectual tradition, you may want to consider the following authors:

- With respect to *science*, its clergy made invaluable contributions to astronomy (Copernicus), biology-genetics (Abbott Gregor Mendel), geology-stratigraphy (Bishop Nicolas Steno), and astrophysics-cosmology (Monsignor Georges Lemaître—the father of the Big Bang Theory) – to mention but a few.⁵¹
- With respect to *philosophy* (St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Fr. Duns Scotus, Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Fr. Joseph Marechal, Fr. Bernard Lonergan, Fr. Emerich Coreth, Fr. Karl Rahner, Josef Pieper, Gabriel Marcel, Henri Bergson, Mortimer Adler, and Fr. John Courtney Murray provided the foundation and development of realist transcendental metaphysics, theodicy, integrated realist epistemology and ontology, and natural law and natural rights theory.
- With respect to *literature*, (St. Augustine, Dante Alighieri, Fr. Desiderius Erasmus, Cardinal John Henry Newman, Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins, G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Evelyn Waugh, François Mauriac, J.R.R. Tolkien, T.S. Eliot (Anglo-Catholic), Graham Greene, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy — (among others) made valuable contributions to the integration of theology/spirituality with literature.

Perhaps the easiest way to find the above theology, spirituality, philosophy, and other books is to put one of the above subject areas into your search engine along with a general book provider – such as Amazon or Google books – and consider the various options. Before purchasing anything, you should do a Wikipedia search of the author, read the amazon and other reviews, and “look inside” to judge the scholarly apparatus and the quality of the prose. Remember two points:

1. Not all published works are good quality or faithful to the teaching of Christ – so be a discerning judge.
2. Even though we live in a culture that emphasizes short videos and computer enhancements, books still provide the deepest and most scholarly approach to all major subject areas. They may not be as immediately engaging, but they will provide the most sourced and comprehensive presentation if done by a scholarly author of faith.

Though our days are so filled with family, work, activities, and traditional and social media, it is truly worthwhile to dedicate what time you can to reading some of the excellent books coming from the Catholic theological, spiritual, and intellectual tradition. They will not only enhance the depth and quality of your faith, but also your confidence in the presence and providence of the Lord of unconditional love manifest in Jesus Christ and in His mystical body, the Church.

⁵¹ See the following website for another 100 Catholic clerics at the forefront of natural science.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Catholic_cleric-scientists.

III.B The Saints and Hagiography

The Catholic Church has promoted intercessory prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints throughout the 2,000 years of its existence. The frescos in the catacombs at the end of the first century clearly indicate how the Blessed Virgin Mary's stature and role in the Church had experienced an almost meteoric rise.⁵² We must assume, given the proliferation of frescos depicting her⁵³ that this did not happen by accident. Evidently there was a long and strong tradition of Mary's intercessory role that began shortly after Jesus' resurrection and gift of the Spirit. Not only had Jesus given Mary to the beloved disciple as "His Mother" (Jn. 19:25-29), but also Mary was present with the apostles in the upper room on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Since that time, Mary's stature and role within the Church began to grow. She was not only the Mother of Jesus, but also Mother of the Church,⁵⁴ because her Son's risen body is the Church's unity and foundation (see 1 Cor. 12).

The Church's encouragement of intercessory prayer went beyond the Blessed Virgin to the entire communion of saints and angels. The Book of Revelation (composed around 90 AD) makes specific mention of prayers of the angels and saints in heaven. Prayers to the saints are also manifest in the second century catacombs of Rome. The catacombs are filled with graffiti asking for intercession or prayers from the saints – Sts. Peter, Paul, and many of the Roman martyrs. Some of these graffiti originated in the second century, but the majority in several catacombs can be accurately dated to the persecution of Valerian between 253 – 260. These graffiti continued into the late third and early fourth centuries – at which point such intercessory prayers could be spoken publicly (after Constantine's Edict of Toleration in 313 AD).⁵⁵

The practice of intercessory prayer was encouraged and promoted by early Church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and many others. From that time on, the practice grew quite rapidly inspiring generations of Catholics in faith, charity, holiness of life, and prayer.

Is there any other way of confirming the Lord's intention to make the prayers and actions of the Blessed Virgin and saints efficacious for our salvation—thereby justifying our prayers to them for intercession and help? As a matter of fact, there is—by showing the efficacy of our prayers to them (and their intercession for us) in *miracles*. This is especially important in a scientific age where miraculous intercession can be discerned by showing that certain events are beyond the laws of nature (the laws of physics) as we understand them. Volume 3, Chapter 9 presents nine scientifically validated miracles concerned with the Blessed Virgin and

⁵² We have literary evidence of panel icons and frescos in the catacombs of the 1st century, but these have not survived. The earliest frescos of Mary are in the Catacomb of Priscilla dating back to 150 A.D. – one with the child Jesus nursing on Mary's lap as well as the Madonna and Child. See Jeremy Norman 2010 *History of Information* in <http://www.historyofinformation.com/expanded.php?id=3073>.

⁵³ This proliferation of frescos – including her role as praying, and as Mother of the Church (standing between Peter and Paul) are evident in the Catacomb of St. Agnes. See Mark Miravalle 2007 "Mary in the Early Church" in *Mother of all Peoples* <http://www.motherofallpeoples.com/2007/01/mary-in-the-early-church/>.

⁵⁴ The fresco of Mary elevated between Peter and Paul from the 2nd century makes this evident. See Ibid.

⁵⁵ See a summary of archaeological findings in Danilo Mazzoleni 2000 "Ancient Graffiti in Roman Catacombs" in *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 9, 2000, p. 6. (www.ewtn.com/library/CHISTORY/GRAFFITL.HTML)

contemporary saints, which are inexplicable in terms of our scientific understanding of the laws of nature.

Mary and the saints not only provide us with powerful intercessory prayers, but also profound examples of holiness that can help us in our spiritual conversion. There are spiritual benefits in reading hagiographies (lives of the saints). We can be inspired by simply learning about the major events in a saint's life -- actions to build faith, build the Church, serve the poor, and contemplative prayer. If readers are inspired by this basic level of hagiographical presentation, they may want to pursue a deeper level that goes beyond recounting major actions and words -- and delve into greater detail in certain works, preaching, or reflections of a saint. As we shall see in Chapter Four, it is incumbent on a reader to make a selection about the level of detail, the level of scholarship, and the level of devotion that best fits their spiritual life.

As you begin looking into the lives and spiritual practice of these extraordinary men and women, you might want to reflect on saints having charisms similar to your own. The following general break down might help you make a selection of saints and hagiographies to inspire your prayer and service to others. Those interested in *intellectual* and *educational* service may want to read about St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas More, Jacques Maritain, Fr. Georges Lemaître (discoverer of the Big Bang Theory), St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Hildegard of Bingen, and Edith Stein (St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross).

Those interested in pastoral ministries may want to read about holy popes, bishops, priests, and women religious who gave their lives to guiding their flocks -- beginning with St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Augustine, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, St. Dominic (Founder of the Dominicans), St. Ignatius Loyola (Founder of the Jesuits), John XXIII, St. John Paul II, St. Katherine Drexel (Founder of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament), Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini (Founder of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart), St. Jane Francis de Chantal (Founder of the Visitation Sisters), and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (Founder of the Sisters of Charity).

Those leaning toward prayer and spiritual ministries may want to look into the lives of St. Anthony (the desert father), St. Benedict, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis de Sales, Thomas à Kempis, St. Alphonsus de' Liguori, Fr. Jean Pierre de Caussade, Blessed Charles de Foucauld, Julian of Norwich, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, St. Bridget of Sweden, St. Therese of Lisieux, and Catherine de Hueck Doherty.

Those leaning toward charitable ministries may want to study the lives of St. Francis de Assisi, St. John Bosco, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Peter Claver, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Saint Rose of Lima, St. Francis Xavier Cabrini, and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Those inclined toward missionary vocations may want to read about St. Paul, the eleven apostles (in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*), St. Francis Xavier, Bartolome de las Casas, St. Isaac Jogues, Blessed Junipero Serra, Matteo Ricci, and Father Eusebio Kino.

III.C

Sacramentals

Sacramentals have played an important part in bringing religious blessings and objects into our homes, workplaces, and daily lives. Besides blessings themselves, Holy Water (blessed by a priest or bishop) is one of the most foundational sacramentals. It is essential for blessing persons, places, and objects. Additionally, the Church has encouraged the blessing of many other sacred objects as a means of bringing God's grace, inspiration, and protection into homes, the workplace and individual persons. Since its beginnings, the Church has been sacramental – and has used many material objects as signs and conduits of sacred grace, inspiration, and protection. We noted above that Christian artists painted frescoes of Mary, Sts. Peter and Paul, biblical stories, and the martyrs in the catacombs of the late first century, second century, and third century. Since that time, there has been a proliferation of sacramentals – including sacred icons, crucifixes, holy water, and relics, among many others. For an explanation of these sacramentals, see Chapter Five of this volume.

I recommend that sacramentals -- such as holy water, crucifixes, and sacred icons and statues – be part of every Christian home and in most every room of the home where possible. They are a reminder of who we really are, the purpose of our lives, the redemption wrought on our behalf, and the destiny to which we are called. They are also a reminder of the love and goodness of Christ our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and the various saints that provide inspiration to us. Some people are reticent to place these objects in their living rooms and dining room because they might be found troubling to guests who do not share their beliefs. Though this might seem like a gesture of respect, I believe it belittles the openness and magnanimity of our friends. If a friend is offended by a sign of what is most important to me and my family in my own home, what would that mean about their friendship? If I have to hide the most important dimension of my life in order to be acceptable as a friend, then I would seriously suspect the depth and sincerity of that friendship which must be built on sincere respect for the other we cherish.

III.D

Christian Art and Architecture

Christian art and architecture can be a doorway to the divine in prayer, because it reminds us and points to the presence of the Lord or the saints in our midst. These icons are important outside the context of prayer, because gazing upon them – or simply hearing the ring of a Cathedral bell – can call us out of a secular viewpoint and even call us back to the sacred during times of temptation. As will be explained below (Chapter Five, Section III.D.3), the history and literature of Christian art is enormous. If readers want to get started in appreciating this treasure trove of icons to the divine, consult the websites listed in Chapter Five, Section II.D.3.

III.E

Conclusion

The Catholic Church provides a myriad of services and avenues to help us connect more deeply with the Lord in the process of spiritual conversion. The Eucharist and the New Testament come from Jesus Himself, and the various methods of contemplative prayer have their

roots in Jesus' mother, the Psalms, and the many Christian prayers written by saints throughout the ages. Complementary inspiration comes from the whole range of Christian faithful – theologians, philosophers, scientists, historians, litterateurs, hagiographers, artists, artisans, musicians, and the clergy who use their gifts and charisms to inspire and edify faith. If we avail ourselves of but a few of these services and avenues of spiritual conversion, we will build a strong foundation on which to build our moral conversion – beginning with detachment (moral freedom) and proceeding to the deliberate choice of moral actions. In my life, spiritual conversion has not been a difficult or sacrificial endeavor, because the liturgy, reception of the Eucharist, contemplative prayer, spiritual reading, hagiographical reading, and the other avenues of spiritual conversion are so filled with inspiration, beauty, community, and grace that they are a pleasure – or should I say, a sublime joy that is given to me for simply making the effort to “show up” and focus on the Lord's loving, good, holy, and beautiful presence. If ever there was a painless -- indeed a sublimely joyful way to freedom and salvation, this is it.

As by now may be clear, spiritual conversion builds the foundation for moral conversion, but moral conversion goes further – to detachment (moral freedom) and the choice of moral actions. These two additional components require more discipline and can be self-sacrificial. Once again, the Church offers services (graced by God) to help us move from spiritual conversion to moral conversion. We will briefly examine these in the next section and in considerable detail in Volume 16.

IV.

Three Services of the Outer Church Leading to Moral Conversion

[**Back to top**](#)

Since these elements will be taken up in great detail in Volume 16, I will give only a brief summary presentation here to show how the Church provides essential assistance to us in the area of moral conversion. As noted above, the Church provides three major services:

1. Moral instruction and guidance (Section IV.A),
2. The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Section IV.B), and
3. Examples and avenues of Church and Charitable Services (Section IV.C).

IV.A

Moral Instruction and Guidance

We might divide moral conversion into seven component parts:

1. The reality of spiritual good and spiritual evil, the cosmic struggle between them, and Jesus' defeat of evil (Chapters 1, 2 & 3 of Volume 14).
2. How the evil spirit works through temptation, deceit and despair – and how to defend against them (Chapter 4 of Volume 14).
3. The eight deadly sins (Chapters 1 & 2 of Volume 15).
4. Faith, love, and other virtues (Chapter 1 of Volume 16).
5. Moral conversion – arising out of moral freedom and moral action (Chapter 3 of Volume 16).

6. Principles and methods of personal ethics (Chapter 1 of Volume 17).
7. Principles and methods of social ethics – and the Church’s social teaching (Chapters 3&4 of Volume 17).

As can be seen, the moral teaching of Jesus and the Catholic Church is remarkably nuanced, reaching into the depths of the human psyche, not only through theology, spirituality and philosophy, but also through psychology, literature, hagiography, history, and art. The Church has never been content to simply present a set of principles (e.g. the Ten Commandments), but has always endeavored to place them within the context of spiritual and moral conversion. To do this, she provides the spiritual gifts of the inner church as well as the services and instruction of the outer church, focusing not only on virtue, but also its spiritual foundation – the Eucharist, the Word of God, prayer, and complementary inspiration connecting us ever more closely to the heart of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

IV.B **The Sacrament of Reconciliation**

As we have seen in Volume 10, the sacrament of reconciliation is immensely important in persevering on our journey to moral conversion in the heart of Christ. It provides not only the impetus for examination of conscience, but also the counsel of a priest, the definitive forgiveness of absolution, and the power of its healing grace. The effects of this remarkable sacrament are most manifest in people who have strayed off the path or stayed away from the Church for a considerable time. After leaving the confessional, penitents seem to be pulled out of a state of malaise, and very obviously feel relieved and elated. I have been a confessor at many conferences of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students where it is not uncommon to see more than 4,000 students stand in line until 2:00 a.m. in the morning to go to confession. If they have been away from the sacrament for a long time, the effects are palpable – one after the other, they leave relieved, elated, and renewed on their spiritual journey. In a conference filled with terrific speakers, liturgies, music, and camaraderie, the students almost resoundingly say that the sacrament of reconciliation was one of the highest, if not the highest, point of the conference. I point this out only to show how extraordinarily powerful this sacrament is – and the peace and healing it can bring. Hard as it may be to avail ourselves of the sacrament, it is worth doing because of its power to reconcile and heal on our very imperfect journey toward the heart of Jesus Christ. In Volume 16 we will examine how to integrate this sacrament into the process of detachment (moral freedom) as well as living out the principles of moral action.

IV.C **Church and Charitable Service**

The Church encourages and provides avenues to serve the spiritual and temporal needs of individuals and the community. Everyone who has committed themselves to some form of service to meet others’ needs will recognize that the person served is not the sole beneficiary – the servers also receive the huge benefit of spirit and purpose in life bringing with it a sense of healing and peace. As we serve the needs of others, our alienation from self, others, and God

seems to melt away, replaced by the peace and spiritual light that comes from being connected to the good and precious other we are serving. As Viktor Frankl noted:

The more one forgets himself - by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love - the more human he is.⁵⁶

If our true objective is to become free from the prison of our egocentricity in order to imitate the loving heart of Christ for all eternity, then humility would seem to be essential, and if Frankl is correct, then service will be instrumental in helping us toward humility by softening our hearts, awakening compassion, and inducing self-forgetfulness.

Chapter Four

Devotion to Mary, the Saints, and the Holy Eucharist

[Back to top](#)

As can be seen, the services of the outer Church integrate devotion to Mary, the angels, and saints into virtually every fabric of its being. The Trinity is not set apart in splendid isolation, but rather reaches out not only to the Mother of the incarnate word, the angels, and saints, but to the Church and all of us in its loving identity and community. If we are to understand this interpersonal, communitarian, and inclusive dimension of the Trinity and the community into which we are indelibly integrated through baptism, it will prove helpful to investigate more deeply the roles played by the Blessed Virgin, the angels, the saints, and even the Church's sacramentals, art, music, and architecture. The following is a brief overview.

This chapter will be divided into five sections:

1. The legitimacy of praying to Mary, angels and the saints (Section I).
2. Corroboration by Miracles (Section II).
3. Marian Devotion (Section III).
4. Devotion to the Saints (Section IV).
5. Devotion to the Eucharist (Section V).

I.

The Legitimacy of Praying to Mary, Angels and the Saints

[Back to top](#)

Catholics have a variety of prayer experiences that some Protestant churches may find bewildering—devotion to the Eucharist, Mary, angels, and the saints as well as belief in the sacredness of blessed crucifixes, icons, water, Bibles, rosaries, and relics of the saints. Though Catholics and Protestants hold in common the absolute centrality of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as the focus and foundation of prayer,⁵⁷ Catholics also believe that the three divine Persons intended to share their sacredness, glory, majesty, beauty, and desirability

⁵⁶ Read more at: <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/v/viktorefr752766.html>.

⁵⁷ See Volume 9 on the Mass—the Trinity is the central focus of all the parts of the Mass.

with those members of humanity who allow themselves to be transformed into the image of Christ's love through their faith and devotion. This "sharing of divine grace and glory" goes beyond bringing a transformed individual into the heavenly kingdom—into what Catholics call the "communion of saints." We believe that Jesus intended to incorporate these "holy ones" (*"hagioi"*) into the whole economy of salvation—so that the divine goodness, glory, and holiness might be diffused into a rich tapestry of co-participation in the defeat of evil, the protection and inspiration of willing individuals and the salvation of humanity. Yes—Jesus has done everything necessary through His Incarnation, Passion, Death, Resurrection and Gift of the Spirit to effect salvation for everyone but He also intended to share the *work* of salvation as well as His sacred, glorious, and majestic essence with angelic and human collaborators.

Catholics do not believe that the three Divine Persons wanted the sole focus of their salvific work and divine glory to be on themselves alone—to exclude, as it were, all lesser beings from the drama of salvation. It was always their intention to play the central role in this drama, but to share supporting roles with every angelic and human being who desires to be in that drama. The Divine Persons did not intend to give insignificant "bit parts" to these non-divine actors, but significant and meaningful parts—not just in their lifetimes, but throughout the history of the world. Inasmuch as God is unrestricted love and love is an outpouring and sharing of self, the Divine Persons, by nature, intend to share themselves—their love, goodness, and *sacred beauty*—their glory, splendor, majesty and awesomeness—with every intelligent and free being who has the heart and desire to do so. It is contrary to the nature of the Divine Persons to "hog" the attention, to point to themselves, and to exclude others from participation.⁵⁸ Indeed, their nature is precisely the opposite—to share their glorious essence and to include everyone in the divine drama who wishes to become involved. The drama has all kinds of roles—for angels and humans—roles for prayer, inspiration, guidance, and protection—and yes, roles of active intervention into the laws of nature to effect miracles where there is faith and consistency with the divine will. Yes, miracles are rare, but as will be seen below, they are frequent enough. Sometimes miracles arise out of the conspiracy of divine providence, requiring no suspension of natural laws but only an incredible coincidence of unusual events, seemingly orchestrated by a trans-worldly intelligence, though some miracles do require a suspension of physical laws pointing more directly to that intelligence. In both cases, the Divine Persons share their power and intellect with willing creatures who can and do effect miracles through their intercessory prayer and action.

How can we be so sure about the Divine Persons' intention to share power and intellect—even miraculous power and intellect—as well as glory, majesty and splendor with non-divine creatures? Perhaps the most obvious reason is that this desire is central to the nature of love, and as we have seen from the revelation of Jesus, God is unrestricted and unconditional love.⁵⁹ Therefore, God unconditionally shares His power, intellect, sacredness and glory with all beings who choose to become part of the Divine Will and Kingdom.

A second, more explicit manifestation of Jesus' desire to share power, wisdom, and glory with angels and saints both in heaven and on earth may be found in an extension of St. Paul's

⁵⁸ See Volume 5 on the Holy Trinity as interpersonal love—complete sharing of self with the others.

⁵⁹ See Volume 4, Chapters 2-4 on Jesus' revelation of the unrestricted and unconditional love of God as well as Jesus' actions indicating His own unrestricted and unconditional love.

doctrine of the Body of Christ in the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians. Recall that St. Paul developed the doctrine of the Church as “the Body of Christ” primarily in 1Corinthians:12 and Romans:12, where he asserts:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.... (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

Later in the same letter, he develops this theme further:

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.... (1 Cor. 12:26-27).

In the Letter to the Romans, he reiterates the same conviction:

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another (Rom. 12:4-5).

As noted in Volume 6 (Chapter 1), St. Paul likely derived this doctrine from Jesus’ words about becoming the new universal temple in His risen body (see Mk. 14:58 and Jn. 2:13-25). These words are more than metaphorical for Paul; he truly considers Christ’s risen body to be the real spiritual substance through which every baptized person is related to every other baptized person which has a real significant spiritual effect on those members—“ if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” Thus, our good actions can positively affect every member of the Mystical Body and conversely, our evil actions can negatively affect them.

The Pauline author of Colossians extends this even further by combining Paul’s doctrine of the Mystical Body with the idea of Christ being the co-Creator, Head, and unity of all creation *both in heaven* and on earth—an idea embedded in an early Christological liturgical hymn:

[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God,
Firstborn of all creation,
For in Him was created everything,
In heaven and on earth,
The seen and the unseen,
Whether thrones or dominions,
Whether principalities or powers;
Everything through Him and for Him was created.
He is before everything;
And everything in Him exists.
He is the head of the body, the church.
Who is the beginning,

Firstborn from the dead,
so that in everything He is preeminent.
For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
and through Him to reconcile everything to Him,
Making peace through the blood of His cross,
Whether on earth or in heaven. (Colossians 1:15-19).⁶⁰

In the first part of this hymn, the Pauline author of Colossians borrows a primitive liturgical hymn likely written by Jewish scribal converts to Christianity prior to Paul's Letters to the Corinthians and Romans.⁶¹ These scribal converts were familiar with both Wisdom speculation and Hellenistic philosophical concepts. The Pauline author then adds the second part of the hymn beginning with, "He is the Head of the body, the Church..."⁶² By doing this, he skillfully combines the idea that Jesus is the co-Creator and unifier of all creation both *in Heaven* and on earth with the idea that Christ is the head and unifier of the Church—His body. In so doing, He explicitizes the doctrine of *the communion of saints*, which includes angelic beings, saints in Heaven, and members of the Church on earth.⁶³ Through His risen body Christ unifies every heavenly and earthly member with one another.

As noted above, each member has a real effect on other members – if certain members do good to advance the Kingdom all members benefit from it, and if some members depart from the one body or undermine it, then all are negatively affected. This unity of all heavenly beings and all members of the earthly Church means that we are related to each other—and therefore our prayers and actions can affect our lives and paths to salvation. In view of this, we might conclude – as all early Christians did⁶⁴—that the prayers and actions of angels and saints are highly effective in our path to salvation—and that our prayers and actions are also effective in helping others to salvation.

The Pauline author of 1 Timothy expresses this belief in the effectiveness of prayers for the salvation of all humankind explicitly:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

If our earthly prayers can help others to attain peace and move toward salvation, and we are in unity with all the angels and saints in Heaven (as the letter to the Colossians indicates), then why wouldn't the prayers of the angels and saints in Heaven (with whom we are unified) be even

⁶⁰ Translation by Maurya Horgan 1990 "The Letter to the Colossians" *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* p. 879.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*

⁶² See *ibid.*

⁶³ This theme of the unity of the heavenly and earthly members of the body is also echoed by the Pauline author of Ephesians. See Ephesians 1:22-23 and 4:11-13.

⁶⁴ See the discussion of 1 Timothy 2:1-4 and early Christian graffiti below.

more efficacious than ours for bringing us closer to Christ and the Kingdom? Why would the efficacy of prayers be limited only to the *earthly* members of Christ's risen body? Why would the prayers and actions of saints and angels (with whom we are in union) be arbitrarily denied efficacy for anyone on earth? The obvious answer is that they are not denied efficacy, but rather are more efficacious for our salvation than the prayers of people on earth. Inasmuch as the angels and saints are purified in their loving intentions and actions, their prayers and actions would seem to be more efficacious than those whose intentions and actions are still impeded by sin. The Letter of James implies this by noting, "the prayers of a *righteous* man has great power in its effects" (Jas. 5:16).

The Book of Revelation indicates that the prayers of the saints are co-mingled with the incense of angels presumably for people who are in need of them—people still living on earth:

"And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God." (Rev. 8:3-4)⁶⁵

The efficacy of prayers and actions of angels and saints is also confirmed in the works of early Church Fathers. Writing in 208 A.D., Clement of Alexandria expresses a highly developed awareness of our prayers being joined to those of angels and saints in Heaven:

"In this way is he [the true Christian] always pure for prayer. He also prays in the society of angels, as being already of angelic rank, and he is never out of their holy keeping; and though he pray alone, he has the choir of the saints standing with him [in prayer]"⁶⁶

Origen, writing in 233 A.D., gives precise explication to the efficacy of prayers and actions of angels and saints:

"But not the high priest [Christ] alone prays for those who pray sincerely, but also the angels . . . as also the souls of the saints who have already fallen asleep"⁶⁷

This awareness by the early Christian community of the efficacy of prayers of saints and angels is evident not only in Scripture, but also in the graffiti on the walls of Roman catacombs. Of particular importance is the graffiti wall (next to the Red Wall) in the excavation (Scavi) underneath St. Peter's Basilica. This wall is filled with graffiti asking for the prayers of Sts. Peter and Paul for various individuals—e.g., "St Peter and Paul intercede for Victor" and "Sts. Peter and Paul, remember us."⁶⁸ These graffiti go back to the early part of the 3rd Century, but there may be earlier graffiti underneath them. Evidently, praying to the saints was widespread,

⁶⁵ See also Revelation 5:7-8 for the same theme.

⁶⁶ Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 7:12

⁶⁷ Origen, *Prayer* 11

⁶⁸ Danilo Mazzoleni, 2000, "Ancient Graffiti in Roman Catacombs" in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 February 2000, p. 6 (www.ewtn.com/library/CHISTORY/GRAFFITL.HTM).

because graffiti asking for prayers from various saints and martyrs can be found throughout the large catacombs of St. Sebastian and St. Callistus in Rome.⁶⁹

In sum, the Lord wants to involve every willing member of His Kingdom and Church in the order of salvation. This is the highest imaginable work of love and meaning in life. Angels and saints are not only called to pray for us, but also to intercede for us with actions and inspiration.⁷⁰ As members of the Church, we are unified with them through the risen body of Christ who enables each member – heavenly or earthly—to affect the other members.

Is there any other way of confirming the Lord's intention to make the prayers and actions of angels and saints efficacious for our salvation—thereby justifying our prayers to them for intercession and help? As a matter of fact, there is—by showing the efficacy of our prayers to them (and their intercession for us) in *miracles*. This is especially important in a scientific age where miraculous intercession can be discerned by showing that certain events are beyond the laws of nature (the laws of physics) as we understand them. As we shall see below (Chapter Two) these scientifically analyzed trans-natural occurrences are directly associated with prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary, canonized saints, and some living saintly individuals (e.g. St. Padre Pio).

II. Corroboration by Miracles [Back to top](#)

In Volume 3, Chapter 9, we explored nine well-documented, scientifically and medically attested miracles associated with Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, St. Padre Pio, Blessed Fulton J. Sheen, St. John Paul II, and the Holy Eucharist. These miracles were scientifically tested and documented by multiple physicians and scientists, and have absolutely no natural or scientific explanation. They are as follows:

1. Eight enigmas/miracles associated with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section I.A).
2. The complete and immediate healing of Marie Bailly (attested by Alexis Carrel) at the Grotto of Lourdes in 1902 (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section 1.B.2).
3. The complete and immediate healing of Gabriel Gargam at the Grotto of Lourdes in 1901 (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section I.B.3).
4. The complete and immediate healing of John Traynor at the Grotto of Lourdes in 1923 (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section I.B.4).
5. The miracle of the sun in Fatima, Portugal on October 13, 1917 (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section I.C).
6. A scientifically validated miracle associated with the canonization of Padre Pio – the case of Consiglia DeMartino on November 2, 1995 (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section II.A).

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ This doctrine was formally declared by the Council of Trent in its Twenty-fifth Session.

7. A scientifically validated miracle for the beatification of Blessed Fulton J. Sheen – the case of James Engstrom on September 16, 2010 (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section II.B).
8. A scientifically validated miracle associated with the canonization of Saint John Paul II – the case of Floribeth Mora Diaz on May 1, 2011 (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section II.C).
9. A scientifically validated Eucharistic miracle overseen by Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis) in Buenos Aires, Argentina on August 18, 1996 (Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section III).

These nine scientifically validated miracles give additional support to the four major Marian dogmas – beyond their grounding in scripture and tradition. They are also integral to the validation of the canonization of the saints who interceded for them, and also for the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. As such, they ground the validity of the three major devotions that amplify Christians’ principal and fundamental devotion to the three persons of the Trinity – devotions to Mary, the saints, and the Holy Eucharist.

III.

Marian Devotion

[**Back to top**](#)

Marian devotion is so deeply developed within the Catholic Church that literally thousands of books, articles, booklets, pamphlets, prayer cards, and websites are devoted to it. The rosary, meditations for the rosary, novenas, special prayers, and litanies are but a few expressions of this devotion. There is no possible way of summarizing these devotions nor the countless icons and paintings meant to inspire it in a relatively small section of a chapter. To do so would be to under dignify, undervalue, and underestimate tens of thousands of expressions of love and devotion throughout the centuries. My hope here is simply to mention a few resources for getting started on Marian devotion that can be accessed through the internet – or purchased for reasonable cost at online bookstores.

III.A

A Brief History of Marian Devotion

Devotion to Mary begins in the New Testament when Mary proclaims in the Magnificat, “All generations will call me blessed [blessed by God], for the Almighty has done great things for me” (Lk. 1: 48). It is also intimated by Jesus Himself when He turns to the beloved disciple, “Son, behold your Mother” (Jn. 19: 27). By making the beloved disciple an adopted son, and Mary, his adopting mother, Jesus opens the way for Mary to become the Mother of all the faithful. The Book of Revelation portrays Mary within a cosmic and eschatological setting, revealing her heavenly and glorified status within the history of salvation:

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and

hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days (Rev. 12: 1-6).

Though scripture recognizes Mary's central role in the history of salvation, in the battle between good and evil, and as Mother of those who have faith in Her Son, it does not specifically mention direct prayer to Mary or her role in interceding for the human race. This of course does not mean that the Apostolic Church and early Christians did not practice such devotion. Scripture is but one source of the practices of the Early Church – Christian art, devotions, and liturgy also tell the story. Frescos in the first century Roman catacombs are particularly important in revealing Mary's central role in early Christian devotional practice. Dr. Mark Miravalle, citing studies from John Murphy and Juniper Carol, states the following:

As early as the end of the first century to the first half of the second century, Mary is depicted in frescos in the Roman catacombs both with and without her divine Son. Mary is depicted as a model of virginity with her Son; at the Annunciation; at the adoration of the Magi; and as the *orans*, the 'praying one,' the woman of prayer. ¶ A very significant fresco found in the catacombs of St. Agnes depicts Mary situated between St. Peter and St. Paul with her arms outstretched to both. This fresco reflects, in the language of Christian frescoes, the earliest symbol of Mary as "Mother of the Church." Whenever St. Peter and St. Paul are shown together, it is symbolic of the one Church of Christ, a Church of authority and evangelization, a Church for both Jew and Gentile.⁷¹

The frescos in the catacombs at the end of the first century clearly indicate how the Blessed Virgin Mary's stature and role in the Church had experienced an almost meteoric rise. We must assume, given the proliferation of frescos depicting her that this did not happen by accident. Evidently there was a long and strong tradition of Mary's intercessory role that began shortly after Jesus' resurrection and gift of the Spirit. Not only had Jesus given Mary to the beloved disciple as "His Mother," but Mary was present with the apostles in the upper room on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Since that time, Mary's stature and role within the Church began to grow. She was not only the Mother of Jesus, but also Mother of the Church, because her Son's risen body is the Church's unity and foundation (see 1 Cor. 12). Beyond the Motherhood of the Church which she co-initiated with her Son by accepting Him into her womb, Mary's role was one of prayer. This role continued after she passed in glory to her Son and the Father, at which point she took on a supreme role commensurate with her glorification with Jesus – the *supreme* protector and intercessor for the Church which had been persecuted almost from its initiation. The frescos of Mary as "the praying one" manifest this central role she resumed after Pentecost – and more gloriously, after her passing to the Son and the Father. This spirituality (and theology) seems to have pervaded the apostolic Church as indicated by the

⁷¹ Mark Miravalle 2006 *Introduction to Mary: The Heart of Marian Doctrine and Devotion* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Press). p. 6. See also John Murphy 1961 "Origin and Nature of Marian Cult" in *Mariology*, ed by Juniper Carol (Milwaukee: Bruce) pp. 4-5.

cosmic intercessory imagery with which she is depicted in the Book of Revelations (circa 90 A.D.) as “the woman clothed with the sun” (Rev. 12: 1-6). It is further indicated by the prevalence of the frescos depicting her in the first and second century catacombs.

Mary’s role within salvation history was enhanced by the writings of the Early Church fathers who viewed her not only as a primary intercessor for the Church, but also as the new Eve – the woman who through her humility and obedience overcame the sin and darkness of the first Eve. This view was advanced and developed by Justin Martyr (d. 165 A.D.),⁷² St. Irenaeus (d. 202),⁷³ and St. Ambrose (d. 397),⁷⁴ among many others. After the Edict of Milan issued by Constantine in 313 A.D., Christians were allowed to worship freely within the Roman Empire, at which point, St. Ambrose is supposed to have initiated a cult of veneration to Mary as Mother of the Church, example of virginity and purity, and intercessor for sinners.⁷⁵ After that, churches began to spring up all over the empire dedicated to Mary. In 431, the Council of Ephesus sanctioned the cult of Mary Mother of God that promoted intercessory prayer, dedication and Mariology. Starting in the seventh century, monks (particularly the Benedictines) devoted themselves to the cult of Mary, which ultimately gave rise to the Marian office (prayer book), Marian hymns and Marian feast days. By the ninth century, these devotions had moved far beyond the monasteries into the diocesan priesthood and laity, after which great cathedrals in France and Germany were dedicated to her.⁷⁶

The cult of Mary grew significantly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries because of the influence of theologians like St. Bernard of Clairvaux – and soon began to influence the secular culture of Europe – permeating every aspect of the high Middle Ages. This influence was quite civilizing, and brought the virtues of women into high regard in a culture that was overshadowed by male virtues and strengths. The nineteenth century Irish rationalist historian, William Lecky recognized this incredible civilizing power of the devotion to Mary in secular culture by noting:

The world is governed by its ideals, and seldom or never has there been one which has exercised a more salutary influence than the medieval concept of the Virgin. For the first time woman was elevated to her rightful position, and the sanctity of weakness was recognized, as well as the sanctity of sorrow. No longer the slave or toy of man, no longer associated only with ideas of degradation and of sensuality, woman rose, in the person of the Virgin Mother, into a new sphere, and became the object of reverential homage, of which antiquity had no conception. A new type of character was called into being; a new kind of admiration was fostered. Into a harsh and ignorant and benighted age, this ideal type infused a conception of gentleness and purity, unknown to the proudest civilizations of the past. In the pages of living tenderness, which many a monkish writer has left in honor of his celestial patron; in the millions who, in many lands and in many ages, have sought to mold their characters into her image; in those

⁷² Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. 100.

⁷³ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, Bk. 3.

⁷⁴ St. Ambrose, *Epist.* 22, No. 21.

⁷⁵ See Louis Ellies Du Pin, et al 2010 *A New History of Ecclesiastical Writers* Vol. 1-2, p. 212 (Rarebooksclub.com).

⁷⁶ See Miri Rubin 2009, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press) p. 533.

holy maidens who, for love of Mary, have separated themselves from all glories and pleasure of the world, to seek in fastings and vigils and humble charity to render themselves worthy of her benedictions; in the new sense of honor, in the chivalrous respect, in the softening of manners, in the refinement of tastes displayed in all walks of society; in these and in many other ways we detect the influence of the Virgin. All that was best in Europe clustered around it, and it is the origin of many of the purest elements of our civilization.⁷⁷

Marian devotion continued to develop throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, and was especially important during the black plague. The Renaissance saw many new forms of devotion to the Blessed Virgin as well as a proliferation of her image in paintings and statues. Protestants, during the Reformation attempted to limit Marian devotion, and their efforts were successful in some parts of Northern Europe. This led to a return of protestant churches to a predominantly male-oriented religion that emphasized male virtues and strengths, lessening the focus on compassion and the dignity of humility, weakness, and suffering. Seen through the lens of Lecky (cited above), this had a de-civilizing influence on Northern European culture – though its influence on natural science, mathematics, and rationality would lead to progress in these disciplines as well as scriptural exegesis and historiography.

The Catholic Church did not back away from devotion to Mary after the Reformation. Indeed, one of the main arguments of the counterreformation was the appropriateness of devotion to Mary as the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). Furthermore, the apparition of Mary to Juan Diego on Tepeyac Hill in 1531 was so influential that it led to Marian devotion first in Central and South America, and then throughout the New World. The Shrine on Tepeyac Hill is the most visited Shrine in the world (see Volume 3, Chapter 9).

Emphasis on Mary's role in the history of salvation – not simply as the new Eve, but as intercessor for the Church until the end of time, continued to grow after the Council of Trent. During the nineteenth century, Pope Pius IX declared the Immaculate Conception (a well-developed doctrine before that time) to be a dogma of the Catholic Church (see below), and in the twentieth century (1950), Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of Mary (also well-developed before that time) to be Catholic dogma. Devotion to Mary continues to be strong in Latin America, Africa, and Asia – though it has waned in some parts of Western Europe and the United States.

III.B

Four Marian Doctrines

There are four Marian dogmas defined by the Catholic Church and one additional dogma being considered by the Vatican:

1. *Theotokos* – the Mother of God
2. The perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
3. The immaculate conception of Mary.

⁷⁷ As quoted in John Stoddard 1990, *Rebuilding a Lost Faith: By an American Agnostic* (Tan Books and Publishers, Inc.) p. 247.

4. The assumption of Mary.

Saint John Paul II encouraged the fifth Marian dogma – Mary as Mediatrix and Co-Redemptrix – which has been formally petitioned by several cardinals, bishops, and lay people to Pope Francis. It has not yet been approved by him as a dogma of the Catholic Church.

III.B.1

***Theotókos* – the Mother of God**

The title *Theotokos*—signifying the “mother of God” does not mean that Mary “created Jesus’ Divinity” but only that Mary conceived, gave humanity, and birth to the One who was *already* Divine – the Son of God. As the famous Church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan has noted, the term *Theotókos* (the accent is important) should be translated as “the one who gives birth (*tókos*) to the one who is God” (*Theos*).⁷⁸ This literal translation indicates that Mary gave birth to the one who was *already* divine, indicating that Mary is not the human mother of Jesus’ divinity.

The dogma of Mary as the mother of God was declared in 431 A.D. at the Council of Ephesus, though its theological development began much earlier. The earliest recorded use of *Theotókos* seems to have occurred in Origen’s commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Romans (240 A.D.). After that time, the term was used by Athanasius of Alexandria in 330, Gregory the Theologian in 370, John Chrysostom in 400, and St. Augustine.⁷⁹

The term took on its most refined definition in the debate between Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, and Cyril of Alexandria. Nestorius argued that Mary as a human being could only give birth to a human being – and to nothing divine. Hence, he insisted that Mary be called “*Christotókos*” – the one who gives birth to the Christ—the Messiah”. Cyril of Alexandria rebutted Nestorius’ argument by noting that when Jesus’ Divine person (i.e., self-consciousness of the Son – see Volume 5, Chapter 1) was conceived in Mary’s womb through the power of the Holy Spirit, His two natures—His eternally pre-existent Divine Nature and the human nature He received from Mary-- became united through His Divine person (self-consciousness). So Mary gave birth (*tókos*), to Jesus’ Divine Person which was then united with His human nature as it had been united to His Divine nature throughout eternity—she gave birth to the Divine Person now uniting both His human and divine nature.⁸⁰

Nestorius was condemned by the First Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. which also defined “Mary, the Mother of God” as a dogma of the Catholic Church. Nestorius’ denial of Mary as the Mother of God implied his denial of the incarnate divine person (uniting His human and divine natures) within her. This, in turn, implied a denial of Jesus’ incarnate divine personhood or a denial of His divine nature, or both.

As can be seen from the above, the doctrine of *Theotókos* is needed to protect the doctrine of Jesus’ Divine Personhood and the unity of His Human and Divine natures through

⁷⁸ See Jaroslav Pelikan. 1998. *Mary Through the Centuries*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press) p.55.

⁷⁹ See E. Artemi 2012 “Cyril of Alexandria’s Critique of the term Theotokos by Nestorius Constantinople” in *Acta Theologica* 2012:2 (www.uovs.ac.za/ActaTheologica)

⁸⁰ See *ibid.* See also Cyril of Alexandria *Epistle 1, To the Monks of Egypt*; PG 77:13B

His Divine Personhood—the deposit of Faith. Therefore, it is one of the major foundations of Christian orthodoxy. It has its foundations in two areas of scripture:

1. The unity of Jesus' divine and human nature in His incarnation.
2. The incarnation of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Both of these scriptural foundations have been explained in detail in Volume 5 – the incarnation and two natures of Jesus in Chapter 4, and the divine conception and virgin birth in Chapters 5 and 6. Hence, a brief review should suffice here.

With respect to Jesus' incarnation and two natures (divine and human), we might begin with the foundations of the apostolic belief in Jesus' divinity. As noted in Volume 5 (Chapter 4), they are quite extensive. The five most prevalent foundations are:

1. Jesus' resurrection in glory, manifesting divinity (see Volume 3, Chapter 5).
2. Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit -- the power of God – “*Dunamis Tou Theou*” (Volume 3, Chapter 7).
3. Jesus' miracles by His own authority (Volume 3, Chapter Six).
4. Jesus' self-proclamation to be the Exclusive Son of the Father – “knowing the Father as the Father knows Him” (Volume 4, Chapter 6).
5. The apostles ability to do miracles in the name of *Jesus* – if Jesus were not who He said He was, then God would not allow miracles to be worked in His name (Volume 3, Chapters 6&7).

The certainty of the apostles about Jesus' divinity was so great that they sacrificed their religious status, social status, and financial status – and in the end, gave their lives to proclaim Him as “the Lord” (“*Ho Kurios*”) and “the Son of God.” As noted in Volume 3, this proclamation was not only at the cost of everything worldly, but was also apologetically *unappealing* – losing many potential converts to the early Church. Why would they have done this, when they could have proclaimed Him a “martyr prophet,” “God's holiest one,” or “the Messiah” without any of these sacrifices? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the early Church was completely convinced that He was indeed the Son of God.

The clearest, most explicit and comprehensive statements of the union of Jesus' divine and human nature are found in some of the earliest writings in the New Testament – the Christological Hymns. Four of these hymns are of particular importance:

1. Philippians 2: 6-11 (particularly Phil. 2: 6-7).
2. John 1: 1-3, 14.
3. Colossians 1: 15-17.
4. Hebrews 1:2-3.

In Volume 5, Chapter 4, we gave an extensive explanation of the first two verses of the first hymn (Phil.2:6-7) that clearly show the early Church's belief in Jesus' two natures. The following translation was justified there:

[Jesus], subsisting in the nature of God [from all eternity]
did not deem equality with God

something to be held onto
but emptied Himself
taking the nature of a slave,
becoming identical to a man (2:6-7).

We explained the author's very careful use of technical terms, such as "*Huparchōn*," "*to einai isa Theō*," and "*morphē*" (with its subsequent clarifications) and the use of participles to describe the ongoing states of Jesus' divine nature and human nature, and concluded from this that the scriptural foundations for the co-existence of Jesus' two natures in His person after His incarnation is quite strong. Thus, the early Church fathers and the fathers of the Councils of Nicaea, Chalcedon, and Constantinople had extensive scriptural foundations for their definition of the person and two natures of Jesus. Inasmuch as St. Cyril of Alexandria relied on those definitions, which in turn, rely on the above scriptural foundations, to justify Mary as *Theotókos*, the Christological part of this Marian doctrine is also well-founded in scripture.

There is a second dimension to the doctrine of *Theotókos* for which scriptural foundation was needed – the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth. Cyril of Alexandria did not have previous Church Councils to draw upon for these doctrines, and so relied solely on the Infancy Narratives of Matthew and Luke. Since scripture is part of the deposit of faith, St. Cyril was completely justified in doing this, and there really was no need for him to justify this dependence on scripture any more than he did. However, some contemporary critics have alleged that Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth were a product of Matthew's and Luke's fanciful imagination, and this challenge has undermined the confidence of some contemporary believers not only with respect to these doctrines but also to the dogma of *Theotókos* itself.

In Volume 5, Chapters 5&6, we redress these critical allegations in substantial detail, and so a brief review of our conclusions will suffice. Three of these conclusions militate against the idea that Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth are mere fanciful redactions.

First, Matthew's and Luke's narratives are substantially different – Luke's from the perspective of Mary, and Matthew's from the perspective of Joseph. As noted in Volume 5, Chapters 5 and 6, there are only five major points in common – though these points are from the central core of both narratives. Three of those points are:

1. Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18, 20 and Lk. 1:35).
2. The virgin birth – Mary had no relations with a man before Jesus' birth (Mt. 1:18, 25 and Lk. 1:34).
3. Jesus is divine – in Matthew 1:23, "Emmanuel"; in Luke 1:35, "Son of God."

What are the odds that these two early traditions with two different perspectives formulated by two authors (who apparently did not know of each other's work) would select the same three highly unusual, non-Jewish metaphors to form the core of their narratives by pure chance? Answer – highly improbable. So how did they become aware of these three common events if they did not know of each other's work? They must have received it from a common source – or sources who knew a common source. The most likely candidate for such a common

source – who would really know what happened, and would still be alive at the time the traditions were formed, is Mary herself or perhaps one of the apostles.

Secondly, with respect to the allegation that the divine conception through the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth were metaphors used to embellish Jesus’ divinity, Wright responds resoundingly that the very conjecture is ridiculous, because these metaphors are not Jewish – there is simply no precedent for them in the whole of Jewish literature (Isaiah 7:14 – “the virgin shall conceive and bear a child” – is not about the birth of the Messiah – see Wright – “Suspending scepticism”⁸¹). Rather, these metaphors are, as Wright calls them, “nakedly pagan,” and would have been shunned by the fiercely Jewish authors who formed the initial traditions. The idea that early Christians would have borrowed these metaphors from the pagans to put Jesus on an equal pedestal with pagan demigods – like Alexander the Great and Caesar Augustus – is also ridiculous. As Wright notes:

The only conceivable parallels are pagan ones, and these fiercely Jewish stories have certainly not been modelled on them. Luke at least must have known that telling this story ran the risk of making Jesus out to be a pagan demigod. Why, for the sake of an exalted metaphor, would they take this risk - unless they at least believed the stories to be literally true?⁸²

Wright asks the question why would the early Christians have invented a completely new metaphor (from a Jewish perspective) that risked identifying Jesus with a pagan demigod when all this could do is simply “put embroidering” around the truth of Jesus’ divinity which had already been very well established by His resurrection in glory, gift of the Holy Spirit, miracles by His own authority, and self-declaration? Why risk the exceedingly negative downside simply to put icing on the icing? It seems from any coherent historical perspective to be highly implausible.

Thirdly, it is alleged that other non-central incidents not common to both narratives are fanciful (e.g., the star, the wise men, the census of Quirinius, etc.). Why wouldn’t the above three central characteristics be fanciful if other non-central characteristics are? In Volume 5, Chapter Six, we responded first with Wright’s argument that single attestation and mysterious miracles cannot be used as a criterion to show non-historicity.⁸³ If we did that, we would have to judge the vast majority of ancient history to be non-historical. Furthermore, recent discoveries in astronomy and history indicate strong evidence for the existence of a spectacular celestial phenomenon (the conjunction of Venus, Jupiter, and the fixed star Regulus) in 3 B.C. – as well as the possibility of astrologers recognizing such a phenomenon. Finally, historians have recalculated the date of Herod’s death (based on Josephus’ *Antiquities*) to be in 1 B.C., rather than 4 B.C., and made a compelling case that Luke was speaking about a census to determine allegiance to Caesar *before* Quirinius was governor of Syria – and was not speaking about the tax census of Quirinius in 6 A.D. (which Luke addresses in Acts 5).

⁸¹ N.T. Wright, 2011, “Suspending scepticism: History and the Virgin Birth” in *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Religion and Ethics* (<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/12/28/3398969.htm>).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

In view of these considerations, we are justified in holding with N.T. Wright that skepticism about Jesus' divine conception by the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth can reasonably be suspended, and that the historicity of these events can reasonably be respected – a historicity which seems to be grounded in Mary herself. In the end, Wright concludes, “If that's what God deemed appropriate, who am I to object?⁸⁴”

As noted above, the scriptural foundations for Jesus as “divine person unifying a divine and human nature” – as well as His conception by the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth are quite strong, indicating that the doctrine of Mary as *Theotókos* – the Mother of God – is well-grounded in history and theology. Cyril of Alexandria and the Council of Ephesus were therefore well-justified in dogmatically defining this doctrine for the Catholic Church.

III.B.2 The Perpetual Virginity of Mary

The second Marian dogma to be defined by the Catholic Church was the perpetual virginity of Mary (Lateran Council of 649). It means that Mary was a virgin not only before the birth of Jesus, but after the birth of Jesus, and therefore she did not have any natural offspring besides Jesus during her lifetime. In the previous section, we showed the substantial evidence for the historicity of the virgin birth (that Mary had no relations with a man before Jesus' birth). On the basis of tradition, the Church went further and declared that Mary did not have relations with a man throughout the rest of her life – and was therefore a perpetual virgin. The theological development of this doctrine dates back to the late second century with St. Irenaeus.⁸⁵ Tertullian notably dissented from Irenaeus' view, to which Jerome responded bluntly, “he is not a man of the church—I have nothing more to say.”

This disagreement arose out of two passages from Scripture—MT 1:25 and the term “brothers of Jesus.” Matthew's phrase “but he [Joseph] knew her not until she had borne a son” (MT 1:25) is clear with respect to Mary's virginity *prior to* Jesus' birth, but ambiguous with respect to her virginity after His birth. The Greek adverb “*heós*” (“until”) need not indicate that a change occurred in Mary's relationship with Joseph *after* Jesus' birth.⁸⁶ As Irenaeus and Jerome correctly concluded, the matter of Mary's future virginity is completely unclear from this phrase—and no conclusion can be drawn—positive or negative – from Matthew's silence.

The references to Jesus' brothers (James “the brother of Jesus”, Joses, Jude, and Simon – see Mk 6:3, Mt. 13:55-56, John 7:3, Acts 1:14, 1 Cor 9:5, Gal 1:19 -- also created confusion in the fourth century—though this did not seem to be a problem in the second or third century. The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament attests strongly that “brothers” (“*adelphoi*”) need not mean “biological brother,” but could also mean relatives (Genesis 14:14, 29:15, close friends 2 Samuel 1:26, 1 Kings 9:13) or allies (Amos 1:9). In the Christian Church, the term takes on even

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ *Adversus haereses* Book 1, see Chap 10, Sec 1-2; and also Book 3, Chap 21, Sec 3-4

⁸⁶ See, for example K. Beyer who notes “the Greek “*heós*” after a negative, as used in the verse, “often has no implication at all about what happened after the limit of the ‘until’ was reached.” Raymond Brown adds “the immediate context favors a lack of future implication here, for Matthew is concerned only with stressing Mary's virginity before the child's birth”. See Raymond Brown, 1999 *The Birth of the Messiah*, (New York, Doubleday) p 132

broader meanings, “those who are followers of Jesus by doing His Father’s Will” (Mt 12:46-50) and “members of the Christian Church” (Acts 1:15, 6:3, etc). Of the 383 references to “brothers” in the New Testament, the vast majority does not refer to “biological brothers.” In view of this, it is simply impossible to conclude that James, Joses, Jude, and Simon were biological brothers of Jesus.

So why did the Early Church believe that Mary was a virgin after Jesus’ birth? They inferred this from John 19:26-27 –“When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near [the cross], He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.” The Early Church Fathers could not conceive of why Jesus would have presented His Mother to the Beloved Disciple, and presented the Beloved Disciple to His Mother as “son” if Joseph were alive or if Jesus had any other biological brothers or sisters. If Mary did, in fact, have other children, strong family customs would have made clear where her future home and family would be after Jesus’ death. The fact that Jesus asked the Beloved disciple (apparently unrelated to her) to take her into his home, strongly suggests that she did not have other children, and furthermore, that Joseph was already deceased.

We also have to imagine that there was a strong tradition in the Early Church concerning the perpetual virginity of Mary (which was not controverted by any other tradition) because it emerged with such force in the works of St Irenaeus and others in about 190 AD. It is difficult to imagine that Irenaeus fabricated this idea completely on his own—without recourse to prior tradition-- in the early second (or late first) century. In any case, this view enjoyed almost universal acceptance (with the notable exception of Tertullian up to the time of Helvidius, the Arian, in 382 AD. Helvidius declared for the first time going beyond Tertullian⁸⁷ -- that Mary did, in fact, have other children. Since Mary’s perpetual virginity was so widely accepted, Jerome responded with indignation (and with virtually complete agreement from the Church Fathers) that Helvidius’ contention was “novel, wicked, and a daring affront to the faith of the whole world.” He later wrote a tractate on the perpetual virginity of Mary defending this point against Helvidius using scripture and early church fathers such as Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Justin Martyr.⁸⁸ When Helvidius did not respond, the tradition continued to grow, and was formally declared Catholic dogma by the Lateran Council of 649: “[Mary conceived] without any detriment to her virginity, which remained inviolate even after his birth]”.

The Marian apparitions dating back to Guadalupe (1531), Lourdes, and Fatima all identify Mary as “the *Virgin* Mary,” implying perpetual virginity throughout the ages (see above, Section II). Though such apparitions, even when approved by the Church, are only private revelation that Catholics do not have to believe, their evident super-natural character (beyond any natural or scientific explanation) lends further confirmation to the tradition initiated in John 19:26-27 and the early tradition of the Catholic Church.

⁸⁷ Tertullian only taught that Mary was not a perpetual virgin but did not declare that she had other children besides Jesus.

⁸⁸ See St. Jerome *The Perpetual Virginity of Mary* in *New Advent* website (www.newadvent.org/fathers/3007.htm)

Mary's perpetual virginity was viewed, along with that of her son, as encouragements for the strong Christian discipline of virginity in the early Church. In the Medieval Church it encouraged the rise of many men's and women's orders of consecrated religious life. The perpetual virginity of both Jesus and Mary served as the exemplars for both men and women in their vows of perpetual chastity. This doctrine also supported Mary's universal motherhood of all humanity arising out of her motherhood of the incarnate Son of God.

III.B.3 The Immaculate Conception of Mary

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception defines that Mary from the instant of her being conceived was free from original sin – not subject to concupiscence from the fall – because of the foreseen merits of her Son, Jesus. Pope Pius IX who declared this to be dogma infallibly in his Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854) meant that the future sanctification of the world to be wrought by Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection was foreseen by God the Father and retrojected back in time to sanctify His Mother Mary at the moment of her conception. The precise words of the encyclical are as follows:

We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and therefore should firmly and constantly be believed by all the faithful.⁸⁹

This is one of the few doctrines of the Catholic Church that does not directly originate from Scripture or arise out of the resolution of a conflict concerning the interpretation of Scripture or other doctrines. As Pope Pius IX declared, "this doctrine does not arise so much from proofs of scripture and tradition but from a profound *sensus fidelium* and magisterium."⁹⁰ This kind of declaration—based on the *sensus fidelium*—though rare, can be defined dogmatically by a pope infallibly⁹¹ or by an ecumenical council.

⁸⁹ Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, December 8, 1854

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ Papal infallibility is a dogma of the Catholic Church that states that, in virtue of the promise of Jesus to Peter, the Pope is preserved from the possibility of error "when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church."

This doctrine was defined dogmatically in the First Vatican Council of 1869–1870, but had been defended before that, existing already in medieval theology and was the majority view at the Council of Trent. Even though the doctrine of infallibility was defined fifteen years after the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception, the doctrine was still defined dogmatically by Pope Pius IX, because his intention in the encyclical corresponds to all the conditions needed for an infallible declaration. It does not really matter the definition of infallibility occurred after the dogmatic declaration of the Immaculate Conception so long as the Pope met all the conditions necessary for such a declaration.

What is the *sensus fidelium*, and how does it apply to the development and definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception? As noted above, (in Chapter 2, Section II) the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful) is a consensus of the faithful—from the Pope through the laity--about the truth of a particular doctrine, interpretation of a doctrine, or extension of a doctrine. According to *Lumen Gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, Vatican II):

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.⁹²

The Vatican Council declared that the whole people of God when guided by the Holy Spirit, the Magisterium and previous tradition can, as a whole, discern matters of faith and morals more extensively than might be found in scripture and previous Church doctrine. Thus the whole faithful – from the Bishops to the last lay person—through their common agreement and consent can declare the truth of a particular teaching which is not properly found either in sacred scripture or previous tradition (doctrine). In order to do this, the faithful—from the Bishops to the last lay person—must have substantial agreement, adhere to the Magisterium, be faithful to all past tradition (doctrine), and listen attentively to the Holy Spirit moving through the Church as a whole. If these conditions are met, a truth like that of the Immaculate Conception can be discerned, and then declared a doctrine infallibly by a Pope or an ecumenical council. Without this infallible declaration by a Pope or ecumenical council, the people's discernment is only a strong consensus. In order to be defined as a dogma, it must be declared so infallibly by a pope or ecumenical council.

How did the dogma of the Immaculate Conception arise in Church history (without a ground in Scripture or past doctrine/tradition) and achieve such a strong consensus among the faithful so that Pope Pius IX was convinced of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the *sensus fidelium*, enabling him to define it infallibly as a dogma of the Catholic Church in 1854? Perhaps the most comprehensive work on the “preponderance of theological opinion on the Immaculate Conception throughout the centuries is Father Charles Passaglia's, *De immaculato Deiparae semper Virginis conceptu --commentarius* (3 vols., Romae, 1854-1855). As noted above, Mary's role as a primary intercessor and as the *holy* virgin was well appreciated within the late first century and second century church -- as seen in frescoes in the catacombs and in the works of St. Justin Martyr (d 165 A.D.) and St. Irenaeus (d 202). In addition to her holiness, virginity, and role as intercessor for the whole church, Mary was identified as “the new

⁹² Documents of Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium* (promulgated 1964) trans by official Vatican website (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) par 12

Eve” by St. Justin Martyr and St Irenaeus (see above in this Chapter, Section III.A). Eve was viewed by the early church as the sinless mother of all humanity—though through her free choice, she later fell into sin. Mary is viewed as the “new Eve—the mother of the new redeemed world,” and so she, too, would have been free from sin, and since she did not fall (like Eve), she remained sinless throughout her life. This view of Mary’s holiness and the implication of her sinlessness as the “new Eve” gained consensus among the early church fathers (in the late second and third centuries), and begins to develop theologically in the third and fourth centuries. St. Ephraem, the Syrian monk, (writing around 350-360 A.D.) indicates an absolute quality to Mary’s sinlessness, implying that there was no stain of actual, as well as original sin within her: “Thou alone and thy Mother are in all things fair, there is no flaw in thee and no stain in thy Mother.”⁹³ This kind of reflection on Mary’s sinless state led St. Gregory of Nazianzen (Archbishop of Constantinople and theologian -- writing between 360-390 A.D.) to one of the first proclamations implying Mary’s Immaculate Conception. He called it “Mary’s pre-purification.” Reflecting on the original state of both Jesus and Mary:

In every way,[Jesus] also became man, save sin. He was brought forth from a virgin, herself too immaculate in soul and body, for it was necessary indeed that the birth of a human creation be honored, yet it was necessary that the glory of virginity be more highly honored.⁹⁴

St. Gregory’s view of Mary’s immaculate original state influenced the Eastern Church, which gained consensus throughout Byzantium. This doctrine also gained acceptance in the West. Inspired by St Justin Martyr’s and St. Irenaeus’ view of the New Eve, St. Ambrose (Bishop of Milan writing in about 380 A.D.) stated: “Mary, a Virgin not only undefiled but a Virgin whom grace has made inviolate, free of every stain of sin.”⁹⁵ Though he does not specifically mention original sin, he implies it by saying “*every stain* of sin.” The term “stain” here was used specifically to refer to the “taint” of original sin by early Church fathers—and so at the very least, St. Ambrose appears to be strongly implying that Mary is free from original sin.

St. Ambrose was one of St. Augustine’s major influences.⁹⁶ He takes up St. Ambrose’s theological view about Mary’s complete sinlessness, but does not specifically apply it to original sin:

Having excepted the Holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom, on account of the honor of the Lord, I wish to have absolutely no question when treating of sins – for how do we know what abundance of grace for the total overcoming of sin was conferred upon her, who merited to conceive and bear him in whom there was no sin?...⁹⁷

⁹³ St Ephraem, Nisibene Hymns, 27:8

⁹⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, *On Theophany: Oratio* 38

⁹⁵ St Ambrose, Sermon 22:30

⁹⁶ In *Confessions*, Book VI Augustine explains how he first admired Ambrose because of his oratorical skill but soon fell under his influence in theology which led ultimately to his conversion to Christianity—and to one of Christianity’s greatest theologians and writers.

⁹⁷ St. Augustine *Nature and Grace* 36:45

Though St. Augustine's use of "sins" here implies actual sins, the context in his treatise on *Nature and Grace* implies that he may also have been thinking about original sin. The reason Augustine considers all people to be sinners is that they have all been affected by concupiscence – the negative effect of original sin. Since Mary was *not* a sinner in any way (see the above quotation), he may have been thinking that she was not affected by concupiscence/original sin. This may explain why he later says, that Mary *may* have had sufficient grace to overcome sin "of every sort".⁹⁸

Saint Augustine's implication that Mary may have had sufficient grace to overcome sin of every sort opens the door for later church fathers—particularly Frankish theologians – to openly consider Mary definitively having the grace to overcome original sin itself. Though St. Augustine does not say it explicitly, his openness to this extraordinary grace at the time of Mary's conception may not only harken back to his mentor St. Ambrose, but also to the Angel's greeting to Mary in Luke's infancy narrative: 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!' (Lk 1:28)

Kecharitomene is a perfect passive participle of *charitoo*, meaning "to fill with grace." The precise translation is "having been filled with grace," implying that her filling with grace occurred before the Angel's visit, and the effects of that grace were still active when the Angel visited. This interpretation of Luke 1:28 points to Mary's being *full* of grace—implying freedom from original sin-- prior to Jesus' birth.

The doctrine developed in the East through the influence of St. John Damascene and in the West through the Normans who were probably influenced by theologians in the East as well as St. Augustine. There was a feast day of Mary's Conception (without Immaculate) throughout both the East and the West by 750 AD. Soon after, the adjective "immaculate" was attached to the feast's name (probably because of the influence of the Eastern Church Fathers) which sparked a controversy in the West. Some theologians (many of whom were Dominicans) were not in favor of "Immaculate Conception," because they believed that the overcoming of original sin occurred through the merits of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection which clearly happened after Mary's conception. However, the Franciscans believed that God's foreknowledge of the merits to be worked by His Son in His passion and resurrection enabled him to retroject that grace back in history to the time of Mary's conception. No decision was made about which view was correct at the time of the Council of Trent—though many theologians believed that God would not have allowed the mother of His Son to have been under the influence of concupiscence (original sin) since it would have had some effect on Him. If God had waited until after Jesus' passion, death and resurrection to relieve Mary of original sin, she would have raised Him under its influence. Alternatively, if He decided to relieve her of original sin before Jesus' passion, death and resurrection by retrojecting Jesus' future merits into Mary's present, why not do it at her conception? Why wait until some other point? If Mary was relieved of Original Sin—which would be necessary if Jesus' was not to be affected by it—then why not do it at the instant of her conception so it would not affect her any more than it would affect His Son?

⁹⁸ See *ibid*

After the Council of Trent, the acceptance of the term “Immaculate Conception” grew in popularity among the bishops, which enabled Pope Pius IX to convene commissions of theologians and bishops to discuss the matter—the first immediately after he began his pontificate and the second in 1851. Between 1851 and 1853, he consulted the majority of bishops throughout the world about the appropriateness of a dogma and was advised by both his commission and the bishops that it would be appropriate and helpful to the faithful. In 1854, he infallibly defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in his bull *Ineffabilis Deus* doing it on the basis of a profound *sensus fidelium* (explained above in this section).

An interesting confirmation of Pope Pius’ discernment of the *sensus fidelium* regarding the Immaculate Conception occurred four years later when St. Bernadette of Soubirous announced that she had been visited by the Blessed Mother at the Lourdes grotto, and that she had identified herself as “the Immaculate Conception.”⁹⁹ Some have challenged this confirmation of the doctrine by suggesting that Bernadette may have been influenced by its recent passage (in 1854), and woven it into the appearance.

This seems highly unlikely for two reasons. First, Bernadette was fourteen years old, formally uneducated, and probably did not believe that any report *she* might make would be needed by the Pope and the rest of the Church (making it much more likely that this is what she was told by the *Blessed Mother* in the apparition). Secondly, St. Bernadette’s report of the apparition has been confirmed thousands of times by the miracles that have taken place at the grotto since the time of the apparition. As noted in Volume 3, Chapter 9, Section I.B., sixty-nine of these miracles have been certified by panels of believing and non-believing scientists and doctors to be *completely* beyond natural and scientific explanation. If Bernadette had been making it all up—or making up the part about the Immaculate Conception --why would the Lord (through the intercession of Mary) continue to work such miracles to this very day? Of course, the Pope’s definition of the dogma does not need any post-factum miraculous confirmation, because his discernment of the *sensus fidelium* was certain at the time he dogmatically defined it (meaning that it had been validated by the Holy Spirit). Nevertheless, such confirmations may help the skeptical to be more open to the doctrine simply because the miraculous nature of the Grotto of Lourdes is difficult to cavalierly deny. As St. Ignatius of Loyola might say if the confirmation of the doctrine at Lourdes is helpful, then use it; but if it is not helpful, there is no need to make recourse to it.

This doctrine reveals the pure heart and soul of Mary—the one who raised the incarnate Son of God and the one who is our heavenly mother. She and her son are not only the exemplars of authenticity, humility, compassion, simplicity and genuine love to which we aspire, they are also the path and the help to move toward this objective in the Kingdom of Heaven. As noted in Chapter One, the Lord delights in sharing His glory and salvific power with everyone in the mystical body-- above all, the mother of His Son. Why would He allow that plan to be hindered in any way by the taint of concupiscence or original sin?

⁹⁹ This occurred on March 25, 1858 according to the official Lourdes website. See Anonymous, “The Apparitions in 1858” on the official Lourdes website. <https://en.lourdes-france.org/deepen/bernadette-soubirous/the-apparitions>.

III.B.4 The Doctrine of the Assumption

On November 1, 1950, in the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, Pope Pius XII defined as dogma the Assumption of Mary, body and soul, into Heaven:

By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

There is no *direct* scriptural reference to Mary's assumption – though Pope Pius XII believed that there were scriptural foundations for it. He relied principally on three passages that imply Mary's incorruptible entrance into glory:

- Revelation 12 (“A woman clothed with the sun...” – see below),
- 1 Corinthians 15: 26-27 (“Putting all things [Jesus'] feet”), alludes to Psalms 8:6 and Mary's role in this prophecy alluded to in Gen. 3:15.
- Psalm 132: 8 where it is said that the loss of the Ark of the Covenant will be recompensed in the New Covenant – when both “thou and the ark will be taken to thy heavenly resting place” (v. 8). Mary was viewed as the Ark of Jesus and so was thought to be taken up to heaven along with her Son.

Though these “proofs” give implicit and indirect scriptural reference to the Assumption, they do not directly ground it, and so Pope Pius XII's Declaration is also supported by the *Sensus Fidelium* (see Chapter Two, Section II.B). Recall from above that the *sensus fidelium* is a theological belief held by the majority of the Faithful – from the bishops to the last lay person—assenting to the doctrine –indicating validation by the Holy Spirit (see *Lumen Gentium 12*). As will be seen below, this doctrine enjoys this validation by the Holy Spirit.

The major reason for declaring the doctrine was to recognize that Mary had joined her Son in Heaven after her earthly life– sharing in His glory, and interceding with Him for us as Mother of the Church and the human race. The Church recognized almost immediately after the end of Mary's life that she already possessed intercessory powers, and so later inferred from this that she was immediately glorified so that she could intercede with her Son in *heaven*. This implied that she was taken up into heaven (“assumed”) – body and soul -- by the Father immediately after her earthly life. The Church never made a dogmatic declaration as to whether or not Mary died. Though most theologians believe that she did, the faithful may believe whatever they wish so long as they believe in her immediate glorification and heavenly intercession with her Son through her assumption after her earthly life.

Furthermore, it seemed appropriate to recognize that the end of Mary's life would resemble the beginning of it. She was not affected by concupiscence (original sin) at the beginning of her life and so it seemed that she would not be affected by the corruption of her embodiment after her earthly life. It seemed appropriate that the Father would have taken her up to Heaven – body and soul – as Jesus took Himself up to Heaven after His resurrection. Note

that the Church refers to Jesus' heavenly ascent as "Ascension" because it was by His own power; however it refers to Mary's movement into Heaven as "Assumption," because she was taken up *by God* into Heaven, a gift enabling her to join her Son in glory at the conclusion of her earthly life so she might assume her place as Mother of the Church and of the human race.

Though proliferation of the idea of Mary's assumption did not occur until the latter part of the 3rd century, the idea that undergirded it – her *immediate* glorification and arrival into heaven with her Son (to begin her role as universal mother and intercessor) – was widespread (see her portrayal in the catacombs in Section I of this chapter above). Further evidence of this is found in Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation which was written in 90 AD by the unknown author who many refer to as "John of Patmos." Mary's portrayal in that text is glorified, heavenly, intercessory, and completely involved in the cosmic struggle between good and evil:

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days...

This glorified portrayal of Mary, according to the apocalyptic prophetic author, is seen as having occurred before the birth of Jesus – revealing an early strand of tradition indicating Mary's glorified and cosmic significance not only after her earthly life, but before the birth of Jesus. This may have influenced some of the early Church fathers (e.g. Irenaeus) regarding her status as *Theotókos*.

Though the idea of Mary's glorification, presence in heaven, and universal intercessory power were present in the Church since the latter half of the first century, the idea of her bodily assumption – implied by these other ideas – does not seem to have been formulated until the latter half of the third century, at which time several apocryphal stories of Mary's assumption were written in the Eastern Church.¹⁰⁰ Though these stories are apocryphal, they show the increasingly widespread acceptance of this belief by the faithful who connection it with her glorification and the beginning of her heavenly intercession with her Son.

¹⁰⁰ See for example, *The Book of Mary's Repose* (late 3rd century), *The Six Books Dormition Narratives* (4th century), and several other works based on these stories. See *The Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record*, 6 (1865): 417–48 and 7 (1865): 108–60. See also Agnes Smith Lewis, ed., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, *Studia Sinaitica*, XI (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1902).

The belief grew in popularity throughout the 5th century, was celebrated as a feast in the East, and established by Emperor Maurice around 600 AD.¹⁰¹ St. John Damascene wrote about the Assumption under his own name in about 720 AD in a homily containing an inspired canticle:

Even though, according to nature, your most holy and happy soul is separated from your most blessed and stainless body and the body as usual is delivered to the tomb, it will not remain in the power of death and is not subject to decay. For just as her virginity remained inviolate while giving birth, when she departed her body was preserved from destruction and only taken to a better and more divine tabernacle, which is not subject to any death . . . Hence I will call her holy passing not death, but falling asleep or departure, or better still, arrival. . . . Your stainless and wholly immaculate body has not been left on earth; the Queen, the Mistress, the Mother of God who has truly given birth to God has been translated to the royal palaces of heaven. Angels and archangels have borne you upwards, the impure spirits of the air have trembled at your ascension. The air is purified, the ether sanctified by your passing through them. . . the powers meet you with sacred hymns and much solemnity, saying something like this: Who is she that comes forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, elect like the sun?¹⁰²

Notice that St. John Damascene speaks not only of Mary's Assumption into glory, but ties it into her status as "Mother of God" (*Theotókos*) and her perpetual virginity. The possible influence of Revelation 12 – in his references to the moon and the sun – is also present.

These inspired, integrated statements of the belief influenced the West through Gregory of Tours. Later, in the 8th century, it was celebrated as a feast in the West under Pope Sergius I, and it was confirmed as a feast (celebrated on August 15) by Pope Leo IV in 847. In his beautiful and inspired words of declaration, Pope Leo IV brought together the themes of Mary's Assumption with her glorification and her intercessory role with her Son:

A roadway of clouds billowed the pathway from an uncorrupted grave to an incorruptible throne. At last, borne by angels, the lovely Lady arrives. It is the first Assumption Day, the Assumption of Mary. The heavenly throng gasps with admiration. The celestial singers burst into song. The angels hurry to and fro to catch a glimpse of her and to tell their companions of her beauty. Jesus waits at the open entrance, throws His arms about His Mother, leads her triumphantly and happily to the very throne of the heavenly Father, who leans forward and places solemnly and smilingly upon her beauteous head the crown, as the Holy Spirit, heavenly Spouse of the Virgin Mother casts warmth and light upon the welcome newcomer.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ See Alban Butler and Paul Burns 1998 *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, pp. 140-141.

¹⁰² St. John Damascene *Canticles* 6:9.

¹⁰³ Pope Leo IV 847 "Words of Declaration of the Feast of the Assumption" in *Roman Catholic Saints* <http://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/assumption-of-mary.html>

Though the doctrine gained widespread popularity in the East and the West throughout the Catholic Church, it was disputed by most of the reformers, who saw no direct biblical basis for it. This criterion did not affect the Catholic Church, who relied on past tradition, its magisterium, and the *Sensus Fidelium* to indicate the Holy Spirit's validation of it.¹⁰⁴

Since the assumption was complementary to the Immaculate Conception (proclaimed in 1854 -- see II.C above), Pope Pius XII, after wide consultation with bishops, decided to declare it dogmatically in 1950 in his encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus* (cited above).

The dogmatic declaration of Mary's assumption reveals yet another dimension of her glorious cosmic and intercessory role within Christ's order of salvation – the uncorrupted and glorified one who has joined her Son to intercede for the Church and the world as universal mother. If anyone should think that this somehow reduces the glory of Jesus or the Father – or takes away from praising them – they should consider the words that Blessed Fulton J. Sheen was reputed to have said. On one occasion, a protestant asked, “By loving Mary, do I not take something away from my love of Christ?” Sheen responded, “Well if I love your mother, does that mean I love you any less?”¹⁰⁵ Love is not something that diminishes when we lavish it upon our beloveds' family and friends – it has a way of being compounded – increasing its beauty, goodness, and bondedness as it does so. This is the Spirit in which Jesus shared His glory with His Mother, included her in the work of salvation, in His mystical body, in the cosmic struggle between good and evil. He desired that she love and be loved, so that *His* love and belovedness might be compounded in a many-splendored way. The logic of love and shared glory is not a zero sum game. On the contrary, it is ongoingly creative – the more it is shared, the more love is created, and the more it is magnified and differentiated. As Gerard Manley Hopkins recognized, “Christ plays in then thousand places, lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his to the Father through the features of men's faces.”¹⁰⁶

III.B.5 Conclusion

The above four Marian doctrines manifest the important role she plays in the economy of salvation throughout the ages. She is at once mother of the Incarnate Word, mother of the Church, and our own mother; she is the model of purity and chastity who calls us to the same ideal manifest in her perpetual virginity; and she is the one who was assumed into heaven to be a

¹⁰⁴ Recall from Volume 7 that most protestants believe in *Sola Scriptura* – “Scripture alone” – meaning that the absence of direct reference to scripture leaves no other option, but to deny a teaching. The Catholic Church has tradition, which includes the doctrinal teaching of the Magisterium as well as the *Sensus Fidelium*, upon which to base sound teaching in conformity with scripture. The Church believes that tradition – handed down through the liturgy, apostolic custom, and early Petrine authority, preceded the Canon of the scripture – and was absolutely necessary in selecting the “authorized” books of the bible. Furthermore, the Church believes that without a magisterial teaching, there would be no official way of interpreting scripture and doctrines during times of conflict. This has proven to be true throughout the centuries since the Protestant Reformation after which the fractioning of churches (because of such conflicts) resulted in more than 33,000 denominations when the Catholic Church has remained only one.

¹⁰⁵ This logic of the compounding effect of love is articulated beautifully in Fulton J. Sheen's classic *The World's First Love, Mary, Mother of God*, Second Edition 2010 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press).

¹⁰⁶ Taken from Gerard Manley Hopkins *Kingfishers*.

central intercessor and Mediatrix of Grace for the Church and for each believer. As such, she, bonded with her Son, is integral to the Divine Family and the communion of saints which extends to the mystical body on earth. She is the woman clothed with the sun—the divine radiance—who assists us against Satan, leads us toward her Son, and comforts us like a mother. As noted above (Chapter 3, Section I.C) we can call upon her presence, protection, and intercessory power by entering into the rosary which is a central element of Catholic contemplative life. Devotion to Mary will always lead us more deeply into the heart of her Son while bringing her motherly and familial presence into our contemplative lives. Like a mother, she is gentle, calming, and healing, yet she can also call us to the purity and continence which protects us from the empty promises of Satan and leads us ever more deeply into the communion of saints.

IV. Intercessory Prayer to the Saints [Back to top](#)

As noted above, the Catholic Church has promoted devotion to the saints throughout the 2,000 years of its existence. The Book of Revelation (composed around 90 AD) makes specific mention of prayers of the angels and saints in heaven. Prayers to the saints are also manifest in the second century catacombs of Rome.¹⁰⁷ This practice was encouraged and promoted by early Church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and many others.¹⁰⁸ From that time on, the practice grew quite rapidly inspiring generations of Catholics in faith, charity, holiness of life, and prayer.

Though the Church states that the primary form of prayer and worship is the Eucharistic celebration at Mass, it also encourages devotion to Mary, the Eucharist, and the saints. Pope Benedict rekindled this encouragement in his General Audience of April 13, 2011:

At the General Audiences in the past two years we have been accompanied by the figures of so many saints: we have learned to know them more closely and to understand that the whole of the Church's history is marked by these men and women who with their faith, with their charity, and with their life have been beacons for so many generations, as they are for us too. The saints expressed in various ways the powerful and transforming presence of the Risen One. They let Jesus so totally overwhelm their life that they could say with St Paul "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Following their example, seeking their intercession, entering into communion with them, "brings us closer to Christ, so our companionship with the saints joins us to Christ, from

¹⁰⁷ The catacombs are filled with graffiti asking for intercession or prayers from the saints – Sts. Peter, Paul, and many of the Roman martyrs. Some of these graffiti originated in the second century, but the vast majority in several catacombs can be accurately dated to the persecution of Valerian between 253 – 260. These graffiti continued into the late third and early fourth centuries – at which point such intercessory prayers could be spoken publicly (after Constantine's Edict of Toleration in 313 AD). See a summary of archaeological findings in Danilo Mazzoleni 2000 "Ancient Graffiti in Roman Catacombs" in *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 9, 2000, p. 6.

(www.ewtn.com/library/CHISTORY/GRAFFITL.HTM)

¹⁰⁸ See the citations to these Church fathers in Chapter Three, Section III.B above.

whom as from their fountain and head issue every grace and the life of the People of God itself” (cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 50).¹⁰⁹

Pope Benedict here tells us why intercession to the saints helps us in our spiritual lives and joins us more closely to Christ—they give us an inspirational and edifying example to follow, they help us with their intercessory prayers, and we can join ourselves to them within the Mystical Body, and in so doing, draw closer to Christ, Our Lord. In order to best prepare ourselves to follow the example of the Saints, join ourselves to them, and ask for their prayers, we are encouraged to familiarize ourselves with them—and this is best done by reading *lives of the saints* (hagiographies). As readers may know, there are huge variations in the presentation of hagiographies. Some are little pamphlets with basic events in the life of a saint, some compile details about works, missions, preaching, and reflections of the saints, some are spiritual autobiographies which present the words of the saints themselves, and some are exemplary works of well-documented historical research that present accurate words and actions of the saints in historical context. Some hagiographies include a significant amount of pious interpretation of what the saint might have been thinking or praying, while others are more reserved in interpretation, and still others minimalistic in interpretation. Some hagiographies emphasize the strengths of the saints but make little mention of the weaknesses, while others present both strengths and weaknesses.

Recall that no saint is equivalent to Christ, Our Lord. All of them (with the exception of the Blessed Virgin Mary) had to contend with concupiscence—the negative effects of original sin, all of them had to go through a process of conversion, and all of them maintained their weakness and dependence on the Lord to the end of their lives. St. Paul – toward the end of his life in the letter to the Romans—laments:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me... For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:15 -25)

As noted above, there are spiritual benefits in reading most hagiographies. These saints can become both powerful examples and intercessors in the development of our spiritual lives. In Chapter Three (Section III above), we addressed the kinds of hagiographies (lives of the saints) we might want consider in light of our own spiritual proclivities and talents. We may now proceed to a discussion of how select a hagiography for a particular saint.

A good place to begin is with spiritual *autobiographies* in which a saint writes about his life, theological and spiritual viewpoints and relationship with God, others, and the Church.

¹⁰⁹ Pope Benedict XVI “Intercessory Prayer of the Saints” in General Audience April 13, 2011. (www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110413.html)

Such autobiographies range from a simple reflection to complex interior probings and theology. Five excellent spiritual autobiographies (ranked in order of simplicity to complexity) are as follows:

1. St. Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Autobiography*
2. St. Therese of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*
3. St. Teresa of Avila, *Spiritual Autobiography*
4. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*
5. St. Augustine, *Confessions*

There are also several spiritual autobiographies not written by canonized saints that have been helpful to general audiences:

1. C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Story of My Early Life*
2. Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*
3. Thomas Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain*
4. G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*
5. Henri Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey*
6. Two by Walter Ciszek, S.J.
 - *He Leadeth Me: An Extraordinary Testament of Faith*
 - *With God in Russia*

There are also several excellent spiritual biographies by saints of famous authors which may also prove to be a suitable place to begin the pursuit of hagiographical inspiration:

- G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox*
- G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*
- Evelyn Waugh, *Edmund Campion: A Life*
- Clare Boothe Luce, *Saints for Now*

There are so many hagiographies by less-known authors available today that making a selection might seem overwhelming. For example, if you were to search Ignatius Press' website for "saints" you would get 210 biographies for adults and children. Again if you made a restricted search for "Jesuit saints" or "Jesuit biographies" in Google you will find hundreds of biographies or compendia of biographies. If you search only for "St. Francis Xavier", you will discover 40 different English biographies—from children's stories to the four-volume work of Georg Schurhammer. So where might we begin?

One way of proceeding might be to look up the saint of the day from the annual liturgical calendar. This can be done by simply doing a "google search" for "saint of the day". Click on Franciscan Media, and you will see the saint(s) for that particular day. Some saints are major and some minor. If there is an extended Wikipedia article on a particular saint (e.g., 6-10 sections in the wiki article), they are likely to be a major saint, and if you have the time, you may want to read the wiki article. (Most of them are reasonably accurate and are written by people from their religious order or who have an expertise in a particular historical period). If by reading the wiki article, you find a saint's life and teaching to be inspiring and edifying, you may want to

do an internet search for additional free articles on that saint. If this proves fruitful, you may want to go deeper and do a search for a book—a hagiography—that fits your interests and is helpful to your spiritual life. There are three dimensions about which to be conscientious:

1. What level of simplicity or complexity fits your needs or interests?
2. What level of historical scholarship are you interested in?
3. What kind of spiritual approach is most helpful to you—one that emphasizes the strengths and piety of the saints or one that addresses weaknesses and challenges as well?

With respect to the first dimension—simplicity or complexity—“know thyself.” If you are the type that enjoys details and depth, find an extensive hagiography that provides it; however, if you are the type that “just likes the facts” or “bullet points,” find a shorter hagiography that emphasizes general points in the life, doctrines, and spiritual works of the saint. Children obviously need works that are age-appropriate. If you do a brief search of the table of contents and the “amazon reviews” of a particular hagiography you can determine fairly quickly the author’s intended level of detail and linguistic complexity. If you are not sure where your interests lie, start with simpler biographies and work your way up.

With respect to the second dimension of your search —level of scholarship—all you need do is search for the book on either amazon or googlebooks and see if you can look inside. If you can, simply go to the last page of the actual text and look at the footnote number. If there are three times as many footnotes as pages, the level of scholarship will probably be quite high, and the “amazon reviews” are likely to mention a good scholarly apparatus. If the number of footnotes are about the same as the number of pages, you will probably find an adequate scholarly apparatus and attention to primary sources. Again, the “amazon reviews” will indicate this. Finally, if you find there are few-to- no footnotes, the book was probably written on a “popular” level. This kind of volume is great if you are not interested in validation of data or primary sources. However, if validation of data, listing of sources, and primary sources are important to you, you probably want to make recourse to the higher levels of historical scholarship.

The third dimension of your search—biographies that emphasize strengths and piety of a saint versus those that include weaknesses and challenges—is probably the most difficult to pre-determine. Sometimes, the “amazon reviews” give some good clues but often enough, they do not. One general rule might be—the more complex and scholarly the work, the more likely it will contain weaknesses and challenges of a particular saint because these biographies tend toward a *complete* portrayal of the whole person in historical context.

This third characteristic is very important because the point of reading spiritual biographies—hagiographies—is to be inspired and edified. It is somewhat counterproductive to read a biography that portrays a saint’s life in a fashion that emphasizes negativity rather than positivity. I’m not saying here that we should restrict ourselves to hagiographies that portray a saint and the Church through “rose colored glasses” or “the viewpoint of Pollyanna.” My point is really about the way in which the weaknesses and challenges of the saints and the church are portrayed. Some authors are “respectful” and capable of seeing positivity amidst weakness—while others begin with a “less than respectful” and sometimes an even suspicious or hyper-

critical point of view. Though I truly value complex and scholarly biographies, I always avoid those whose authors manifest disrespect, suspicion, negativity, or even “anti-spiritual” points of view.

I have several intelligent and scholarly friends who gravitate toward this more negative and anti-spiritual approach to history, believing it to be more realistic. However, I am not in agreement with them as I think they have *uncritically* appropriated the culture’s “anti-spiritual” perspective without so much as a brief sojourn into the miraculous, the numinous experience, or a contemplative life. If a person is not yet able to recognize how the Holy Spirit is moving them with consolation or desolation—and cannot determine the difference between a natural insight versus a spiritual inspiration—or a coincidence/accident versus a providential nudge, then it is difficult for me to trust their judgement about a saint who is living in a profoundly spiritual context instead of a purely naturalistic one.

It is one thing to be a good historian, but another to be a good spiritual historian. Spiritual historians have a spiritual life—and therefore, they are more likely to see spiritual agency in the life of a holy person who claims to be under that influence. Non-spiritual historians – out of no fault of their own except a lack of spiritual experience—are likely to doubt spiritual agency even when a holy person says it is there—likely to doubt the miraculous even when a panel of seven objective scientists validates that there is no naturalistic or scientific explanation for a healing performed by the saint—and likely to doubt a providential context in which the saint is working in both the Church and in the world. We can only bring to a subject what we have experienced and studied. Without such experience and study, we are left only with a hermeneutic of suspicion, negativity and doubt. I would recommend avoiding histories and biographies of saints written with this perspective. This does not mean that we have to be gullible in our historical judgement—only that we give spiritual agency the benefit of the doubt in the case of individuals whose lives are markedly holy.

St Ignatius Loyola gave an important rule for assessing spiritual practice, spiritual reading, and historical reading called “*tantum...quantum*” meaning ‘insofar as...inasmuch as.’ What he means is, *insofar as* a particular spiritual practice, spiritual book or hagiography is helpful to your spiritual life, continue to use it, but inasmuch as it is not helpful to your spiritual life, cut back or cease using it. What does he mean “helpful to your spiritual life”? In a phrase, if a particular practice or book increases your *trust* in and closeness to God, your *hope* in your salvation, and your openness and capacity for *charity*, then it is helpful to your spiritual life. However, if a spiritual practice or book leads to mistrust of God, doubt or despair about your salvation, or difficulty in practicing charity, then it is *not helpful* to your spiritual life and should be cut back or discontinued. You, the reader, are the best judge of your interior spiritual state. Do not persist in a spiritual practice or complete a book that is hurting you spiritually! God does not expect you to persist in such a negative spiritual practice even if a very holy friend told you this is the best practice in which they ever engaged. It does not matter how that practice helped your friend. All that matters in God’s eyes is how it is affecting *you*. Similarly, there is no need to finish a spiritual or historical book that a friend recommended as being truly profound or a great work of scholarship. If the book decreases your trust in God, your hope in your salvation, or your capacity for charity, you should, as the cliché goes “forget about it!” This is God’s

perspective—the One who loves you, wants the best for you, and is guiding you. Do not gauge yourself on what your friends say, but rather on your interior experience.

I hope I have not made the pursuit of hagiographical inspiration into an overly complicated matter. I do not want it to be a “turn-off” to anyone because it has been such an inspiration in my own life. However, as with all roads to deeper spiritual inspiration, there are pitfalls and detours as well as levels of complexity, scholarship, and spiritual openness—and if we are to benefit from the inspiration of the saints by following their example, praying for their intercession and joining ourselves to them in the Mystical Body, we will have to be conscious of these differences and work our way through them with the help of the Holy Spirit and awareness of our interior disposition.

V. Eucharistic Devotion [Back to top](#)

We will consider two points in the development of this uniquely Catholic devotion and practice:

- A. A brief history of Eucharistic devotion (Section V.A)
- B. A spirituality of Eucharistic devotion (Section V.B)

V.A A Brief History of Eucharistic Devotion

Eucharistic devotion begins with the custom of *fermentum* going back to 120 A.D. A portion of the consecrated host was put in a container and carried from one diocese to another when a new bishop was appointed -- to show unity of the dioceses (and the Church) in the One Body of Christ.¹¹⁰ When the host arrived at the new bishop's diocese, he would consume it to achieve unity in Christ's body. The host was treated with special reverence since the bishops and the person transporting the host were aware of its eternal significance – the real presence of Christ. It is important to recognize that the bishops believed that the host could achieve the *reality* of unity between them in the mystical body – it was not merely symbolic. In the second century, Popes sent a piece of the Eucharist to bishops to achieve unity with them – and sometimes bishops would send a piece of the Eucharist to their priests for the same purpose.¹¹¹

St. Justin Martyr (writing in about 150) tells us that after the mass, “There is a distribution to each and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons”.¹¹² This was also mentioned by Irenaeus in 190 A.D. as reported by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ See John Hardon 2003, *The History of Eucharistic Adoration: Development of Doctrine in the Catholic Church* (CMJ Marian Publishers), <http://www.ewtn.com/library/HOMELIBR/HISTOREA.TXT>.

¹¹¹ See Ibid.

¹¹² Saint Justin Martyr, *First Apology to Triphon*, Section 87.

¹¹³ V. 24.15

In the mid-third century, the custom of *fermentum* took on special significance in the lives of hermits and solitaries living in the caves in Egypt and Palestine. The hermits (who were not priests) kept the Holy Eucharist reserved in their caves so that they could receive it regularly while remaining faithful to their vows of solitude.¹¹⁴ Their awareness of Christ's presence with them in the reserved Eucharist in the cave turned the cave – or hermitage – into a holy place. Gradually the host was reserved in the chapels and sanctuaries of larger hermitages, and later in large monasteries.¹¹⁵ The presence of the host sanctified – made holy – the chapel or the sanctuary far beyond any blessing, icon, relic, or holy object. It was the ultimate manifestation of holiness – and therefore the ultimate way of sanctifying a place.

In 325, the custom of reserving the Holy Eucharist for distribution to the sick – particularly those in danger of dying – was so widespread that it was defined by the Council of Nicaea in Canon 13 (325 A.D.):

With respect to the dying, the old rule should continue to be observed which forbids that anyone who is on the point of death should be deprived of the last and most necessary Viaticum.¹¹⁶

After the development of large monasteries, St. Basil (who wrote a monastic rule and founded a large monastery) started a custom in about 350 A.D. of consecrating a large host – and splitting it into three pieces – one for himself, one for the monks, and one to be reserved in a golden dove elevated above the altar (suggestive of an early tabernacle).¹¹⁷

In the fourth century, the practice of adoring the Holy Eucharist at the time of the communion service seems to have arisen. St. Augustine, writing at the end of the fourth century (395) noted: “No one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it.”¹¹⁸

The customs of public reservation of the Holy Eucharist for the sick and the sanctification of a chapel or sanctuary – as well as that of private adoration of the Eucharist (during the communion service) were neither challenged or enhanced for about 600 years. Then Berengarius' denial of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (around 1060 A.D.) caused Gregory VII to reaffirm the doctrine immediately thereafter by making Berengarius sign a letter of retraction and belief:

I believe in my heart and openly profess that the bread and wine placed upon the altar are, by the mystery of the sacred prayer and the words of the Redeemer, substantially changed into the true and life-giving flesh and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, and that after the consecration, there is present the true body of Christ

¹¹⁴ See Ibid.

¹¹⁵ See Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Council of Nicaea, Canon 13.

¹¹⁷ See Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Saint Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Explorations of the Psalms)* 98, 9.

which was born of the Virgin and offered up for the salvation of the world, hung on the cross and now sits at the right hand of the Father, and that there is present the true blood of Christ which flowed from his side. They are present not only by means of a sign and of the efficacy of the Sacrament, but also in the very reality and truth of their nature and substance.¹¹⁹

John Hardon describes what he calls a “renaissance” of Eucharistic devotion and adoration that ensued after Gregory VII’s declaration.

Processions of the Blessed Sacrament were instituted; prescribed acts of adoration were legislated; visits to Christ in the pyx were encouraged; the cells of anchoresses had windows made into the church to allow the religious to view and adore before the tabernacle.¹²⁰

From 1100 onward, the religious orders – the Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, and others – integrated Eucharistic adoration as a regular feature of their religious lives and promoted devotion to the Eucharist and adoration throughout the Church in Europe. St. Francis of Assisi was central to the integration of adoration into the Franciscan order and the promulgation of adoration within Franciscan churches.¹²¹

The right of elevation of the Eucharist for adoration after the consecration of the bread and then the wine, occurred as a reaction to the heresy of Peter Comester and Peter the Chanter who jointly held that the real presence of Christ was not present in the consecrated bread until after both the bread and wine had been consecrated. The bishops and priests who protested against this teaching elevated the consecrated host for adoration immediately after pronouncing the words of consecration over the bread – and then again after saying the words of consecration over the wine. This practice was validated by a French synod of bishops slightly before 1200.¹²²

During the thirteenth century, scholastic theologians debated whether a person in the state of mortal sin could worthily gaze upon – or be in the presence of – a host exposed for adoration. It was decided that it was not only permissible, but praiseworthy – and many theologians thought that “if it were done with a reverent intention, it was likely to obtain for the sinner the grace of true contrition.”¹²³

On August 11, 1264, Pope Urban IV instituted the feast of *Corpus Christi* to be celebrated on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday to commemorate Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist and the fulfillment of His promise “to be with us even until the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). The celebration included a Eucharistic procession with the priest leading the faithful

¹¹⁹ St. Gregory VII “Letter of Retraction and Belief for Berengarius” cited in the encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* by Pope Paul VI (1965), http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_03091965_mysterium.html.

¹²⁰ John Hardon, *The History of Eucharistic Adoration*

¹²¹ See Ibid.

¹²² See H. Thurston, 1909 “Eucharistic Adoration” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05713a.htm>.

¹²³ Ibid.

elevating a monstrance with the host – and culminating with Eucharistic adoration. The Pope commissioned St. Thomas Aquinas to write the hymns for the celebration which are the same hymns we say today -- “*O Salutaris*,” “*Tantum Ergo*,” and “*Panis Angelicus*.”¹²⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas also clarified the doctrine of transubstantiation in the *Summa Theologica* (see Volume 9, Chapter Three).¹²⁵

After the thirteenth century, the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in a large number of churches so that the faithful could visit the Lord in that sanctified place. Additionally, adoration of the sacrament was encouraged for religious and laity. Religious societies and orders dedicated to perpetual adoration -- uninterrupted adoration of the Blessed Sacrament – were started throughout Europe.¹²⁶

Benediction of the Holy Eucharist was also instituted after the feast of Corpus Christi. Though Benediction (blessing by) the exposed Holy Eucharist was a rite unto itself, it gained popularity by being associated with evening Marian songfests in churches throughout Europe. The people would sing hymns to Mary, after which they were blessed by the Holy Eucharist – a special favor for those who were sick and infirmed.¹²⁷ The combination of Marian canticles and benediction is still practiced at the Grotto of Lourdes to this day. The thirteenth and fourteenth century was truly a time during which Eucharistic reverence, adoration, exposition, procession, and benediction came to a flourishing.

During the Reformation, the entire range of Catholic teaching on the Holy Eucharist was challenged by the Reformers. Several Protestant churches polemicized against Eucharistic reverence and exposition because they did not believe in transubstantiation. Furthermore, attempts were made to stop the practice within Catholic churches in predominantly protestant areas.¹²⁸

The Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) defined everything within the scope of Eucharistic theology and practice – from transubstantiation to Eucharistic adoration. It also encouraged a return to, and increase in, Eucharistic reverence, adoration, exposition, benediction, and procession. The Council’s summary words show why a resurgence of Eucharistic devotion came out of its theological teaching:

Christ should be worshiped now in
the Eucharist no less than He had been in first century Palestine,
because in the Blessed Sacrament it is the same God Whom the
apostles adored in Galilee.¹²⁹

In the 1800’s, Eucharistic congresses were established, which added further to the devotion to Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist. There has now been an International

¹²⁴ Hardon *History of Eucharistic Adoration*.

¹²⁵ See Ibid.

¹²⁶ See Ibid.

¹²⁷ See Ibid.

¹²⁸ See Ibid.

¹²⁹ See Ibid. Council of Trent 22.

Eucharistic Congress in every major country in every continent throughout the world. These Eucharistic Congresses have led to increased theological reflection and dogmatic development of the Eucharistic doctrine.

St. Pius X, after the 16th Eucharistic Congress, encouraged not only frequent communion, but daily communion with the Lord at mass in his encyclical, *Sacra Tridentina* promulgated December 20, 1905. This led to a large surge in lay participation at daily mass. Prior to that time, the Jesuits and other religious orders participated in daily mass, but lay participation was fairly infrequent. Pope Pius X encouraged this most important and central prayer of Christianity – and the reception of our Lord in it – for anyone who wished to be part of its regular daily celebration.¹³⁰

In 1947, Pope Pius XII wrote the encyclical, *Mediator Dei* which represented additional progress in doctrinal development of the celebration of the Eucharist inside and outside of mass. First, he presented a plan for the renewal of the Divine Liturgy that became a major impetus for the Second Vatican Council's document on the Sacred Liturgy (see below). Secondly, he presented a developed set of practices for Eucharistic devotion outside of mass that delved deeply into the healing, peace-filled, strengthening presence of the Lord coming from these extra liturgical Eucharistic devotions. John Hardon has examined Pope Pius' many statements about the benefits of Eucharistic devotion in *Mediator Dei*.¹³¹

The Second Vatican Council's constitution on the Sacred Liturgy gave rise to many changes in the Liturgy that led to greater participation by the laity, greater understanding of the parts of the mass, and a greater sense of communion with congregants through communion with Christ. The celebration of the mass resumed its place of highest priority within the sacramental and spiritual life of the Church and the faithful. This renewed sense of the centrality of the Sacred Liturgy had an unintended effect of deemphasizing Eucharistic adoration outside of mass. Pope Paul VI tried to correct some of these unintended misunderstandings and consequences in his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* (quoted below) and St. John Paul II tried to reinvigorate Eucharistic reverence, adoration, and benediction in several statements made during his Pontificate.¹³² He himself had a very strong devotion to the Holy Eucharist in the Sacred Liturgy – and also in the reserved Blessed Sacrament and Eucharistic adoration, and wished to share his deep spiritual consolation and strengthening through the sacrament with the Church throughout the world.

Pope Benedict XVI followed St. John Paul II in encouraging Eucharistic adoration and extra liturgical Eucharistic prayer and reverence. In Part Two of his post-synodal document, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, he speaks of an intrinsic relationship among the Eucharistic sacrifice, the Eucharistic sacrament, and extra liturgical reverence and worship.¹³³ Thanks to the encouragement of St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic adoration, benediction,

¹³⁰ Pope Pius X 1905 *Sacra Tridentina*, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDWFREQ.HTM>.

¹³¹ See John Hardon. *The History of Eucharistic Adoration*, Chapter 6.

¹³² See St. John Paul II, "Address on the Eucharist in Phoenix Park, Ireland, September 29, 1979. See also *Redemptor Hominis*, March 4, 1979, IV, 20.

¹³³ See Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007 – Part Two), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html.

procession, and worship are beginning to increase in seminaries and parishes across the United States and some countries in Europe, Asia, and Latin-America. Hopefully the healing, strengthening, and calming power of this sacrament – manifest in its liturgical and extra-liturgical celebrations will create a new momentum through the testimony of those who have benefitted spiritually from it.

V.B **A Spirituality of Eucharistic Devotion**

In Volume 9 we addressed the spiritual benefits of the mass and Holy Eucharist. In Chapter Five of that volume, we spoke of the unity with Christ amidst the Church community through the sacred liturgy, and in Chapter Six we addressed five graces of the Holy Eucharist:

1. Spiritual Peace,
2. Forgiveness/healing,
3. Transformation in His image,
4. Unity within the mystical body, and
5. Everlasting life.

Many of these graces are also present through extra liturgical worship of the Eucharist – particularly adoration and benediction. Saint John Chrysostom spoke of the joy, consolation, and hope that comes from reverencing the Sacrament:

When you see It (the Body of Christ) exposed, say
to yourself: thanks to this Body, I am no longer dust and ashes, I am
no more a captive but a freeman: hence I hope to obtain Heaven and
the good things that are there in store for me, eternal life, the
heritage of the Angels, companionship with Christ.¹³⁴

Chrysostom's faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist moved him to a state of consolation and hope by simply coming into the presence of the exposed sacrament for reverence and adoration. His experience of Christ in the sacrament led him to conviction about his liberation from slavery to sin and death, and his imminent resurrection with the Lord. This experience of Christ in the Sacrament has been recounted by dozens of other saints such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis de Sales, St. Margaret Mary, St. Claude de la Colombière, and St. John Paul II – to mention but a few. Pope Paul VI clarifies and enhances this experience of consolation and inner strength coming from the reception and adoration of Christ in the Sacrament:

Anyone who has a special devotion to the sacred Eucharist and who tries to repay Christ's infinite love for us with an eager and unselfish love of his own, will experience and fully understand—and this will bring great delight and benefit to his soul—just how precious is a life hidden with Christ in God and just how worthwhile it is to carry on a conversation with Christ, for there is nothing more

¹³⁴ St. John Chrysostom homily on the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 24: 4.

consoling here on earth, nothing more efficacious for progress along the paths of holiness.¹³⁵

When we approach the exposed Sacrament on the altar or in the Tabernacle, we will want to recall the words of The Council of Trent identifying Jesus in the Eucharistic species with the historical Jesus in Galilee and on the cross:

Christ should be worshiped now in
the Eucharist no less than He had been in first century Palestine,
because in the Blessed Sacrament it is the same God Whom the
apostles adored in Galilee.¹³⁶

When we go to a Holy Hour for adoration in Benediction, we will want to look upon the host in the same way the apostles looked upon the historical Jesus in his exorcisms, miracles, raising the dead, teaching, forgiveness of sinners, passion, death, and resurrection. When we do this – and open ourselves to the presence of the One whom the apostles saw – His consolation and peace – His warmth and love – begins to fill the room, and can sometimes be quite palpable.

In addition to the consolation and spiritual growth coming from the adoration of the Lord in the Eucharist (looking upon him as the apostles in Galilee), Pope Paul VI promises several specific additional graces leading to spiritual growth and conviction:

For it is not just while the Sacrifice is being offered and the Sacrament is being confectioned, but also *after* the Sacrifice has been offered and the Sacrament confectioned—while the Eucharist is reserved in churches or oratories—that Christ is truly Emmanuel, which means "God with us." For He is in the midst of us day and night; He dwells in us with the fullness of grace and of truth. He raises the level of morals, fosters virtue, comforts the sorrowful, strengthens the weak and stirs up all those who draw near to Him to imitate Him, so that they may learn from His example to be meek and humble of heart, and to seek not their own interests but those of God.¹³⁷

The Pope here summarizes many works of previous monks, saints, and Popes about the graces intrinsic to reverencing or adoring the Eucharist. The first grace, raising the level of morals – refers to a kind of heightening of both consciousness and conscience about the moral life to which we aspire. The recognized presence of the Lord, and reverence for Him, enables Him to reach into the deepest recesses of our hearts to make a high moral life attractive – and a lower moral life frightening and repulsive. As we spend time with the Lord in the Eucharist, asking to be transformed by Him, we can feel a power beyond ourselves drawing our desire to be like Him and to shun a lifestyle leading us away from Him.

¹³⁵ Pope Paul VI 1965, *Mysterium Fidei*, trans. by Vatican website (September 3, 1965), http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_03091965_mysterium.html, Par. 67.

¹³⁶ Council of Trent, Session 22.

¹³⁷ Pope Paul VI *Mysterium Fidei* (1965), Sec. 67, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_03091965_mysterium.html

He mentions a second grace – the strengthening of virtue – which is similar to the first grace – raising the level of morals. Once again, our abiding and conversing with Christ in the Holy Eucharist enables Him to draw our desires closer to His desires (our hearts closer to His heart). This has the effect not only of *enlightening* us about a higher moral life, but also strengthening our resolve to imitate him in interior attitudes and virtues. We don't have to be like stoics – willing ourselves to greater virtue. We can simply converse with Him and enjoy His presence which enables *His* heart to “rub off” on ours. When we spend time with a friend – simply conversing with them and enjoying them – they tend to “rub off” on us, and so it is with our companionship with Jesus in the Sacrament of the altar. As we identify more and more with the heart of Jesus, we will also grow in the desire for His virtues – temperance (contra gluttony/drunkenness), chastity (contra lust), zeal for souls (contra sloth), patience and forgiveness (contra anger,)generosity(contra greed), gratitude (contra envy), humility (contra pride and vanity). All of these virtues serve the key virtue of Love (*caritas* in Latin – agápē in Greek), the highest virtue for Jesus.¹³⁸ The main point to remember is that the more we spend time with Jesus in the Sacrament of the altar, the more we become transformed in His heart and virtue.

Pope Paul VI goes on to speak of two additional graces coming from Eucharistic reverence and adoration—comfort for the sorrowful and strength for the weak. It may at first seem strange to think that spending time before the Lord in the Holy Eucharist can bring comfort or strength, but this, in fact, has been the experience of thousands of people throughout the world. When we feel overwhelmed, and at the point where we cannot control the negative events in our lives, we can be sure that prayer will help. Some of these prayers are mentioned in Volume 18 (“Lord, snatch victory from the jaws of defeat” or “I give up; You take care of it” or “please make optimal resurrection come out of this cross”). If we say these prayers in faith, we *will* receive the grace of calm and peace, and as will be explained, this enables us to be rational--to think about “back-up” plans, who we should consult, how to do damage control, etc. It is really quite amazing how grace coming from our brief spontaneous prayers can induce this kind of calm and rational reflection.

Yet, if we want even deeper peace—peace that helps us see how our sufferings can purify our hearts, lead us to new opportunities and ultimately usher us into our salvation, I would recommend prayer before the Holy Eucharist—either in the tabernacle or, if possible, before the exposed Eucharist at a Holy Hour or Adoration. As noted earlier, the presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist- the same Jesus the Apostles adored in Galilee-- not only sanctifies a church sanctuary, but also fills it with His warmth, peace, and consoling presence. If the Eucharist is exposed and we gaze upon Him with faith, the effects of consolation and strength are even more palpable than prayer alone. The spiritual and heart-felt demeanor of Christ emanating from the Holy Eucharist brings deep calm, hope, and consolation, enabling us to increase our trust and seek the opportunities of suffering to do His Will (see Volume 19).

The more we attend to the living presence of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist, the more the Lord's peace, hope, and consolation will affect us. We may not get a great flash of insight or a mystical experience, or even a memorable emotional moment, but we *will* leave the presence of

¹³⁸ See Volume 15 for a full explanation.

the Lord transformed more deeply in His peace and consolation. Looking for feelings is a deceptive enterprise. It is much better to look back on two weeks of reflection, prayer, and Eucharistic devotion to see the little, but nonetheless deep, transformations in our interior attitudes. This will tell the true story of the power of prayer and Eucharistic Adoration.

Pope Paul VI concludes his thoughts about the graces of Eucharistic reverence, by a summary statement—“[Jesus] stirs up all those who draw near to Him to imitate Him, so that they may learn from His example to be meek and humble of heart, and to seek not their own interests but those of God.” The overarching grace of Eucharistic Adoration is to be transformed in the heart of Christ. As we have noted several times, leaning close to Him in the Holy Eucharist allows Him to affect us—to let His heart speak to our heart—to “rub off” on us so that we may become like Him—meek and humble of heart (Mathew 11:29).

There is one more grace of Eucharistic Adoration mentioned by Urban IV (who declared the Feast of Corpus Christi), St. Thomas Aquinas,¹³⁹ the Council of Trent¹⁴⁰ and stated most succinctly by Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical on the Sacred Heart (*Miserentissimus Redemptor* – May 8, 1928)—the grace of expiation:

the more perfectly that our oblation and sacrifice corresponds to the sacrifice of Our Lord, that is to say, the more perfectly we have immolated our love and our desires and have crucified our flesh by that mystic crucifixion of which the Apostle speaks, the more abundant fruits of that propitiation and expiation shall we receive for ourselves and for others.¹⁴¹

Though Pope Pius XI was focused on the devotion to the Sacred Heart in the above quotation, he ties it in to the Eucharistic sacrifice which is the perfect manifestation of the Infinite Divine Love of the Sacred Heart.¹⁴²

The Council of Trent summarizes the many graces of the Eucharist described by St. John Chrysostom, St. Thomas Aquinas, Pope Pius XI and Pope Paul VI as follows:

[Christ willed] that this Sacrament be received as the soul's spiritual food, to sustain and build up those who live with His life...[it is also] a remedy to free us from our daily defects and to keep us from mortal sin.¹⁴³

There are many devotions, litanies, holy hours and prayers recommended by saints and pious societies for Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction. A simple internet search will reveal dozens of free resources and pamphlets that may be of assistance. Prayers to the Sacred Heart of Jesus are especially valuable for Eucharistic Adoration.

¹³⁹ See Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II-II (second part of the second part) question 81, Art8.

¹⁴⁰ Session XXIII, Chapter 2

¹⁴¹ Pope Pius XI, 1928, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, par 10 (www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280508_miserentissimus-redemptor.html)

¹⁴² Pope Pius XI, 1928, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, par 9 – (“wherefore with this most august Eucharistic sacrifice, there ought to be joined an oblation both of the ministers and of all the faithful, so that they also may ‘present themselves living sacrifices, holy, pleasing unto God’ (Romans 12:1)”

¹⁴³ Council of Trent, Session 13—October 11, 1551

The reader will want to be certain that the Spiritual Recommendations within these prayers are helpful to an increase in trust in the Lord, hope in salvation, and the practice of charity. Recall the main discernment principle of St. Ignatius Loyola—if a spiritual practice helps you to grow in trust, hope, and love (charity) then continue to use it. If it detracts from trust, hope, and love—leading to mistrust, despair, or impediments to love, do not use it. Find another devotion or set of prayers that proves helpful.

Chapter Five

Sacramentals, Symbols and Holy Places

[Back to top](#)

Sacramentals are a means for extending the sacramental life of the Church (i.e. the effects of the seven sacraments) into other areas, such as home, work, associations, and even visits to holy places. The Church teaches that practically any material can be turned into a sign of these extended sacramentals. They come in three major forms:

- (1) blessings (Section I)
- (2) exorcisms (Section II)
- (3) popular devotions (Section III)

I.

Blessings

[Back to top](#)

Blessings bestow God’s favor and protection on persons, places, meals, and objects. It infuses them with the divine, sacred, and spiritual presence that calls the faithful to holiness and protects them from evil. In the Christian church, blessings are done in the name of Jesus, through a prayer, which is concluded with a blessing in the names of the Persons of the Trinity. Lay people can preside over non-ecclesial blessings that are not part of the seven major sacraments—such as blessings of meals and persons. They may also invoke blessings of a place – though sometimes this is reserved for ordained clergy. If a blessing is associated with a formal ecclesiastical function (e.g. the consecration of a bishop, a member of a religious order, or a church) – or if it is associated with the seven Sacraments (e.g. a blessing after Mass, during a Baptism, or during the Sacrament of the Sick), it is reserved for ordained clergy.

In the Old Testament, “blessing” signified asking for God’s favor on a particular person or persons. Thus, the Mosaic blessing, “ may the Lord bless you and keep you; may He make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; may He look upon you with kindness and grant your peace” ask for four major favors – for God’s favor in general (“bless you”), for God’s protection (“ keep you”), for favorable circumstances (“may He make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you and look upon you in kindness”), and for His peace (“grant You peace.”)

Additionally, blessing signified giving thanks and praise to God for meals, the necessities of life, the beauty and usefulness of the natural world. Hence, Psalm 103—“bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name..” which means, “give thanks and praise to the Lord, O my soul; all that is within me, give thanks and praise to His holy name..”

Jesus (and the Early Church) expanded the power of blessing so that it became an infusion of the holy divine presence not only in persons, but in places, meals and objects. Such blessings call us to holiness and the Divine Presence and protect us from evil. They are invoked through either the name of Jesus or the names of the three Divine Persons (through the sign of the cross). The Old Testament meanings and uses of blessings are preserved in the Christian Church, insofar as Christians pray the Psalms and reverently read the Old Testament (particularly the Torah and the Prophets).

In the Catholic Church, blessings of religious objects (such as bibles, rosaries, and icons) are generally reserved to ordained clergy; so also are blessings of churches, sanctuaries and pilgrimage sites. Lay people may bless meals, as well as preside over blessings of some persons, places or objects that are not formally associated with the seven sacraments or ecclesiastical or sacred functions, persons, or places. The blessing of water (because it is a derivative of the Baptismal blessing) is generally reserved for ordained clergy. Lay people may take blessed water (holy water) and use it to sanctify a room, an object or themselves. They may also use holy water as part of a deliverance service to dispel evil in particular places or objects (see *exorcisms* below).

II.

Exorcisms

[Back to top](#)

Exorcisms are the second major form of sacramentals. While blessings are intended to protect particular persons, places or objects from evil (or make them undesirable for evil to inhabit), exorcisms are required if a person, place or object is *already* affected or inhabited by evil through some form of curse (or being present at a ceremony or practice invoking evil spirits). As will be explained in Volume 14, evil can inhabit persons, places, or objects when individuals willingly participate in practices or ceremonies that call spirits—or evil spirits in particular—into a particular place (e.g. playing with ouija boards, or entering into a séance). In these cases, evil spirits are invited into places, objects and sometimes people. Furthermore, people can curse a person, place, or object by invoking evil upon them. However, anyone who does this, makes himself a disciple of the Master of Darkness—Satan himself. Ironically, the first person to be cursed with darkness is the one who invokes Satan in order to curse someone or something else.

When evil inhabits a place, its power can be broken, dissipated, and chased away by invoking the name of Jesus and/or the names of the Divine Persons. Assistance may also be sought from the angels (such as St. Michael the Archangel), Mary the Mother of God, and /or the saints. Commensurate with Early Church practice, invoking the name of Jesus *in faith*, brings the fullness of His sacred, all-good and all-loving presence into a place, object or person affected or infected by an evil spirit. In our culture, a name merely *refers* to a person—while in the

Semitic culture of the Early Church, invoking the name of Jesus brings *His presence and power* into a particular place, object or person.

As will be discussed in Volume 14, the presence of evil has many degrees. With respect to places and objects, it can range from a faint presence to an infestation of a place (a haunting in which there is not only a presence of evil but also destructive, harmful, and hateful activity). With respect to persons, evil's presence can range from obsession to oppression to possession (see Volume 14).

If an object or place is affected by the presence of evil, a group of lay people can exorcise it through deliverance prayers (see Volume 14—Deliverance Ministry and Prayers). Sometimes, the presence of evil can be strong and persistent, in which case a deacon, priest or bishop may be called to give a more formal blessing of that place.

With respect to people, lay ministers (who are qualified deliverance ministers) can also effectively release people who are *obsessed* from the presence of evil, but if this presence or spirit is persistent, a priest may also be invited – along with lay ministers – to exorcise it.

If a person is seriously *oppressed* by an evil spirit, it is advisable to ask a priest to do an informal exorcism (with or without lay ministers). This may take several sessions and requires the free will and cooperation of the oppressed person (which may be difficult if that person invited evil into themselves either by participating in a satanic ceremony, cursing another person, or becoming a disciple of Satan).

If a person is possessed – and an evil spirit is present *in* him, periodically manifesting itself by suppressing his real personality, rolling the eyes to the back of the head, and emerging with a different voice and (evil) personality, then a formal exorcism may be required—though the need for this is quite rare. If there is to be a formal exorcism of a person, it must be done by a priest (with or without others present), permission must be granted by the bishop, and at least one or two psychiatrists must testify that the phenomenon cannot be explained by psychosis, schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder or any other psychiatric pathology. The Church has a published formal Rite of Exorcism that the priest is to use. It may require ten, twenty or thirty repetitions before a particular evil spirit (or spirits) is named and exorcised. Again, the free-will and cooperation of the possessed person is important—particularly to reject Satan and declare Jesus to be his Lord.

Though some possessions may come from a curse (generally parents or close relatives cursing children—or dedicating them to Satan), the vast majority of possessions occur because individuals have freely invited Satan into them or participated in cursing another person. The seriousness of participating in satanic ceremonies and using the power of Satan cannot be underestimated. Doing so will force individuals into unimaginable darkness and evil in short order, because they have freely opened themselves to it. An evil spirit cannot take over the soul of an individual – and therefore cannot permanently suppress their transcendental awareness of God, free-will, or individual self-consciousness (see *The Powers of the Soul* in Volume Two).

Nevertheless, during possession an evil spirit can *temporarily* suppress an individual's distinct personality by pushing it to an unconscious state (generally manifested by a trance and the eyes rolling back into the head). When an evil spirit does this, a complete personality change will occur—generally accompanied by a change in temperature (making the room colder), a voice change, and often paranormal phenomenon—such as objects flying or levitation without a physical cause—and knowledge of languages and facts about someone else's life without previous natural cause. Even before an exorcism, an evil spirit will eventually withdraw back into the individual's unconscious mind, and the trance will be broken and his normal personality will return. Evil spirits do not permanently suppress an individual's regular personality.

When an exorcism is ultimately successful, there will be some sign of release by the evil spirit, and the alternate evil personality will not re-emerge — unless the individual loses touch with the Lord or returns to the practice of evil or the occult. The victim of an exorcism does not remember what happened to him when he was in his trance state because the evil spirit had to suppress his conscious mind in order to become manifest in the possessed individual's body.

The main point is that formal exorcisms—though rare—can release a person from possession and bondage to Satan even when they have voluntarily entered into his power and company. It may take repeated efforts, but ultimately even Satan himself cannot be victorious over the name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus will always be victorious—if we want Him to—and if we have the faith to release the power of His name and presence.

III.

Popular Devotions

[Back to top](#)

Popular devotions constitute the third form of sacramentals. As with blessings and exorcisms, these devotions can increase holiness and the Divine presence in people (and can also protect and distance them from evil). Devotions are aimed more at the sanctification of people than of places or objects—though holy places and objects are involved in devotions.

Popular devotions take the following major forms – the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the Stations of the Cross, the rosary and blessed objects – such as icons, scapulars and medals. We have already spoken about the rosary and processions above in this chapter, and we will discuss each of the others briefly below.

III.A

The Veneration of Relics

The veneration of relics is not the worship or adoration of them. “Veneration” means to demonstrate respect or awe before someone or something of great reputation or sacredness. In a religious context it means to demonstrate respect for holiness or sacredness. With respect to relics, it means demonstrating respect for the holiness of the remains of a person declared to be a saint—or an object associated with Jesus (e.g. the Shroud of Turin—see Volume 3, Chapter Eight). Relics have long been associated with God's healing power. There is nothing magic about them—God sanctifies them and makes them a sign of His power and the intercession of

the Saint with whom the relic is associated (see above Chapter Five—Section II.A). Catholics venerate relics to ask for the intercession of saints for healing and spiritual protection as well as to draw close to the holiness and memory of those saints.

Veneration of relics is evidenced in the Old Testament—such as intercessory raising of the dead through the bones of Elisha (2Kings13:20-21). It is also evidenced during the time of Jesus—a woman with a hemorrhage thought to herself, “if I can only touch His garments, I will get well—she touched them and was completely healed” (MK5:27-29). It is also evident in the Early Church. The Acts of the Apostles recounts, “and God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them” (Acts19:11-12).

This tradition was handed down to the next generations of the Church when St. Polycarp’s bones were explicitly venerated after he had been burned at the stake. In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* written by the Smyrnaeans in 156 A.D. it is reported:

[after his martyrdom] And so we afterwards took up his bones which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place; where the Lord will permit us to gather ourselves together, as we are able, in gladness and joy, and to celebrate the birth-day of his martyrdom for the commemoration of those that have already fought in the contest, and for the training and preparation of those that shall do so hereafter.

Since that time, the Church has been careful to reserve and validate the remains of those who are martyred and likely to be canonized as saints. Though there are certainly false relics—ranging from pieces of the True Cross to some relics of ancient saints—the majority of relics validated as first class relics of the saints¹⁴⁴ (particularly those from about 1100 AD onward where provenance can be established) are very probably authentic. Moreover, the Shroud of Turin and the Facecloth of Oviedo are very probably authentic relics of Jesus Himself (see Volume 3, Chapter Eight). Furthermore, many intercessory miracles of the saints occurred through their relics being applied to the body of a person in dire need of healing. Many of these miracles have been validated by panels of objective scientists who profess that there is no natural or scientific explanation for them. (See Volume 3, Chapter Nine, Section II). Thus there is no good reason for doubting the authenticity of these relics or the intercessory powers of the saints worked through them.

III.B

Visits to Sanctuaries and Pilgrimages

Visits to sanctuaries—and pilgrimages--can also be a way of deepening one’s devotion and spiritual life beyond the seven Sacraments. A “sanctuary” is a holy place – and the highest sanctuary is also the most common—the place in a church where the altar of Eucharistic commemoration and unbloody sacrifice occurs—and the place in a church where the Blessed

¹⁴⁴ There are three classes of sacred relics. The first-class is a part of the saint’s body. The second-class is a piece of the saint’s clothing or something used by the saint, while the third-class is an object which has been touched to a first-class relic.

Sacrament is reserved in a tabernacle. When the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, a “sanctuary” candle is lighted to signify that the Holy Eucharist is reserved and present (see Chapter Four, Section V.B). Furthermore, we genuflect toward the reserved sacrament and bow toward the altar in the Church sanctuary to show proper respect for their holiness (derived from the real presence of Christ).

In addition to Church sanctuaries, there are also sanctuaries—holy places—associated with Jesus Himself (in Israel), the burial places of the saints, places where saints lived and worked, and ancient churches and monasteries that have been and still are central to the life of the Church – the hierarchical Church, Churches associated with the founding of religious orders, shrines associated with Marian apparitions, and shrines associated with the saints.

Pilgrimages to holy places are a part of virtually every religion throughout the world. In Volume 2 (Chapter Three), we addressed Eliade’s intuition of the sacred manifest particularly in sacred times and places. Eliade shows that virtually every religion encourages visits to sacred places where the Divine – the sacred—has broken into the profane world. Visiting these places allows pilgrims to draw closer to the transcendent and sacred deity which helps them grow in holiness, purity, and readiness for the next life.

Christians hold that the Son of God Himself (not merely sacred presence or power) has come into the world to redeem it completely—and so we, above all, have reason to visit and draw close to the sacred places where He engaged in His ministry, gave His life, and was raised from the dead. By visiting the Holy Land, and the places (sanctuaries) marking where Jesus is likely to have been we hope to be inspired and edified and to sense His presence, and through this, to grow closer to Him in our attitudes, behaviors, and spiritual lives. Many pilgrims report this kind of inspiration and edification, particularly when visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (where Jesus is likely to have died on the cross and been buried) and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (where Jesus is likely to have been born). There are many other sites in the Holy Land—particularly the Via de la Rosa (where Jesus was purported to have carried His cross).

Catholics also believe that there are other places into which God’s sacred presence has broken in to the world – the places visited by the Mother of Jesus, and the dwelling places of canonized saints. Visiting these shrines also deepens our closeness to Christ and our spiritual lives by drawing close to these individuals whose holiness and love for Him still permeate the places where they visited, dwelled, and worked. Shrines marking the places of Marian apparitions are thought to be particularly holy—the Church holding the image of Our Lady of Guadeloupe, the Grotto at Lourdes, and the place of Mary’s visitation at Fatima. (See Volume 3, Chapter Nine, Section I). Many people make a pilgrimage to these Marian Shrines for healing or miracles, but even if they do not receive one, they still receive a deep spiritual benefit by drawing close to the place where the Mother of God broke into the world once again—and where her presence and influence can still be felt in the holy places she touched and in the community of faithful who pray there. All pilgrims to Marian shrines can receive this spiritual benefit if they have faith and truly desire it.

There are also multiple pilgrimages to the places where Sts. Peter and Paul visited, the catacombs of the martyrs, and the places where saints lived and died—e.g. St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Margaret Mary, St. Padre Pio, St. Anthony de Padua, St. John Paul II —Italian saints, Spanish saints, French saints, American saints, Polish saints, Irish saints, and the list goes on. If time permits, you might want to make a visit to the Holy Land, Rome, Spain, Paris, or places of your favorite apparitions or saints. A simple google search for “Catholic pilgrimages” will show dozens of pilgrimages to these places at virtually all times of the year, led by Catholic priests, native speaking guides, and ranging from modest to deluxe accommodations. Native guides can give excellent historical context, priests can celebrate Mass and read the words of scripture or the saints appropriate to particular places, and community prayer can heighten the spiritual experience. All of these dimensions of a pilgrimage can draw us closer to the Lord, the Mother of Jesus, and the saints, and through imbedded memories of spiritual intuition and emotion, can deepen our spiritual lives for a lifetime.

III.C

The Stations of the Cross

Virtually every Catholic is familiar with the Stations of the Cross that adorn the inside of most Catholic Churches. Today, the standard number of stations is 14 – though it changed somewhat throughout history (see below). The stations are images – mostly carved in wood, marble, or metal – depicting various places where Jesus could have stopped along the path from his trial to his burial. As noted in the history below, each of the stations represents a place along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem – the route that is believed to be the one taken by Jesus when carrying the cross to Golgotha. It is central to Catholics’ experience of Lent, Holy Week, and particularly Good Friday, and has infused devotion to Jesus’ Passion into the center of the Church’s and many individual believers’ spiritual life. The fourteen stations are:

1. Christ condemned to death.
2. The cross is laid upon him.
3. His first fall.
4. He meets His Blessed Mother.
5. Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross.
6. Christ’s face is wiped by Veronica.
7. His second fall.
8. He meets the women of Jerusalem.
9. His third fall.
10. He is stripped of His garments.
11. His crucifixion.
12. His death on the cross.
13. His body is taken down from the cross.
14. He is laid in the tomb.

The passion of Jesus is one of the central contemplations to attain closeness to the Lord through gratitude and love for His sacrifice. Virtually every saint has stated that it was central to

their deeper conversion, spiritual life, and desire to serve Christ and others with great fervor and sacrifice. Everything about the passion of Jesus manifests His love for us expressed in freely given self-sacrifice aimed at our redemption. Though the Stations of the Cross have special communal emphasis during Lent, Holy Week, and especially Good Friday—they can be a source for individuals any time during the year to evoke deep contemplation on Jesus’ passion and supreme love.

Though the stations are oftentimes our introduction to the loving sacrifice of Jesus in the Passion, many Catholics complement it with a contemplative reading of one of the gospel accounts of it. The Passion narratives are the most detailed accounts in the gospels, and they are written in a way that invites us to pause after each paragraph and imagine the scene depicted in Jerusalem or on Calvary 2,000 years ago. Whatever method we choose to contemplate on the Passion – the stations, the gospel accounts, the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary, or some combination of them – the objective is to make a personal connection with the Lord in His Passion as we contemplate each scene. Each station of the cross, each paragraph of the gospel narratives, and each sorrowful mystery of the rosary provide a point at which we can pause to imagine the scene of 2,000 years ago – and then to speak with our Savior in the scene, giving thanks to Him for His self-sacrificial redemptive love that saves us now and is intent on saving us ultimately and eternally in the future. We don’t need to say much except “thank you” or “I love you too.” As noted earlier, this contemplative and dialogical approach to the Passion accounts is one of the primary vehicles through which almost every saint reached their deepest levels of contemplative love for the Lord and acceptance of His call to heroic sacrificial love. This was certainly the case with St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, and St. Ignatius Loyola – to mention but a few.

As we consider how to enter more contemplatively into Jesus’ Passion, we will want to remember St. Ignatius’ rule – *Tantum Quantum*. ” If a spiritual practice helps you to increase in trust in God, hope in your salvation, and capacity for charity, then continue it, but if it decreases trust, hope, and capacity for charity, then modify or discontinue it. Given the high popularity of the stations of the cross, contemplative reflection on the passion accounts, and the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary (including dialogue with the Lord in the Passion scene), it is safe to say that all these ways of entering into the Passion accounts have proven to be helpful not only in deepening our personal love for the Lord, but also in following Him in sacrifice.

The communal celebration of the Stations during Fridays of Lent or the six days of Holy Week or after the Good Friday service has the added value of experiencing Christ’s self-sacrificial love as a *community*. The traditional prayers and hymns bring out a common experience of deep gratitude and love which cannot help but call us to greater contrition, reparation, and love.

Some Catholics may want to amplify their experience of the Passion accounts by reading one of the lives of Christ – by Fulton J. Sheen, Romano Guardini, or Archbishop Goodier. Normally an entire volume is devoted to the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. Additionally, readers may want to view the recent film called *The Passion of the Christ* directed by Mel Gibson – or some other films devoted to the life and Passion of Christ.

Historically, devotion to the Passion and Stations of the Cross goes back to the fourth century, after the Edict of Constantine, in Jerusalem. Apparently, Constantine or one of his delegates decided to mark out the likely path that Jesus would have taken from the place of His trial (in Jerusalem) to Golgotha, and then to the tomb. Several “stations” were fixed along the path in Jerusalem, and St. Jerome recounts that by the beginning of the fifth century (401 A.D.), crowds of pilgrims from every country were visiting the path (which later came to be known as the Via Dolorosa).¹⁴⁵

It is difficult to determine when certain churches began to make imitation stations resembling those on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, but the tradition of imitating Jerusalem sanctuaries and churches (atop holy places) in other lands occurred quite early. At the monastery of San Stefano at Bologna a group of connected chapels were constructed as early as the fifth century, by St. Petronius, Bishop of Bologna, which were intended to represent the more important shrines of Jerusalem.¹⁴⁶ Sometime between the fifth century and the fourteenth century, not only churches in Jerusalem, but the Stations along the Via Dolorosa were fashioned and placed into Churches throughout Europe. These constituted a “mini pilgrimage” at a European church that provided similar indulgences as those received by pilgrims visiting the actual stations in Jerusalem. At the beginning of the fifteenth century (1400), “Blessed Alvarez, on his return from the Holy Land, built a series of little chapels at the Dominican friary of Cordova, in which, after the pattern of separate Stations, were painted the principal scenes of the Passion.”¹⁴⁷ Since that time, Stations of the Cross were set up in churches throughout Europe.

The number of Stations varied for about 180 years – between 7 and 31 stations, but in 1584 the number seems to have been set at 12 – the first twelve stations today – in a book for pilgrims entitled *Jerusalem sicut Christi tempore floruit* by Adrichomius. The thirteenth and fourteenth stations were added in the late 17th century, and a proliferation of prayer books and hymns were published throughout Europe. Since that time, the Stations were standardized, and given Church approval. The Franciscans had custody over the administration of prayer and hymn books associated with the Stations for several centuries, but this was opened to the whole Church for administration by pastors, pious societies, and individuals. Today, the Stations of the Cross are one of the most popular devotions in the Church. They continue to be at the center of Lenten and Holy Week observance, and continue to inspire people to contemplate on the gospel accounts of Jesus’ Passion, which ultimately leads to a deepening relationship with the Lord in prayer and service.

III.D Blessed Objects and Symbols

We have already spoken about Holy Water, and its importance for blessing persons, places, and objects, but the Church has encouraged the blessing of many other sacred objects as a means of bringing God’s grace, inspiration, and protection into prayer, homes, the workplace and individual persons. Since its beginnings, the Church has been sacramental – and has used many

¹⁴⁵ G.C. Alston, (1912). “Way of the Cross” In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (New York: Robert Appleton Company). (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15569a.htm>).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

material objects as signs and conduits of sacred grace, inspiration, and protection. We noted above that Christian artists painted frescoes of Mary, Sts. Peter and Paul, biblical stories, and the martyrs in the catacombs of the late first century, second century, and third century.

Recall from above (Section I), that a sacramental can be any place, object, or devotion that can act as a sacred sign and instrument of God's power and presence – and so it extends sacramentality beyond the seven major sacraments to help the faithful grow in relationship with and service to Christ. Recall also that the primary sacramental – a blessing – infuses a place or object with the power and presence of God which connects the faithful with the presence of God, inspires them, and protects them. This means that sacred objects – such as a crucifix or an icon – that are already signs of God's presence and holiness can also be blessed so that these objects are infused with God's power to make holy, inspire, and protect the people who use them in faith. Thus, it is not redundant, for example, to bless a crucifix. Though the crucifix is already a sacred sign of God's presence (a sacramental), blessing it adds to it – by infusing it with God's presence and power and making it a conduit for His holiness, inspiration, protection, and peace.

The most common sacred objects are crucifixes, icons (pictures of divine or holy beings), sacred statues, bibles, rosaries, scapulars and medals. There are many other objects that can act as a sign of God's sacred presence – such as candles – but the above list represents what many, if not most Catholics have in their homes or on their persons today. A brief note about the first two will suffice in view of the fact that we have already addressed the bible and rosary quite extensively. Information about other sacred objects can be obtained by doing a web search for the item in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (sponsored by New Advent).

III.D.1 The Crucifix

A crucifix (a cross with the body of Jesus crucified – called a “corpus”) is the most popular and prolific sacred object for Catholics today. It evolved out of a plain figure of a cross in the first century. The earliest extant Christian cross dates back to 79 A.D., and was found at Herculaneum – one of the cities buried by volcanic ash of Mount Vesuvius, along with Pompeii. Its use spread throughout the Roman Empire, so that at the beginning of the third century (211-216 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria called it “the Lord's sign.”¹⁴⁸ Tertullian, in 204 A.D., spoke of Christian practice of tracing the cross on their foreheads,¹⁴⁹ and noted that the Christians were called, “devotees of the cross.”¹⁵⁰ The practice of tracing the cross on the forehead was done multiple times per day, and Christians began to fashion crosses for use in sanctuaries and homes throughout the third century. In the fourth century, after the Edict of Constantine, crosses were used openly as signs of the salvation won by Jesus and the principal identification mark of the Christian community. The sign of the cross on the forehead was thought to bring the presence of Jesus into believers, and protect them from evil.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* (the third volume of Clement's trilogy on Christian life), Book VI, chapter XI.

¹⁴⁹ See Tertullian *De Corona*, Chap. 3.

¹⁵⁰ See Tertullian *Apology*, Chap 16.

¹⁵¹ See *Ibid.* Tertullian.

The cross eventually evolved into the crucifix – with the corpus present – at the beginning of the sixth century (520 A.D.).¹⁵² The earliest crosses depicted Jesus in priestly vestments, eyes open, and arms extended straight out as a sign of resurrection and welcome. This was particularly popular throughout the eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁵³ In the tenth century, the priestly garments evolved into a skirt, but the eyes remained open and the arms outstretched.¹⁵⁴ In the Gothic period (the 13th through 15th centuries), the figure of Jesus changes significantly. He is now dead with his head slumped over, blood flowing from His side, and graphic marks of wounds and torture around His body.¹⁵⁵ Earlier crucifixes (before the 13th century) emphasized Jesus’ role as king and priest, but after the 13th century, they emphasized His role as suffering redeemer. The painted crucifixes show the redemptive and victorious aspect of Jesus’ crucifixion with paintings of St. Michael (victor over Satan) or a pelican (symbol of the redemption) on the top of the crucifix.¹⁵⁶ The Franciscans started a stylized school of painted crucifixes (attributed to the maestro of St. Francis) that became very popular throughout Europe. Crucifixes of the Gothic kind may be found today in Spain and throughout Latin America. Most crucifixes today depict Jesus deceased and wounded, but considerably less bloody.¹⁵⁷

III.D.2 Christian Symbols

Most Catholics will recognize several major symbols that adorn pascal candles, Church windows, priests’ vestments, altar cloths, the front covers of liturgical books, Greek icons, and medieval paintings. Most of these symbols go back before the fourth century and were known to Christians alone because they were signs of membership in the Christian Church while it was still under persecution. The following five are still in frequent use:



¹⁵² John Stott (2006). *The Cross of Christ* (20th Anniversary ed.). Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.p. 27.

¹⁵³ Richard Stracke, 2016, “Crosses and Crucifixes: A Historical Study” (<http://www.christianiconography.info/cross.html>).

¹⁵⁴ See Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ See Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ See Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Many contemporary crucifixes have the inscription “INRI” on the top of the cross. This reflects the Roman custom of putting the crime of the crucified person on a cross. In this case, Pontius Pilate’s words from John 19: 19-22 – “*Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum*” (“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”).

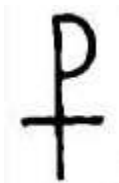
The Chi-Rho symbol. The “X” is the Greek letter “Chi” which is transliterated “Ch” in English, and “P” in the middle is the Greek letter “Rho” which is transliterated as “R”. When the three letters are put together – “Chr,” they are the first three letters of the Greek word “Christos” which means “Christ.”



The “Alpha-Omega” symbol represents the first and the last letters of the Greek language – symbolically indicating, the beginning and the end. It represents the Christological statement in the book of Revelation 22:13 – “I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” This symbol is used on pascal candles and other articles used during the Easter ceremony and is reminiscent of the words used to bless the Paschal candle – “Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, All time belongs to him and all the ages; to him be glory and power through every age and forever. Amen.”



This ancient symbol stands for “Jesus” because it is the first three Greek letters of Jesus’ name. The “I” – *Iota* is transliterated “I” in English; the “H” – “*Ēta*” is transliterated as “E”; and the “S” – “*Sigma*” is transliterated as “S.” These are the first three letters of Jesus’ Greek name – “Iēsus.”



This ancient symbol is called a “Staurogram,” because it contains two of the letters in the Greek word for “cross” – “Stauros.” The second letter “T” -- “*tau*” is superimposed on the fifth letter “P” -- “*rho*” – transliterated as “R” in English.



This symbol of a fish represents the Greek word for it – “*Ichthus*.” It is really an acronym for Jesus (represented by the “I”) Christ (represented by the “Ch”), “Son of God” (represented by the “Th” and the “u”), Savior (represented by the “s”). In Greek, the full expression is “*Iēsous Christos Theou Huios Sōtēr*” – “Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Savior.”

There are several other less common symbols also used in ancient times that appear on Christian vestments, liturgical books, windows and paintings today:

- Good Shepherd (self-explanatory from scripture (from Jn. 10:11-14),
- Dove (symbol of the Holy Spirit and baptism – see Mt. 3:16),
- Peacock (symbol of eternal life premised on the ancient belief that peacock flesh did not decay),
- Pelican (symbol of redemption through the blood of Jesus premised on the ancient belief that pelicans fed their young with their own blood).
- Anchor (symbol of hope through Jesus Christ premised on the ancient belief that an anchor represented safety).

III.D.3

Christian Iconography, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture

The history and literature of Christian iconography, paintings, sculpture, and architecture is enormous. There is simply no way of even beginning to describe it in any meaningful way by a summary explanation in this *Compendium*. However, it is so rich and vast that I am compelled to suggest some websites that beginners can use to explore this immensely spiritual and beautiful domain of Christian sacramentals. Books on architecture are generally quite expensive, and I would recommend that if resources are short, that readers borrow these books from public and church libraries.

With respect to *Christian iconography*, try the following websites:

- The History of Iconography – Classical Christianity --
<http://classicalchristianity.com/2011/07/03/the-history-of-iconography>
- Monastery Icons—Windows into Heaven – The History & Symbolism of Iconography
<https://www.monasteryicons.com/product/The-History-and-Symbolism-of-Iconography/did-you-know>

With respect to *Christian art* through the ages, try the following websites:

- Christian Art: History, Characteristics of Catholic and Protestant Visual Arts --
<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/christian-art.htm>
- The Met: Painting the Life of Christ in Medieval and Renaissance Italy --
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chri/hd_chri.htm

- Medieval Artists: Sculptors, Book Painters, Illuminators and Goldsmiths of the Middle Ages -- <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/medieval-artists.htm>
- List of 10 Remarkable Religious Renaissance Paintings -- <http://historylists.org/art/list-of-10-remarkable-religious-renaissance-paintings.html>

With respect to *Christian architecture*, try the following websites:

- 25 Incredible Examples of Early Christian Architecture -- <http://list25.com/25-incredible-examples-early-christian-architecture/>
- Gothic Architecture: Gothic Architecture – Cathedrals and Castles -- <http://quatr.us/medieval/architecture/gothic.htm>
- Romanesque Architecture -- <http://quatr.us/medieval/architecture/romanesque.htm>
- Baroque Architecture: Definition, History, Origins, Characteristics -- <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/baroque-architecture.htm>

There are literally dozens of excellent websites giving photographs and explanations of Christian art and architecture through the centuries. With respect to the above sites, you can generally click on the picture, church, or sculpture, and the photograph will be enlarged considerably – and sometimes additional explanation will be given.

Though Christian music is not strictly speaking a sacramental, it is so rich, diverse, and spiritually deepening, so much a part of Christian liturgy, and so unified with Christian art and architecture, that it deserves to be studied and used by any Christian seeking inspiration and entrance into the heart of Christ and the Church. For some “starter” websites on Christian music, try the following:

- Compendium of free downloads and You Tubes of Gregorian Chant by Catholic Community Forum -- [http://www.catholicforum.com/forums/showthread.php?12338-Anyone-Interested-in-Gregorian-Chant-Downloads-\(Free\)](http://www.catholicforum.com/forums/showthread.php?12338-Anyone-Interested-in-Gregorian-Chant-Downloads-(Free))
- Welcome to the wonderful world of Baroque Music
<http://www.barquemusic.org/DLower/BACH759T1TrioSonata1BWV525.mp3>

Many of the great composers wrote masses and hymns (from the Psalms, the Magnificat, etc.). You may want to search for free YouTube’s on the masses and hymns of Vivaldi, Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven to get started. There are also many contemporary hymns and songs used for today’s liturgies that may provide inspiration and spiritual awakening.