



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Big Book - Volume 6

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH



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Credible Catholic Big Book Volume Six

The Catholic Church

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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?

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Introduction to Part Two of the *Catechism* and this Volume

Part Two of the *Catechism* concerns the Celebration of the Christian Mystery. It gives particular emphasis to the celebration of the sacred liturgy and the sacramental life. In order to prepare for this discussion, Volumes 6 and 9 through Twelve of *Credible Catholic* will first discuss the need for a Church, Jesus' initiation of the Catholic Church (under the See of Peter and his successors), and the authority and structure of the Catholic Church (Volume 6). We will then proceed to a discussion of the Holy Eucharist and the mass of the Roman rite (Volume 9), Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Sacrament of the Sick, and Holy Orders (Volume 10), the Sacrament of Marriage (Volume 11), and the devotional life of the Church – particularly devotions surrounding Mary, the saints, the Church tradition, and sacramentals (Volume 12).

In this culture, we may no longer assume that young people (and even adults) understand the need for a Church, or why the Catholic Church is the one Church (under the See of Peter) initiated by Jesus to be the fullness of Christian community. This volume is dedicated to providing justification and evidence for these two preparatory topics in five chapters:

1. Why do we need a Church?
2. Why the Catholic Church?
3. The purpose and benefit of the Church: Relationship, Worship, Learning, and Service.
4. The Catholic Church's Structure.
5. The Teaching Authority of the Church.

Chapter One

Why Do We Need a Church?

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Recall from Volume 2 (Chapter Three) that God is present to every human being through the numinous experience and the intuition of the Sacred – so it would seem that our most fundamental way of relating to God would be a “one on one” relationship with Him in prayer. Though this is possible, it is highly unusual in the real world. Most people explicitize their initial relationship with God through a church -- a religious community sharing common belief, common ritual and tradition, and common worship. This is true for two major reasons.

First, the numinous experience and the intuition of the Sacred -- though interiorly powerful and mysterious -- are not explicit. They require discursive interpretation from parents and religious authorities¹ in order to be meaningful and motivational. The early church fathers

¹ See the studies of children throughout the world by the Harvard psychologist Robert Coles in *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Mariner Books 1991).

recognized this and held that the “inner word” (the numinous experience and the intuition of the Sacred – God’s interior presence to us) had to be complemented by the “outer word” (the explicit, discursive, self-revelation of God through religious authorities within a community). Conversely, the outer word would be “dry” – devoid of sacredness, mysteriousness, fascination, and power – without the inner word.

The second reason why religious community is so fundamental is that human beings are *interpersonal and communitarian* by nature. From the moment we are born into the world, we are in relationship with our parents and our extended families. Our initial sense of ourselves is not as solitary and autonomous individuals, but rather as beloved and familial – that is, in relationship. It is difficult to imagine that God did not intend this, and so would provide a means to mediate His initial relationship with us through our families and church communities.

The communitarian dimension of religion is not restricted to the exterior domain – that is – to the world outside of us. It seems that God brings a sense of religious community into our *interior* lives through his presence to our souls. In so doing, he gives us a sense of belonging to a spiritual family and community as a vital part of his presence to us.

The Christian poet John Donne expressed his intuitive awareness of this “spiritual relationship with humanity” in a famous poem:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.

Donne expresses a profound awareness that his relationship with God ties Him into the whole of humanity. We are all inter-involved with one another (which is mutually enhancing) within a spiritual fabric that unites us. Human beings are not only interpersonal, they are transcendently and cosmically interrelated – *everyone* is intertwined with *everyone* else. If Donne’s intuition is correct, then the enlightenment ideal of human autonomy is not only false, but a radical underestimation of the significance and value of every human being.

There is another point we should acknowledge. We have an implicit sense of being caught up in a cosmic struggle between good and evil, reflected in the popular contemporary epics of J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*), J.K. Rowling (*Harry Potter*), and George Lucas (*Star Wars*). We will take this up explicitly in Volume 13. This cosmic struggle between good

and evil entails our universal involvement with the whole of humanity. Our actions and decisions affect this cosmic struggle (for better or for worse), which in turn affects the whole of humanity.

St. Paul had an acute awareness of this universal spiritual relationship among human beings, and said that it is significantly enhanced when we become members of the Christian Church through Baptism. For him, Baptism initiates us into a deeper and more intimate level of spiritual interrelationship that he called “the Body of Christ.”

[T]hat the members may have the same care for one another. 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 12:25-28).

St. Paul implies here that the glorified body of the risen Christ is the unifying fabric among members of the church community which has the effect of relating us to one another in joy and suffering. We need one another, contribute to one another, and support one another through our baptism into spiritual communion in Christ. St. Paul calls this spiritual communion in Christ, “*Koinōnia*,” which carries with it a connotation of intimacy, deep feeling, and love.

He also saw an even deeper level of spiritual interrelationship within the “Body of Christ” which occurs through the ritual that Jesus gave at the Last Supper – His body and blood given through bread and wine:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion (*Koinōnia*) in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion (*Koinōnia*) in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10:16-17).

I recall the first time I recognized this deep spiritual communion with other Christian believers when I was about fourteen years old. It was during our family Christmas celebration, and I was feeling a profound sense of joy and consolation, but I could not figure out why I was so happy. My mother was driving us to Mass, and I said to her, “Mom, I really feel very happy today but I am not sure why.” She thought about it for a moment, and said, “Well, did you get all the presents you wanted?” I said, “Yes, but it’s not the presents that are making me this happy – I have gotten lots of presents before and they never did anything like this to me.” So my mom got a hopeful look in her eyes and said, “Well, maybe you’re looking at the joy of life beyond presents and material things, and maybe you are joyful at being so close to the family during Christmas dinner and festivities.” I responded right away, “Well, I like our family and everything, but I am quite certain that’s not it.” And then she had what I consider to be a profound moment of graced inspiration, and said, “Maybe it’s the joy of the whole communion of saints coursing through your veins on this Christmas feast.” I knew right away that this was it. Don’t ask me how, because I was not a very spiritually profound child. It was as if I had a certitude beyond me that knew that it wasn’t just my joy, but it was thousands upon thousands of other people’s joy, and I was privileged to be able to feel it and be a part of it. Years later when I was studying the above passages from St. Paul, it became apparent to me that I had had one of what was to be many experiences of being involved in the Mystical Body of Christ.

Who are we then? We are an integral part of a unity of humanity through God whose lives are tied up with one another – such that we can contribute to or diminish happiness, love, and goodness through our words and actions. If this is the case, then we are not called only to an *individual* relationship with a Transcendent Personal Being, but to a relationship with the whole of humanity through that Transcendent Being. We are called not only to individual prayer but to *Koinōnia* – Church community and spiritual communion. Therefore, church community is indispensable to our spiritual nature, fulfillment, and destiny.

Beyond the need for spiritual community (both interiorly and exteriorly) there are four other reasons we need church to actualize our true dignity and destiny:

- (1) A source of Revelation,
- (2) A form of sacred ritual, worship, and symbol,
- (3) A source of teaching to help us interpret sacred doctrines in light of the practical requirements of living in an ever-changing world,
- (4) A source of spiritual teaching and guidance to help us in our relationship with God through prayer.

We will discuss all of these needs for church in the next two chapters. For the moment, we will begin with a discussion of the first point concerning our need for God's self-revelation.

Though reason, experience, and science can give significant evidence for the existence of “a unique unrestricted uncaused reality existing through itself as an unrestricted act of thinking which is the creator of everything else that exists,” they cannot tell us much about the heart of God. Is He loving? Is there a heaven? If there is a heaven, how does one get there? Does God redeem suffering, does He guide, inspire and protect us? (See Volume 1, Chapter Two). All such questions require the self-revelation of God—and this in turn requires prophets and other religious authorities to mediate the revelatory Word of God to the community. This normally entails a church community to which the prophets and religious authorities belong. In sum, we need a source of revelation and so we naturally turn to a church community with religious authority to attain it.

As we saw in Volume 3, there are many differences among world religions, but God has also been quite consistent in His revelation to all of them—which is reflected in the seven common characteristics elucidated by Friedrich Heiler. This led to the question of whether God would give a definitive revelation of Himself—an ultimate, personal, self-revelation to help us actualize our true dignity and destiny. We showed that Jesus Christ revealed five unique dimensions of God and human potential that not only changed the history of religions, but also world culture and history:

1. Love as the highest commandment to which all other virtues and commandments are subordinated.
2. His definition of “love” (“*agape*”) through the Beatitudes
3. His revelation of the unconditional love of God through the Parable of the Prodigal Son and His distinctive address of God as “*Abba*”

4. His revelation of His unconditional love through His love of sinners, the sick, the poor, and the world—manifest supremely in his self-sacrificial death (which showed the similarity between Himself and His Father as unconditional love)
5. His identification of Himself with the poorest of the poor and with the slaves which constituted such a large part of ancient society—“whatsoever you do for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do to me.” (Mt. 25:40)

If we believe that these five distinguishing marks of Jesus’ revelation are the fulfillment of truth and meaning for us and the world, and we believe in the veracity of Jesus’ resurrection in glory, gift of the Spirit of God, and miracles by His own authority (discussed throughout Volume 3) then *we will want to put our faith in the Revelation of Jesus.*

Though Revelation comes through the Person of Jesus Christ, it is mediated through religious texts, (i.e. the New Testament) and the religious authorities and churches that formulated and continued to interpret those texts. This leads us to the question concerning which religious authority—which church—we will want to choose as the true interpreter of the revelation of Jesus. Since there are many Christian churches, we will want to select the one that best conforms to the intention of the historical Jesus—the Son of God Who came to be with us.

Chapter Two

Why the *Catholic Church*?

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If we hold that Jesus is (as the Son of God) the ultimate source of God’s Revelation and also hold that the religious authorities who formulated the texts of the New Testament did so in a manner consistent with Jesus’ teaching, then we will also hold that the New Testament scriptures are the word of God. Though they can never be augmented, they can be interpreted for every age and culture. Scripture interpretation is not a simple matter – it is transmitted to us through oral traditions, literary genre, and the interpretive lenses of the Gospel and Epistle writers. When scripture passages appear to conflict with one another or different interpretations appear to conflict with one another, the faithful can be caught in confusion, and seriously deceived. This means that there will have to be some kind of teaching authority within the Church. If there were not, the Church community would be divided into factions, each having different interpretations of the same basic books of scripture. One does not have to look too deeply into history to find such factions in the earliest years of the Church and throughout its history – the early Gnostic movements, the Arian and Monophysite Movements, and the proliferation of thousands of denominations within the Reformation Movement.²

Did Jesus anticipate the possibility of such divisions within the Christian community? Did He intend to initiate a church in order to perpetuate his word and maintain unity among its members? Did he appoint St. Peter as the head of the church (as indicated by the well-known logion in Mt. 16:18-20)? If He did appoint Peter as head of the church did He also intend that not only Peter, but his successors hold the same office as head of the church? If so, then this would

² There are currently 33,000 denominations that regard themselves as Protestant or reformed.

indicate Jesus' intention to start one church which was to be governed by Peter and his successors until the end of the world—that is, the Catholic church (governed by the successors of Peter). I believe that there is significant evidence to give an affirmative answer to all the above questions and therefore believe that it is reasonable and responsible to hold that the Catholic church is the one church intended by Jesus to perpetuate his word, his ministry, and his worldwide call to salvation through Him. Let us take each of these questions in turn.

I.

Jesus as the Universal Temple—the Unifying Body of the Christian Church

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Did Jesus anticipate the potential for factions and divisions within the Christian community? It can scarcely be believed that He did not. Jesus lived at a time when Judaism was divided and even fragmented into many parties and schools—Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and many other sub-factions and extremes. As He 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.” (1 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. (See below in this Chapter).

II.

Did Jesus Think the Church Would Endure beyond the Apostles?

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Did Jesus intend that the church would only last one generation—just to the end of the apostles' lives? There is considerable evidence militating against this. First the charge to proclaim the Gospel to the world (Mt. 28:19-20; and Mk. 13:10) manifest in the missionary activity initiated by the apostolic church immediately after Jesus' resurrection and gift of the Spirit, seems to anticipate more than a generation of evangelization. Secondly, the eschatological discourse in Mark 13—if correctly interpreted by Robert Stein³--likely represents the view of Jesus that there will be a significant period (of unknown duration) between the death of the Apostles and the second coming of the Son of Man (the end of the world).

³ Robert Stein 2014 *Jesus, the Temple and the Coming Son of Man* (Inter Varsity Press)

According to Stein, the first part of the discourse (Mk. 13:1-13) was the first tribulation for the church which ends with the death of the apostles. There is the implication in Mark 13:10 that the church must endure until the gospel is preached to all nations. After the death of the apostles the church will continue to preach the word to all nations, for an undisclosed period of time; then the final tribulation will begin with a “desolating abomination standing where he should not (Mk. 13:14).” This will be followed by a final tribulation which will conclude with the final coming of the Son of Man. (Mk. 13:14-27).

If Mark 13 accurately reflects the views of Jesus, we must conclude that Jesus believed that the church would last beyond the death of Peter and the other apostles. In view of this, it seems likely that Jesus’ commission to Peter was not merely to Peter alone, but to all his successors. If Jesus was interested *only* in commissioning Peter and not creating an office of highest teaching and juridical authority—then Jesus would be rightly accused of creating a church without adequate juridical capacity to prevent endless divisions and factions throughout its history. This can scarcely be imagined—for if Jesus saw the need to have a final juridical authority in Peter to prevent these divisions in Peter’s generation, why would he have allowed all subsequent generations to fall victim to division and disunity? It is not reasonable or responsible to believe that he would have done this.

III.

The Historicity of Matthew’s Commissioning Logion (Mt. 16:17-19)

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So that leaves us with the central question—does the commissioning logion in Mt. 16:18-19 reflect the historical Jesus’ desire to create a highest office of the church for final teaching authority and final mitigation of doctrinal and juridical disputes? To do this we will want to answer three subsidiary questions. Why is this central logion mentioned only in the Gospel of Matthew, or is it? If this logion reflects a very early tradition of the church (also recognized by Paul and John), then, does it give Peter an extraordinary and supreme authority not given to the other apostles? If so, was it Jesus’ intention to give this authority to the successors of Peter? As noted above, we might infer Jesus’ intention to convey this authority on Peter’s successors because of His belief that the church would endure beyond Peter, but is there evidence in the *text itself* that Jesus intended to bestow this authority on those successors to create a highest juridical and teaching *office*. Let us begin with the logion:

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And I tell you that you are Peter, [*Petros*] and on this rock [*petra*] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17-20).

This text is so important to the future of the church that it provokes the question of why it is only to be found in Matthew. One possible explanation for why it is not to be found in Mark or Luke is that it comes from Matthew’s special sources—and therefore was not in Mark or Q. Another possible explanation is that Peter had a close relationship with Mark (influencing the

writing of his Gospel) and did not want to be put in a self-aggrandizing role next to his true master, Jesus. Luke's omission of the commission may be attributable to his neat division between his Gospel (the story of *Jesus*) and the Acts of the Apostles (the story of the Holy Spirit working through *Peter*, in the first half of Acts, and Paul in the second half). There can be no doubt that Luke recognizes Peter's primacy—not only because of his centrality in the first part of Acts (Chap 1-15), but also Peter's implied superiority to Paul—particularly at the Council of Jerusalem (in that section). Perhaps all of the above reasons are responsible for the seeming omission.

Though the commissioning is absent in Mark and Luke, the early Aramaic tradition underlying the commission in Matthew is very probably known to Paul and John. Before looking at those texts, we will want to determine whether there is a primitive Aramaic tradition (going back to Jesus) standing behind the commission logion in Matthew. There are three reasons for suspecting this. First, the logion is filled with Semitisms—literal translations of an Aramaic original into Greek (which can be detected by their peculiar words and structures). These Semitisms indicate an early Aramaic origin before Matthew's Greek rendition of the Gospel. Some of these Semitisms are:

1. Jesus' expression "blessed are you" *asmakavrio* is typically Semitic.
2. The use of "bar Jonah" is also typically Semitic.
3. "Flesh and blood" to refer to human beings is also typically Semitic
4. Jesus' renaming of Peter was meant to be a pun in *Aramaic*—"You are *Cephas*, and on this *Cephas* (Rock), I will build my church." However in order to translate Jesus' *Aramaic* pun into Greek Matthew had to make the feminine noun *petra* (rock) into a masculine proper name *Petros*.
5. "Gates of Hades [netherworld]" is sometimes used by pagans, but is typically Jewish
6. There are several parallel expressions in the Scrolls of Qumran⁴

In view of this, it is highly unlikely that this text was a redaction of Matthew or a creation of the later church. It very likely represents an early Aramaic tradition of which both Paul (in the Letter to the Galatians) and John (Chapters Twenty and Twenty-one) were apparently aware (see below in this Chapter).

Renaming of Peter indicates that Jesus is the origin of this primitive Aramaic tradition. Why? It requires a very high authority to rename a person in Semitic culture. The name chosen by the parents is almost sacrosanct. Jesus not only changes Peter's *first* name from "Simon" to "*Cephas*," He also changes his *last* name from Bar-John to Bar-Jonah (associating him with that biblical figure). Who besides Jesus would have the authority to do this, and have it accepted by the renamed person?⁵ Furthermore, Paul is aware of the renaming of Peter, and refers to it in the context of linking his commissioning to Peter's commissioning. (See below in this Chapter).

⁴ See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison 1991. *International Critical Commentary Volume 2 Matthew 8-18* (New York: T & T Clark Ltd.) pp 626-629

⁵ Ibid

So what is the evidence that both Paul and John knew of the primitive Aramaic tradition standing behind Matthew's commissioning logion? With respect to Paul, the first two chapters of the Letter to the Galatians has five parallels between Peter's commissioning (in the above logion) and Paul's commissioning as an apostle:

1. After three years in Arabia Paul goes up to Jerusalem to meet with *Peter alone* for fifteen days—presumably to integrate himself *officially* within the church of Jesus Christ. After this, seeming approbation from Peter, Paul considers himself to be missioned to the Gentile church (see Gal 1: 18).
2. Paul is aware of Peter's commissioning *by Jesus* to be entrusted with the Gospel to the circumcised—while he has received the same commissioning from the risen Jesus to head the apostolate to the uncircumcised (Gal 2:7-8).
3. In connecting his commissioning with Peter's commission, Paul translates the name "*Cephas*" "*Petros*" to show his Greek readers the meaning of Peter's name—"Rock"—indicating foundation of the Church. This is the *only* time Paul translates the name "*Cephas*."
4. In Galatians 1:1 and 1:12 Paul uses the same expression "flesh and blood" to refer to "human" used in the commissioning logion in Matthew. This is the only time he uses this expression in his entire corpus. Is it merely a coincidence that this unique use of these terms—which precisely parallels Matthew—is used in a passage referring to Paul's own commissioning?
5. Paul refers to "James, Cephas and John" as pillars of the church which has overtones of Jesus' commissioning of Peter as the foundation rock (Gal 2:9).

In view of these parallels, it seems likely that Paul was aware of the primitive Aramaic tradition underlying Matthew's commissioning logion—and uses these parallels to shore up his own commissioning by Jesus as Apostle to the Gentiles.⁶

Is there evidence that John was also aware of Jesus' special commissioning of Peter as head of the church? We must assume that he was aware of it because of the central passage on Peter's commissioning in the Johannine appendix (Jn 21:15-19) and Jesus' conferral of the power to bind and loose on the apostles (Jn: 20: 21-23). Though John does not mention Peter's change of name in the commissioning passage (Jn. 21: 15-19), he acknowledges it at the beginning of the Gospel, translating the Aramaic "*Cephas*" to "*Petros*" for his Greek readers: "Then he [Andrew] brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Kephass' (which is translated Peter)" -- Jn 1:42. Let us now examine John's account of Peter's commissioning after the resurrection:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus

⁶ Ibid

said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” (Jn. 21: 15-19).

There are three aspects of this passage indicating Jesus’ intention to set Peter apart as head of the church:

1. Jesus speaks *only* to Peter in the special commission—which takes place in front of the other apostles who are witnesses to it.
2. Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” (Jn. 21:15) The intention here is to indicate Peter’s heightened fidelity and loyalty to Jesus—which indicates why Jesus has chosen him to occupy his office as “shepherd.”
3. After each of Peter’s three responses, Jesus commissions Peter either to feed or tend his sheep. In these words Jesus gives the *exclusive* commission to Peter to take over his office as “primary shepherd.” Inasmuch as the other disciples are not given this special commission we can infer that it is consistent with the one set out in Matthew 16:17-19.

There is one more key historical indication of Peter’s primacy which is embedded in the order of the resurrection appearances given in the Pauline list in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7. Reginald H. Fuller (an Anglican priest) believes that the order of this list – and the order of the appearances themselves – is not arbitrary. Rather, it is “Church founding” and establishes the primacy of Peter in the “eschatological community.”⁷ Fuller believes that the use of the name “Cephas” (instead of “Simon”) indicates Peter’s designated role to be the rock or foundation of the Church:

The theological significance of the appearances to Peter, we find ... [is indicated in 1 Corinthians 15:5] by the use of the name Cephas..... Simon Bar-Jonah receives the name Cephas ... appointing him to be the foundation upon which the eschatological community is built.⁸

Apparently, Jesus’ ordering of His appearances to the disciples confirms the order He indicated in His ministry – namely, that Peter be the head of the apostles and the Church itself.

So what might we conclude about the historicity of Jesus’ special commission to Peter to be head of the apostles and head of the church? First, the tradition is not exclusive to Matthew 16:17-19, but very probably arises out of a primitive Aramaic tradition going back to Jesus Himself. Secondly, St. Paul is clearly aware of the commissioning language used in the primitive tradition standing behind Matthew’s logion. Thirdly, if John is not aware of the specific tradition underlying Matthew’s commissioning logion, he is certainly aware of all the salient points in it—not only the change in Peter’s name, but also the exclusive commissioning to take over Jesus’

⁷ See Reginald H. Fuller 1971 *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: MacMillan Publishing) p. 35.

⁸ Fuller 1971 p. 35

office as primary shepherd of the Christian community based on Peter's intense fidelity and love for Him. Though the Gospel of Luke does not mention commissioning, the Acts of the Apostles sets Peter in a central place (in Acts 1-15), makes him spokesman of the universal church at the Council of Jerusalem, and implies his superiority to Paul.

In view of all this, it is difficult to deny that Peter was given a special commission by Jesus to be head of the Church. Furthermore, if Matthew or John had invented this special commissioning, it would have been hotly disputed in the apostolic church whose leadership would have been acutely aware of the falsity of such an important tradition—were it not true. Given the highly probable historical veracity of the commissioning logion, we must now examine what it means—specifically whether it refers not just to Peter, but also to the office of “primary shepherd” which Peter is the first to occupy. Let us now turn to the passage in question.

IV.

Did Jesus' Commission of Peter Include His Successors?

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“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this *rock* I will build *my church*, and *the gates of Hades* will not overcome it. I will give you the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*; whatever you *bind* on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you *loose* on earth will be loosed in heaven (Mt 16:18-20).

There are five italicized terms in the above passage which require explanation: “rock,” “my church,” “the gates of Hades,” “keys of the kingdom of heaven,” “bind and loose.” An explanation of each, particularly the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” will indicate the strong likelihood that Jesus is not only commissioning Peter to be head of the Church, but rather creating an office of “Prime Minister,” of which Peter is to be the first holder. We will examine each phrase in turn.

“Rock” refers to the “foundation rock” upon which *Jesus' Church* is to be built. The context is so clear that it does not warrant other interpretations.⁹ Why does Jesus use this particular image to rename Peter at the commission? Davies and Allison see a parallel between Abraham (the foundational leader of the people of God – who is called a “rock” in Isaiah 51:1) and Peter (the foundational leader of the new people of God). They note in this regard:

Here the new people of God is brought into being, hewed not from the rock Abraham but instead founded on the rock Peter.¹⁰

A name in First Century Jewish thought represents the core identity of a person as well as his purpose in life. Thus, the renaming of Simon as “Cephas” (which is unique to Peter) indicates that his “*raison d'être*” is to be the foundation of Jesus' Church and the foundational leader of the new people of God.

⁹ Davies and Allison 2004 *International Critical Commentary* p.614

¹⁰ Ibid p. 624.

The terms “my Church [*ekklesia*]” very probably refers to the new universal church – not a particular local assembly. Davies and Allison hold that the future tense (“I *will* build”) refers to that universal church – and that the concept “church of Jesus” (“my church”) does not refer to a particular assembly in Hebrew, but rather to “*qahal-YHWH*” – “the congregation of God.”¹¹ This interpretation is accepted by most New Testament exegetes – including Bultmann.¹² Given this, Jesus is very probably establishing Peter as the head of the new universal church which is to come through his passion, death, resurrection, and gift of the spirit.

Recall from above, that in both the gospels of Mark and John, Jesus proclaims that *He* will be the new universal temple to replace the old temple built by human hands (Jn 2:19 and Mk 14:58). John interprets this text by noting “The temple he had spoken of was his body” (Jn 2:21). This interpretation does not come from John, but is consistent with the early church’s interpretation of Jesus’ action to cleanse the temple (the same context as John – Jn 2: 18-21). In Mark’s version of the cleansing (as well as Matthew and Luke), when Jesus’ authority is questioned, he vexes the Pharisees, but then tells the Parable of the Wicked Tenants in which he indirectly associates himself with “the only Son – the beloved one” (Mk 12:6). After predicting the beating and death of the son (himself), he then asks, “Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture: The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Mk 12: 10-11). According to N.T. Wright, the cornerstone is that of the new universal temple to be built in place of the old temple.¹³ Thus, it seems that Mark’s interpretation is the same as John’s – Jesus is making his body the new universal temple for everyone in all future generations through his forthcoming death and resurrection.

Did Jesus have this in mind when he declared to Peter, “You are Rock and upon this rock, I will build *my church*, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it”? It is likely that he did because he seems to have had this idea in mind *before* he predicts and interprets His passion, death, and resurrection (Mt 16: 21-28). This interpretation explains why he is knowingly going to Jerusalem to encounter his painful destiny. Jerusalem is the place of the temple -- where the cleansing action must take place – and where his prophetic claim to become the new universal temple (after the destruction of the old one) must be initiated and fulfilled.

This brings us to our next expression: “the gates of Hades.” Though this may seem like a pagan expression (because of the term “Hades”), it is really not. As Davies and Allison indicate, it is a very common Semitic expression – and the Greek translation of it is very likely a Semitism.¹⁴ The expression, “the gates of Hades shall not overcome it,” has an obvious ring of permanence or ongoingness – not limited to the current time or any specific time. Since Peter is the foundation rock of Jesus’ church – the universal temple constituted through his risen body – it will last forever – and it will never be overcome by evil or the domain of evil.

How does the above analysis help us with our question about whether Jesus is referring only to Peter or to Peter and all his successors? If the above interpretation of Matthew 16:18 is

¹¹ Ibid p. 629.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ N.T. Wright 1996, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), pp. 497-501

¹⁴ Davies and Allison 1991, *International Critical Commentary on Matthew* p. 623.

correct, and Jesus intended to start a universal and permanent church through His own body on the foundation rock of Peter, it follows that if Jesus believed that the church would last longer than Peter, then the commission to Peter would apply to all his successors until the end of time. As noted above (Section II of this Chapter) with respect to Mark's eschatological discourse, Jesus very likely believed that there would be a period of time between the death of the apostles and the final tribulation initiating the second coming of the Son of Man. In view of all this, it is quite probable that Jesus intended to start a universal church (through his own risen body) lasting beyond the apostles to the end of the age – and that he appointed Peter to hold the highest teaching and juridical office “binding and loosing” in that church. Is there anything else in this logion which corroborates this interpretation? There is – the “keys to the kingdom of heaven.”

Before discussing the “keys to the kingdom,” it will be helpful to discuss what is meant by the “authority to bind and loose.” Viviano describes Peter's power as follows:

God shall bind and loose what Peter binds and looses. This verse gives enormous authority to Peter. What is the nature of this authority? Binding and loosing are rabbinic technical terms that can refer to binding the devil in exorcism, to the juridical acts of excommunication and of definitive decision making (a form of teaching through legislation, policy setting). See J. Jeremias, *TDNT* 3 744-53. The authority to bind and loose is given to the disciples in [Mt]18:18, but to Peter alone are accorded the revelation, the role of the rock of foundation (Eph 2:20), and especially the keys.¹⁵

Viviano and J. Jeremias interpret Peter's authority to “bind and loose” as highest teaching and juridical authority. The reason for such authority is first and foremost to lead the people of God in the truth of Jesus himself. Yet there is another very important reason for these two kinds of authority – to resolve doctrinal (teaching) disputes and juridical (church governance) disputes. Later in Matthew's gospel (Mt. 18:18) Jesus gives this same authority to bind and loose to all the apostles, but he does not do so in the same way that he gives it to Peter. Before giving this authority to the other apostles, Jesus first gives it to Peter in the context of the foundation rock as well as the keys to the kingdom (see below). Both of these images indicate *ultimate* or *highest* authority to resolve doctrinal and juridical disputes. After establishing Peter's supreme authority, he then bestows the non-supreme authority on the other apostles. We are now in a position to analyze “the keys to the kingdom of heaven.”

The phrase “keys to the kingdom of heaven” has a rich history filling it with meaning – not only for Jesus and Peter, but for the modern church. Timothy Gray presents a compelling interpretation of this phrase in light of several Old Testament texts in his book *Peter – Keys to Following Jesus*.¹⁶ The most striking Old Testament parallel to Jesus' commission occurs in Isaiah 22:18-22. In this passage, Isaiah delivers an oracle to Shebna who was appointed prime minister of the house – the kingdom – of Judah by King Hezekiah. Shebna proved himself unfaithful by not trusting in God -- anticipating Israel's fall to the Assyrians. Assuming he would die at the hands of the Assyrians, he constructed an elaborate tomb for himself. Since Shebna had

¹⁵ Benedict Viviano 1990 “The Gospel According to Matthew” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall) p. 630.

¹⁶ Timothy Gray, 2016, *Peter – Keys to Following Jesus* (San Francisco: Ignatius and Augustine Institute) pp. 70-76.

not trusted God, God replaced him as prime minister by sending Isaiah the prophet with an oracle against Shebna and appointing Eliakim as his replacement:

Compare the last line from the above oracle of Isaiah

(“I will place on his [Eliakim’s] shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open”) with the words of Jesus to appoint Peter as head of the Church – “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:19). The parallelism is so striking that it cannot be thought that this passage from Isaiah was not in the mind of Jesus when he used his words of appointment to Peter.

Recall that Isaiah’s words were used to appoint Eliakim as *prime minister* over the kingdom of Judah. Isaiah’s use of the word “key” along with the authority to open and shut were words of installation – to make Eliakim the new prime minister over the house of Judah. In the previous line, Isaiah deposes Shebna from his *office* and takes away his *authority over the kingdom*. Thus, when he gives Eliakim the “*key along with the authority to open and shut*,” he is installing him in the *office* held by Shebna (prime minister), giving him the full authority of that office.

If Jesus had the passage from Isaiah in mind, then he viewed his declaration to Peter – using the word “key” with the authority to bind and loose – as words of *installation* as well. If so, then he probably intended to install Peter into an *office* of “*highest authority*” (like that of prime minister in the case of Eliakim). So what does this mean? If giving the “*keys*” means “to appoint or install someone as chief administrator of a kingdom” then Jesus likely meant to install Peter in that office. The term “keys” implies administrative authority over a kingdom – a high office. If Jesus did not intend to initiate an office with high administrative authority, why would he have used the image of “keys” in conjunction with the authority to bind and loose? Why use an expression which implies such an office with such striking parallels to Isaiah’s oracle? Why wouldn’t we suppose that he is installing Peter in an office of supreme authority? If he really believed that his church would last beyond the death of Peter until the end of time (which is likely given the Marcan eschatological discourse), why wouldn’t he have foreseen the need for other individuals – after Peter – to occupy that highest administrative office of “binding and loosing”?

If we view “binding and loosing” as the ultimate authority to resolve doctrinal and juridical disputes that could lead to fractioning and division – that is, the ultimate authority to preserve unity within the church – why would Jesus have thought that such ultimate authority would only be needed during the time of Peter? If he really believed that the church would last beyond Peter, would he not have extended this office (with its ultimate authority) to resolve doctrinal and juridical disputes in future ages? It is difficult to believe that he would have made such an artificial restriction. Aside from the fact that it would make him a very poor student of history, it would have been needlessly limiting. In view of all this, it is probable that Jesus intended to create an office of highest authority (represented by the “keys to the kingdom”) which would last as long as the universal church he would unify through his own risen body. If so, then Peter is only the first of many to hold that office. If there are going to be successors to that office, it must be thought that its first occupant would give some advice on how to choose a

successor – and even who that successor might be. As we shall see below, Peter did do this with respect to Clement – his successor.

V.

Peter in the Acts of the Apostles and at the Council of Jerusalem

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Peter plays a central role in the Acts of the Apostles. If he did not have supreme doctrinal and juridical authority, the roles he plays in the early church would be completely inexplicable. 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 Annanias 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)...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...Paul sets him apart as a witness of the resurrection (1 Co 15:5). On Paul's first visit to Jerusalem he conferred with Peter but saw no other apostle except James (Gal 1:18).¹⁷

The role of Peter in the Council of Jerusalem is particularly important (Acts 15:1-21). Apparently, a strong faction of Jewish Christians (seemingly from the Jerusalem Church) were trying to impose the Jewish law upon Gentile converts. Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem to appeal to the apostles (who are evidently regarded as having a higher authority than he) to resolve the matter before it caused serious division within the church.

The apostles convene the first council of the church (the Council of Jerusalem) to resolve the matter. Luke presents the conclusions of the Council in two steps:

- The decree of Peter (Acts 15:1-12).
- The decree of James (Acts 15: 13-21).

Scholars are divided about whether Luke telescoped two different councils in his account of the Council of Jerusalem -- one led by Peter and concerned with circumcision (Acts 15: 1-12), and the other led by James concerned with dietary proscriptions and unlawful marriage (Acts 15: 13-21). Whatever the case, Luke indicates that Peter's authority is greater than that of James; it comes directly from God; and is *universal* – applicable to the whole church. James, in contrast,

¹⁷ John L. McKenzie, 1965 *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Publishing) pp 663-664.

does not claim authority from God himself. Instead he appeals to Moses and the prophets and restricts his decree to Jewish Christians – probably in the church which he oversees – the Church of Jerusalem.¹⁸ A brief discussion of these points will show that in the early church, Peter’s authority is precisely what we would expect in light of Jesus’ commissioning – the highest universal authority.

After the Council was convened, Peter – speaking on behalf of the Church itself – read the decree concerning circumcision and perhaps dietary proscriptions (Acts 15: 7). Notice that Peter claims his authority comes from God Himself:

My brothers, you are well aware that from the early days
God made his choice among you that through *my* mouth the
Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe (Acts 15:7).

Peter’s commissioning by Jesus and his witness of the Holy Spirit descending upon Cornelius and his household (Gentiles) without being subject to the law of Moses, convinces Peter that God Himself has given him authority to resolve the dispute within the church. Since Peter speaks with the authority of God, he does not have to make an appeal to Jewish scripture or the Mosaic Law (unlike James who takes great pains to do so).

Notice too that Peter’s decree is universal and definitive. After he shows how God bore witness to the authenticity of the gentiles’ conversion (without being subject to the law of Moses) by sending the Holy Spirit upon them, he gives his theological justification – that the gentiles are saved in the same way as Jewish Christians – that is, “By faith [and] ...through the grace of the Lord Jesus...” After he presents the justification and theological explanation of his decision, the assembly falls silent (Acts 15:12), meaning that Peter’s word put an end to all debate and discussion. It was definitive.

Peter’s decree stands in stark contrast to that of James. James enjoys no direct authority from God (or special commission from Jesus). Therefore, he must find another ground of authority for his primarily Jewish audience (in the Church of Jerusalem which he leads). To do this, he makes an appeal to Jewish scripture – first to the prophet Amos (Am 9: 11-12 in Acts 15:15), and then to Moses (Acts 15:21). James’ responsibility is to give the detailed information to the Jewish Christians about the three areas proscribed to the gentiles. These three areas were considered particularly offensive to his audience – and his proscription would have a calming effect. James has no authority beyond this subsidiary role.

What might we conclude from Luke’s presentation of the Council of Jerusalem? In around 50 AD (the time of the Council), Peter was already acknowledged as the head of the church who could claim special commission from Jesus and direct authority from God. James and Paul both implicitly acknowledge this – James in his acknowledged secondary role and Paul in referring the matter to the apostles whose spokesman is Peter. Peter can speak on his own authority – and does not need to make recourse to the Mosaic Law or to the Old Testament

¹⁸ Some scholars are divided about whether Luke telescoped two different councils into the one Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Whatever the case, the following observations about the role of Peter versus that of James are equally valid

Scriptures. Furthermore his decree is universal for the whole church – not for one part of the church (i.e. Jerusalem). It can scarcely be believed that Peter would have this authority if it were not given to him explicitly by Jesus.

VI.

Were Peter's Successors accorded Primacy in the Post-Petrine Church?

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The best way to determine whether Petrine primacy was conveyed to Peter's successors (the bishops of Rome) is to examine what the popes and the bishops subject to them acknowledged. Unfortunately letters and texts of the popes succeeding St. Peter are rare indeed, but four texts pertaining to Petrine primacy from early sources still survive today:

1. Pope St. Clement of Rome's Letter to the Corinthian Church (AD 80).
2. Bishop St. Ignatius of Antioch's Letter to the Church of Rome (around 100 AD).
3. St. Irenaeus – from his work *Adversus Haereses* (180 AD).
4. Bishop Cyprian of Carthage from *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* (250 AD).

These texts confirm an unbroken line of thought from the death of St. Peter to the writings of Cyprian of Carthage that the successors of St. Peter maintained his primacy over the universal church in matters of teaching and the resolution of juridical disputes. We will examine each text in turn.

VI.A

Pope Clement I

Pope Clement of Rome (**80-99 AD** – considered as either the second or fourth Pope – ((depending on how we view Peter's consecration of Linus and Cletus¹⁹)) assumes that he has the authority to order the *Corinthian* Church under *obedience* to reconstitute its leaders after they were deposed:

Owing to the sudden and repeated calamities and misfortunes which have befallen us, we must acknowledge that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the matters in dispute among you, beloved; and especially that abominable and unholy sedition, alien and foreign to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-willed persons have inflamed to such madness that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be loved by all men, has been greatly defamed. . . . Accept our counsel and you will have nothing to regret. . . . If anyone disobey the things which have been said by him [God] **through us** [i.e., that you must reinstate your leaders], let them know that they will involve

¹⁹ According to Tertullian (c. 23), Clement was consecrated by Peter himself, and he believed that Clement was the immediate successor to Peter with care for the universal Church. In Tertullian's view, Peter's consecration of Linus and Cletus were for the purposes of service to the people of Rome – as distinct from Clement who had custody over the universal Church. An earlier account from St. Irenaeus (c. 180) declares that Clement was the fourth Pope. Eusebius of Caesarea (*Ecclesiastical History* – c. 314) follows Irenaeus' ordering in his *Ecclesiastical History*. In any case the witness to Petrine supremacy is quite early – probably around 95 A.D.

themselves in transgression and in no small danger. . . . You will afford us joy and gladness if being obedient to the things which we have **written through the Holy Spirit**, you will root out the wicked passion of jealousy." ²⁰

Pope Clement I was consecrated Bishop of Rome by Peter with authority over the universal church, according to Tertullian and the *Liber Pontificalis*. The former viewed Clement as the immediate successor to Peter while the latter viewed him as the third successor to Peter – after Linus and Cletus. The confusion comes from the fact that Peter seems to have consecrated both Linus and Cletus for priestly service to the church – while consecrating Clement as leader of the universal church (Tertullian and the *Liber Pontificalis*).

As the above letter indicates, Clement was certain that he possessed the authority of God – as Peter's successor – to resolve disputes for the *whole* church – beyond the See of Rome. He also believes that he had the authority to order the leaders of the Corinthian Church under obedience and under pain of sin to follow his orders. Apparently they complied. If Clement had not had this authority, the matter would have gone unresolved, leading to further breakdown and disunity in the church in the first century. Clement couldn't have claimed this universal authority on his own. There must have been some recognition on the part of bishops and church leaders in the first century that Clement possessed the same universal authority over the church as Peter – and we must assume that Peter confirmed this in his consecration of the three bishops (including Clement) who would be his successors. We have no written record of such a clarification, but it would be difficult to believe that Peter would have consecrated bishops for the See of Rome without attending to such an important matter of succession – particularly as he anticipated his persecution which occurred around 64AD under the rule of Nero.

VI.B

St. Ignatius of Antioch

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop of Antioch, at the turn of the First Century, wrote a letter to the Church of Rome acknowledging that it was superior to and presided over all other Christian Churches. He acknowledges the presidency of the Roman Church twice in his greeting:

Ignatius . . . to the church also which holds the presidency, in the location of the country of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing,

²⁰ *Letter to the Corinthians* 1, 58–59, 63.

<http://www.catholic.com/tracts/the-authority-of-the-pope-part-i>

worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and, because you hold the presidency in love, named after Christ and named after the Father.²¹

According to Ludwig Ott:

Clear recognition of the consciousness of the Primacy of the Roman Bishops, and of the recognition of the Primacy by the other churches appears at the end of the 1st Century... St. Ignatius elevated the Roman community over all the communities using his epistle as a solemn form of address. Twice he says of it that it is the presiding community, which expresses a relationship of superiority...²²

Charles Belmonte makes a comparative analysis of the tone of Ignatius' many letters to other bishops and the above letter to the Church of Rome:

When one compares the tone of the epistles of St Ignatius, one notices that the epistle addressed to the church of Rome is different. There is no doubt that the bishop of Antioch is writing to a superior. He greets the church that is "presiding in the chief place of the Roman territory;" evidently, presiding not over itself but over the other Christian communities. He calls her "the one presiding in charity," or "presiding in the bond of love." This is his way of saying "presiding over the Church universal." St Ignatius will be the first writer to use the expression "Catholic Church" (Cf. **Ep. to the Smyrneans**, 8) to designate the Church founded by Christ.²³

We now have two sources at the end of the First Century indicating that the successors to Peter in the See of Rome have supreme authority over other Christian Churches – one from the vantage point of Pope Clement to the Church of Corinth (ordering obedience under pain of sin) and one from the Bishop of Antioch to the Church of Rome recognizing superiority and the authority to preside over other Christian Churches. This means that the view of the primacy of Peter's successors was wide-spread among the church's leaders fifteen years after Peter's death – and beyond.

²¹ Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Romans* 1:1.

²² Ludwig Ott 2009 *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books) p. 283.

²³ Charles Belmonte 2012 *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Cobrin Publishing)
<http://fsubelmonte.weebly.com/letter-of-st-ignatius-of-antioch-to-the-romans.html>

VI.C
St. Irenaeus

About 100 years after Ignatius of Antioch, St. Irenaeus declares that the Church of Rome (whose presiding bishop is the pope) is owed obedience in matters of teaching by all other Christian churches. He declares that all other churches – and therefore all the faithful – must agree with this church. This means that all other churches must obey and consent to the authority of the bishop of that church:

But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the succession of all the churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the *greatest* and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. With that church, because of its *superior origin, all the churches must agree*, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition.²⁴

There appears to be an unbroken line of acknowledgement among the churches' leadership from St. Peter to Clement I, to St. Ignatius of Antioch, and to St. Irenaeus that the successor to Peter has authority over all other churches – and is final arbiter over all doctrinal and juridical disputes. This is confirmed 50 years later by Cyprian of Carthage.

VI.D
Cyprian of Carthage

Cyprian of Carthage, one of the greatest Latin apostolic fathers and bishop of Carthage wrote an important treatise on *The Unity of the Catholic Church* in A.D. 251. In a central passage (Section 4), he notes:

The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' he says, 'that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell 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' ... On him [Peter] he builds the Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep [John 21:17], and although he assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet he **founded a single chair [cathedra]**, and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were also what Peter was [i.e., apostles], but a **primacy is given**

²⁴ St. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3:3:2 [A.D. 189].

to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. So too, all [the apostles] are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?²⁵

Approximately, 200 years after the death of Peter, we have a juridical declaration and a theological explanation of the doctrine of the primacy of the bishop of Rome. This follows the unbroken chain of acknowledgment of the doctrine by popes, bishops, and theologians – St. Peter, Pope Clement, St. Ignatius of Antioch, and St. Irenaeus. In this work, Cyprian confidently declares that anyone who does not acknowledge and submit to the Bishop of Rome as his superior does not belong to the Church of Rome. They are the equivalent of excommunicated heretics. He also gives a theological explanation of why Jesus committed this highest authority to St. Peter and his successors – for the sake of the unity of the whole Christian Church. Cyprian here is merely recapitulating what Jesus, St. Peter, St. Ignatius of Antioch, and St. Irenaeus have acknowledged and practiced, but gives it a theological and juridical clarity as he looks back on the history of church leadership.

VI.E

Conclusion

If we suppose that the above four texts represent the general view of the leadership of the Catholic Church throughout two and a half centuries – since the time of St. Peter, then it is quite likely that the Church both implicitly and explicitly submitted itself to the primacy of the successor to St. Peter occupying his chair at the Roman See in matters of doctrine and the resolution of doctrinal and juridical disputes. Though there were many heresies and challenges facing the young church, the primacy of Peter's successors vouchsafed the teaching of Jesus and maintained the unity of the Church. Given this, that one church – unified under the leadership of Peter's successors – should be viewed as the true church initiated by Jesus – and to which He bestowed His Spirit and the promise that the gates of Hades would not prevail against it. To the successors of Peter, He gave the same keys to the kingdom of heaven so that whatever they declared bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever they declared loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. This prime authority bound all other bishops to obedience for the sake of unity and peace.

²⁵ Cyprian of Carthage *The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4.

Chapter Three

The Purpose and Benefit of the Church: Relationship, Worship, Learning, and Service

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How can we best enter into the church community so that its richness can influence every aspect of our spiritual lives? The church has four major gifts to offer:

1. An entryway into relationship with God and the church community.
2. Worship -- Eucharist and liturgy.
3. Learning -- scripture and doctrine and wisdom.
4. Service and saints.

The central role of the church is to provide an entryway into a relationship with God and the Church community (the body of Christ). Everything else the Church does is for the sake of that relationship, so worship, learning, and serving are vital functions which enable us to more deeply live in our relationship with God and his community. The following diagram exemplifies the Church's three main functions within its central role.



Though the Church can provide an entryway into a relationship with God and His community, it cannot do everything for us. *We* must also provide effort to deepen this relationship by actively participating in the three avenues provided by the Church – worship, learning, and serving. In Sections I through IV, I will make some suggestions about how to best utilize these avenues, but they will be cursory – there are literally hundreds of other ways of participating in the Church beyond them.

I.
Relationship with God
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The responsibility of the church community is to convey a sense of the personhood of God so that its members can enter into a relationship with him to the deepest possible extent. Without this vital function of the Church, we are left to our own thoughts and speculations. We may think that we can find the true identity and personhood of God by reflecting on the scriptures, but this is not as easy as it looks. If we are rigorous in our reading of scripture, we can find a multitude of different personal images of God. The reason for this is that scripture talks about God from the vantage point of many different cultures – for example, the Patriarchal culture of Abraham, the warrior culture of Judaism before the Temple, the culture of Second Temple Judaism (influenced by the later prophets, Hellenism, and Wisdom literature), and of course, the Church culture initiated by Jesus himself. Moreover, the New Testament reports Jesus’ sayings in the context of different audiences – some hostile, some like “sheep without a shepherd,” some highly educated (e.g. leaders within Judaism and the Roman Empire), and some who are intimately acquainted with Him – such as His disciples. We also know that the scriptures have layers of development and particular literary forms. In view of all this, it should not be surprising that there are literally dozens of different interpretations of the personhood of God and Jesus.

As noted in Volume 4, Jesus gives his consummate revelation of the Father in four major ways – (1) His address for God as “Abba” (“Daddy”), (2) The Parable of the Prodigal Son in which the Father of the Son represents God the Father (Abba), (3) The revelation of the love of God and neighbor as the highest commandment, and (4) The Beatitudes. The vast majority of scriptural scholars believe the above four passages show that Jesus intended to reveal God (His Father) to be *unconditional love*. Yet as I look back on my life, I can see so many times that I could have been led astray about Jesus’ central revelation, before I formally studied scripture. Were it not for the Church – specifically the words of certain priests, catechism teachers, my mother, and the Sacred Heart devotion - I think I would have appropriated one of the false images of God discussed in Volume 4 -- the “payback God,” the “disgusted God,” the “stoic God,” and the “angry God.”

It would have been very easy to believe in these “false gods” because I did not have either the spirituality or the scriptural expertise to know how to prioritize various passages. For example, should the Parable of the Prodigal Son and Jesus’ name for God (“Abba”) be ranked higher than “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:23)? I did not know how to put that last saying into context or the significance of Jesus’ polemical form, or how to prioritize passages and themes. I never even heard of the term “hermeneutics.” Therefore, I could have just as easily been reduced to neurotic fear as be lifted up by God’s unconditionally loving hand.

If I had appropriated one of the above false images of God, I suspect that I would have been reduced to neurotic fear or complete indifference today. In either case, I would not have been able to pursue a relationship with the transcendent personal Being calling me from within. I suppose I would be experiencing the four negative states of cosmic emptiness, alienation,

loneliness, and guilt, and wondering why we were born into the absurdity and despair of desiring perfect and unconditional, truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home when our fulfilment in these transcendentals was fundamentally impossible. I probably would have been like one of Walker Percy's characters in *Love in the Ruins*, to whom Dr. Thomas More applied his "ontological lapsometer."

It was the Church that informed me in my catechism classes that God and Jesus were loving, and that their love was the central feature of their heart. We were all given little pictures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in our third grade catechism class, and told that His burning heart and compassionate eyes were the way that God loved us. My Catholic picture bible had pictures of Jesus who had both a kind face and frequently an image of the Sacred Heart, and the priests and catechism teachers at Sacred Heart Parish reinforced this belief again and again. I really enjoyed saying my prayers at night – not only because I was with my family, but because I believed God loved me – even when I was being somewhat disobedient or mischievous.

The first time I remember questioning God's love was in the seventh grade, but once again, the Church came to my rescue. My catechism teacher, Mr. Ko, told us that there were two kinds of contrition for sin -- perfect contrition which is done out of love, and imperfect contrition which is done essentially out of fear – the fear of going to hell or the fear of being separated from God. He then said something very interesting, "imperfect contrition is good enough for salvation, because God's love is so great that he desires to save us even if our acts of forgiveness are imperfect – really imperfect." I was amazed at this teaching, and I asked him, "Are you sure?" to which he responded, "As sure as my feet being on the ground." He then encouraged us to say the "Act of Contrition" (a standard Catholic prayer to ask forgiveness for sins), even if we had led a terrible life and were going to crash in a plane. Mr. Ko said that one prayer – sincerely said -- was good enough for the unconditionally loving God who could fill in what we did not, or could not, do for ourselves. He emphasized that sincere contrition – even that borne out of fear -- was good enough for forgiveness because *God's* love would make up for our inadequacies.

There were many other dimensions of my life in the Church that pointed to God's love – the kindness of our priests and catechism teachers, the stained glass windows in our Church, the feelings I experienced during mass, my mother's confidence in God's love, and the books behind her bed on meditations on divine love. This diverse array of images, teachings, and feelings all focused on the person and image of Jesus, and galvanized the inner word within me. I was confident that God loved me, wanted to save me, and was protecting and guiding me – and He was.

In the eighth grade, I received a chain letter in the mail which basically suggested that if I did not send out an additional twenty letters to my friends, God would send me to hell. I was shocked to read this letter, and I thought there was something wrong with it, but I did not want to take any chances. So, I went to my mother and asked her if I could have twenty postage stamps. Of course, she answered, "What do you need twenty postage stamps for?" I did not want to admit why I needed them, but she finally pried it out of me; so I showed her the chain letter. She looked at it and laughed, saying, "Do you really think that God would send you to hell for not sending out twenty chain letters? Do you really believe in that kind of a heartless God? I am not going to give you those stamps, because I think this is the most ridiculous view of God and Jesus

I have ever heard.” Though I was convinced by her assurance, I made one final plea – “Well maybe I could just have a few of the stamps to be on the safe side,” to which she replied, “Don’t be ridiculous, we don’t believe in that kind of God!” I have no doubt that my mother’s assurance came from deep within the heart of the Church, and it caused me to begin a long process of elementary theologizing which took me not only to my catechism texts, but to sessions with our parish priests who I would besiege with questions on every imaginable topic – including the existence of God.

Where would I be without the Church? As I said, I would either be in a state of neurotic fear or completely detached from my transcendent self. In either case, I would have been a fraction of myself, and most probably, in real trouble.

The reason I went into my life in such detail, was to illustrate how the Church helps us not only to interpret scripture or respond to “bad theology,” but also to enter into a *relationship* with God through a complex of diverse images, teachings, actions, relationships and feelings. In this respect, it is irreplaceable, because we need all these sources of inspiration to appropriate the love of God *in our heart*. Scripture alone cannot do this – neither can tradition by itself. Even the combination of them alone cannot do this, we need a living dynamic body with people, preaching, worship, teaching, community, prayer, service – all inspired and orchestrated by the loving God in the present moment and into the future. Only this inspired, dynamic, living community of faith can make scripture and tradition turn into a loving relationship with God.

As we enter into the domain of Level Four happiness and purpose, we will want to avail ourselves of every avenue provided to us by God to help us stay on course, grow in faith, and enter more deeply into relationship with him. To my mind, the most powerful, diverse, dynamic, and complex avenue is the Church, and we would be remiss indeed, if we were to ignore the Church or simply skim along its surface without plumbing its depths.

The Church has its imperfections and failings, because it has real people who are all on a journey to the Lord, and those real people make mistakes – even terrible ones out of egocentricity and narcissism, yet these imperfections do not outshine the good and the grace of the faithful community striving to grow closer to the God who inspires it. I prefer to judge the Church on its saints rather than its sinners because its saints have done so much more for me than its sinners could ever take away. I cannot help but think that others are like me, and could find the same benefit from the plethora of saints who point the way to the loving God.

The reader might be thinking, “Well, is this all that the Church gave you in developing a relationship with God?” No, the Church gave me much much more – as will be discussed below -- the Church gave me a means of worship, a font of philosophical and theological wisdom, an authoritative interpretation of scripture and doctrine, a path to loving service, a method of simple contemplation, a way of following the Holy Spirit, and even a means for better imitating the heart of Christ. However, the most important thing that the Church gave me (or could give anyone else) is the doorway (“icon”) into a relationship with the loving God. Once we have entered this relationship in both mind and heart, everything else follows -- liturgy, contemplation, following the Holy Spirit, the Examen Prayer, and every other form of prayer. They all flow from our relationship with God, while providing a way to express it in the many

dimensions of our lives. The complex mystery of the Church unifies and diversifies the relationship with the loving God through the Holy Spirit's inspiration and guidance acting through the community's free deliberations and intentional acts of love.

II.

Worship, Eucharist, and Liturgy

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We not only need private, but also public prayer – or what might be called “worship.” Worship is the celebration of being called by God to share with others in His unconditionally loving providence and eternity. It is a complex act involving praise and prayer which is wrapped up in the hearts and presence of other people, the beauty of art and architecture, and the inspiration of the scriptures. Thus worship involves giving praise to God through community prayer and song, hearing the word of God and its interpretation by a minister of that word, community prayers of petition for the needs of the congregation as well as the culture and the Church, and a public confession of commonly held beliefs.

Private prayer is qualitatively different from this complex public act of praise. Have you ever noticed that going to a Christmas concert is qualitatively different from listening to a recording of it at your home? The recording might actually be done by a superior symphony and your musical equipment may give you a better quality sound than actually being at a concert hall, but nevertheless we still enjoy a concert. Why? We feel the presence of other people who are enjoying the impact of the music, and that heightens our enjoyment of the music. We like to share our enjoyment of beauty and ideas with others.

I recall once in the novitiate going into the television room on a Saturday to take a peek at the Notre Dame-USC game. There was an elderly priest in his late eighties watching the game by himself. He waved me in as if to give me permission to watch the game with him. So, I sat down and enjoyed the game. We hardly said anything to one another during the game except to express occasional approval or disapproval of a play. At the end, I got up to go, and he looked at me very gratefully and said, “Thank you brother, watching the game with you made all the difference.” I never forgot the power of shared enjoyment that he expressed that day.

The public nature of worship is more significant than going to a concert or sharing a football game, because we are not only sharing joy, but also the profession of our faith, the word of God, praising God, and praying to God. Worship is an act of sharing with one another our relationship with God. This public act binds us more closely to both God and one another – fusing love of God and love of neighbor.

Catholic worship has all the elements of the public act described above, but it distinguishes itself from other kinds of worship by placing Christ's ritual of the Last Supper at the center of the celebration. In Volume 3, we explained the meaning and power of the Eucharist as instituted by Jesus before his passion. In Volume 8, we will examine the Eucharist as the center of Catholic liturgy and then show how the other eight parts of the mass build around this center. For the moment, let us say that Catholic worship not only fulfills all the above acts of public worship, but also makes present the crucified body and risen person of Jesus himself –

who forgives sins, heals our hearts, transforms us in his image, and unites us with the rest of his mystical body. This unique, transformative ritual – imbued with scripture, interpretation, contrition, praise, and blessing – filled with tradition, symbolism, music, art, seasons, and the visible mediation of a priest – is for Catholics, the primary avenue to salvation. The more we participate in and pray with it, the further along we move into the mind, heart, and salvation of Jesus Christ. For an extensive explanation of the history and theology of the Holy Eucharist and the Mass, see Volume 9.

The other six sacraments (Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Sacrament of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Marriage) constitute a huge part of the Church's community's life of worship, the life of worship and communion with the Lord. For an explanation of the history and theology of Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Sacrament of the Sick, and Holy Orders, see Volume 10. For an explanation of Marriage, see Volume 11.

Saints within the Catholic Church have founded dozens of religious traditions, including devotions, spiritual exercises, and methods of contemplation. Some of these are configured to contemplative (and monastic) life while others to an active life—or a mixture of the two. For a summary of the rich devotional life of the Catholic Church surrounding the Trinity, Mary, the Saints, and sacramentals, see Volume 12. For a summary of the Church's devotional practice as an aid to spiritual and moral conversion, see Volume 16.

III.

Learning – Scripture, Doctrine, and Wisdom

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As noted above, we need Jesus – as the fullness of God's revelation – to answer all the questions about God's heart and will that cannot be known by science, metaphysics, and reason – and as we also saw, we need the Church to interpret the meaning of Jesus' revelation for our day. This role of the Church as *teacher* is most critical during times of disagreement and dispute when the same words of Jesus are interpreted in several different ways, leaving open the possibility of misleading and destructive teachings (not in conformity with Jesus' will) and continual fragmenting of the Christian Church. We noted above how Jesus anticipated these problems and instituted a Church through the foundation Rock of Peter and his successors whom he gave ultimate teaching and juridical authority -- the keys to the kingdom, and the power to bind and loose (see above – Chapter Two). Throughout the centuries, Peter and his successors have used this power to resolve dozens of disputes, correct dozens of heretical movements, interpret scripture for contemporary moral questions, and adapt the Church to contemporary circumstances. These efforts have generated a whole body of doctrine through the decrees of popes and church councils. The authoritative nature of these decrees is discussed below in Chapter Five – Church Authority.

Do we need anything beyond scripture and doctrine (Church teaching)? Even though scripture and doctrine can answer many questions, and provide essential guideposts toward our salvation, we seek more. We are not only looking for the answers to essential questions, but also

trying to express the nuance and beauty of God's interaction with us through all the methods of the humanities and sciences. We want to take the fruit of scripture and doctrine and see it through the lens of theology, philosophy, psychology, literature, art, music, architecture, and every other lens that moves our minds and hearts.

We are interested in what great thinkers and artists have to say – such as the religious physicists, philosophers, and mathematicians mentioned in the foregoing Volumes, the great novelists, poets, and writers – from Dante and Shakespeare to Hugo, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Tolkien, Lewis, and Greene. We immerse ourselves in the political ideas of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Erasmus, St. Thomas More, Francisco Suarez, the social encyclicals of the Popes, Jacques Maritain; and John Courtney Murray, and we are edified by centuries of religious art, architecture, and music. If John Henry Newman is correct, then we are not content to see the various disciplines of science, humanities, and the arts by themselves, we will want to see them interact with theology and philosophy, for this is what truly responds to our minds and hearts on all the levels of happiness. The Church is not only interested in doctrinal and moral teaching, but also in the breadth and depth of the sciences, humanities, and arts. It seeks to mediate the words of Jesus through every intellectual and artistic pursuit that moves the human spirit at its highest level.

There are some essential thinkers in the various disciplines who can provide a foundation for the wisdom in the Christian and Catholic intellectual tradition. I will list a few of these thinkers here according to their discipline. If an asterisk follows the name of the thinker, I would recommend first approaching this thinker through a secondary source before undertaking primary sources.

Philosophy. St. Augustine*, St. Thomas Aquinas*, John Henry Newman*, Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Josef Pieper, Max Scheler, Gabriel Marcel, Mortimer Adler, Bernard Lonergan*, Karl Rahner*, and Edith Stein. Most of these thinkers also wrote theological works, but were firmly grounded in philosophical foundations (using the evidence of reason as distinct from revelation).

Contemporary New Testament Scholarship. Thinkers emphasizing the historical Jesus have an “H” following their name. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, John L. McKenzie, Joachim Jeremias (H), John P. Meier (H), N.T. Wright (H), Gary Habermas (H), and Luke Timothy Johnson. Important reference work: *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*.

Contemporary Systematic Theology. Henri de Lubac, Bernard Lonergan*, Hans Urs von Balthasar*, and Karl Rahner. Important reference works: *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, and *The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*.

Christian/Catholic Literature. St. Augustine, Dante Alighieri, George Herbert (Anglican Priest), Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. (Poetry), John Donne (Anglican Priest—Poetry), Theodore Dostoyevsky (Russian Orthodox), Georges Bernanos, Evelyn Waugh, T.S. Eliot (Anglo-Catholic), Graham Greene, G.K. Chesterton, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis (High Anglican), Flannery O'Connor, and Walker Percy.

Catholic Political Theory. St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Francisco Suarez, Pope Leo XIII (*Rerum Novarum*), John Courtney Murray. There are dozens of social encyclicals written by recent popes (since Leo XIII); a synopsis of these collective teachings may be found in *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace).

The above list is not meant to be exhaustive either in disciplines or authors. There are many other disciplines such as Catholic spirituality, history, poetry, art, architecture, music, as well as catholic contributions to the natural sciences, psychology, and anthropology. There are literally hundreds of other Catholic authors and thousands of Catholic works. The above list is meant only to provide some guidance into the foundation of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

IV.

Service and Saints

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All service is an act of love (a gift of self) for another human being who is uniquely good and lovable, and whose intrinsic dignity deserves our love *prima facie*. Love begins with looking for the good news in the other, and once recognized, proceeds naturally to empathy (a felt unity with the other arising out of her unique goodness, lovability, and intrinsic dignity). Empathy, in turn, frees us from our self-attentiveness, and enables us to do the good for the other (even a stranger) just as easily as doing the good for ourselves. Thus, love does not arise out of a stoic act of will in which we force ourselves to accept a despicable person, but rather is a natural act of unity and service arising out of our recognition of the goodness, lovability, and intrinsic dignity of the other, inciting us to empathy and action. It is a perfectly natural act, leading to love, goodness and joy for everyone in the relationship.

Therefore, love does not have to be a burden or an effort – all we need do is let ourselves see the true goodness and lovability of the other – who becomes somewhat irresistible. This is easier said than done, because we can block our view of the good news (which in turn blocks empathy) for a variety of motives – time, resources, psychic energy, and egocentricity (which includes anger, greed, envy, pride, hatred, contempt, domination, etc.).

Is there any advantage to bringing love into the domain of transcendence? Inasmuch as grace and prayer can help us to overcome every form of egocentricity, then our relationship with God can be an invaluable help in actualizing love. But a relationship with God goes much further than this.

When Jesus put the two greatest commandments together, his audience was quite surprised. Love of God (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) was considered to be a heavy (very important) commandment, while love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) was considered to be a middle or light (less important) commandment. By fusing the two together as the “highest” commandments, he implies that they are complementary, and that the love of God opens us to greater love of neighbor, and love of neighbor opens us to greater love of God. As the two commandments act synergistically with one another, they grow and deepen within our hearts and actions. Thus, Jesus implies that love of God (Level Four) not only helps love of neighbor by providing the

grace to move beyond egocentricity, but also helps love of neighbor by acting synergistically with it. When we recognize God's love for us, we naturally love him in return, and like any dear friend, we want to be more like the one we love. If he loves us unconditionally, He loves others unconditionally, and if we want to be like him, we will want to love like him as well. Notice that we are not forcing ourselves to love like him (by a stoic act of will); we actually *want* to love like the one we love (and who loves us).

In the course of our prayer lives, we become more and more familiar with the loving way in which God beholds us (even in our weakness). It is very similar to the way Jesus sees and loves his disciples (his friends and followers). He knows Peter's impetuosity and capacity to speak before thinking. He knows the sarcastic tendencies of Nathaniel, the contemplative proclivities of John and Mary, the checkered past of Matthew, the naiveté of Phillip, and the shortcomings of the other disciples -- and he loves them all in their uniqueness. He also sees us in our sinful moments and looks upon us in the same loving way as he does the sinners he encounters during his ministry -- he seeks them out, goes to their homes, has table fellowship with them, and becomes a fast and deep friend -- just like Zacchaeus the tax collector, the Samaritan woman, and the other sinners whose friendship earns him the disdain of the Pharisees. He knows that there are imperfections and problems, but he loves them, and wants to do good for them by being with them -- instead of avoiding them.

Inasmuch as Jesus becomes a deep friend of ours through prayer, we begin to take on his perspective about the unique goodness and lovability of every human being, and the more we do this, the more naturally and easily we see the good news in, and empathize with, others.

There is still another way in which the love of God can lead to the love of neighbor. Recall what was said above about the unity of the Christian community through the body of Christ. Our participation in this body can do good for others that we do not even see. Just as the joy of Christmas can be communicated from the Christian community to someone like me on Christmas day, so also the collective love of the Christian community can be communicated to each of the participants at every moment of our lives. Thus, participation in the Body of Christ enables us to sense the love of the community, while allowing *our* love to contribute to that same community. Speaking personally, I cannot predict or understand this dynamic, but I feel it -- it strengthens me and frees me to love evermore deeply, and this in turn enables me to participate more deeply in the community.

This dynamic will not occur unless we let it take root in us; so we must try to open ourselves to the love of God and the community by imitating the compassionate source of that love. This is what St. Paul means in his letter to the Ephesians:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ^{and} to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:17-19).

A relationship with God brings contribution and love to a whole new level -- the grace to see others as God sees them, the desire to imitate the Lord who has loved us, and the unity of

love within the community in which we participate. The only way of understanding the qualitative levels of love is to participate in it – to make a little leap of faith, attempt to imitate the love of Christ, and to serve others with the heart of Christ.

The following three-step process has proved valuable for many Christians:

1. Looking at the example of Christ in the New Testament – seeing him in his humility, compassion, friendship with sinners, and love of his disciples. One of the best ways of doing this is through *Lectio Divina* – a contemplative reading of the scriptures²⁶ – particularly the narratives where Jesus is associating with sinners, healing the sick, exorcising unclean spirits, and dealing with his disciples “drawbacks.”
2. Engaging in the “Examen Prayer” – a meditative prayer used by Jesuits to use the power of gratitude to imitate Christ in the beatitudes -- see Volume 18.
3. Finding a ministry (perhaps one in your church) in which you can imitate Christ *in action*.

The first two steps are oriented toward *imitating* the heart of Christ so that we might *serve* others with the heart of Christ (the third step). Service through faith is not done only out of a sense of contribution, duty, or leaving a positive legacy. While these elements may be part of our desire to serve, service through faith (particularly in Christianity) entails a *heart* of compassion reflecting the heart of Jesus. The Lord wants us to look at our fellow human beings with great empathy – to see their unique goodness, lovability, and transcendent mystery. This appreciative and empathetic view of the other calls for compassion when we see them in need. In the parable named after him, the Good Samaritan sees the Jewish man (an enemy of his people) beaten by robbers on the side of the road, and “he was moved with compassion.” The Greek word here, *esplagchnisthē*, signifies a “gut wrenching empathy” causing a movement of the heart to help. The root “*splagchnon*” has the general meaning of “the bowels, which were thought to be the seat of the deeper affections, and could refer to pity or sympathy – inward affection, and tender mercy.”

Since this concept is so central to the teaching of Jesus (and is tantamount to a super virtue for him) we should pause for a moment to study it more closely. Compassion characterizes the heart of Jesus not only in the Gospel of Luke, but also in the other synoptic Gospels. In Mark 1:41 Jesus has compassion for a leper who asks to be healed. In Mark 6:34 Jesus has compassion on the crowd for they are like sheep without a shepherd. In Mark 8:1-3 Jesus has compassion on the crowd because they have been with him for three days and have had nothing to eat. In Matthew 20:34 Jesus has compassion for two blind beggars and heals them.

²⁶The traditional Benedictine practice of *Lectio Divina* has been adapted to contemporary needs and audiences in many ways. In all its adaptations it retains four major steps: (1) Reading a passage of scripture, (2) reflecting on that passage to see how it affects *our heart*, (3) praying about how this passage speaks to *our lives*, and (4) contemplatively entering into the call of Christ in the passage. Notice that *Lectio Divina* is not concerned with exegesis and hermeneutics (a mental discipline), but rather with how a passage of scripture challenges us to become more like Christ, and to enter into that challenge with Christ (a discipline of the heart). In it, we want to hear the call of Christ to us *personally*, in our *hearts*, to discover where he might be *calling* us. Many excellent books are devoted to this practice and so I will not address it more specifically in this Trilogy. Two excellent starting books are: Basil Pennington 1998 *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroads). See also Dr. Tim Gray 2009 *Praying Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Ascension Press).

In the Gospel of Luke, compassion is attributed to the heart of the Father. The primary example of this comes from Jesus himself in the parable of the Prodigal Son where Jesus declares: “But while [the prodigal son] was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Lk 15:20). This apparently had such a strong impact on Luke that he makes compassion *the* central quality of the Father’s perfection by changing Matthew’s admonition from “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect” (Mt 5:48), to “be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate” (Lk 6:36).

If we are to imitate the Lord in this super virtue of compassion, we will want to remove the obstacles that impede compassion within us -- most notably our egocentric and narcissistic impulses and our proclivity to look for the bad news in others. This is best accomplished by looking for the good news in others and recognizing the Lord’s deeply compassionate love for us. These two disciplines are complementary because looking at the Lord’s love for us helps to overcome egocentricity while the overcoming of egocentricity helps us to see more clearly the Lord’s love for us (explained in Volume 9). As we practice this two-fold discipline, we will notice that Christ-like compassion becomes ever more natural, and occurs with greater frequency and depth, making service more desirable and joyful.

Let us now move to step three of the above process – namely, service itself. It must be emphasized that the kind of service we choose should fit with our family and other responsibilities, our talents and education, and our interests and opportunities. With respect to family responsibilities, the Church teaches that family must come first. We cannot jeopardize our family’s welfare by pursuing so much service that we lose our jobs. Similarly we cannot ignore our spouse and children (who are our first priority) in the pursuit of ever increasing amounts of service.

We have a limited amount of time and psychic energy, and so we must strike a balance between depth relationships (those requiring time, commitment, and focus to people with whom we have familial and intimate responsibilities) and breadth relationships (those which require less time and focus because there is little familial or intimate commitment). Depth relationships require considerable time for a few special individuals while breadth relationships can occur with literally hundreds of people. The more time we spend in depth relationships, the less time we have for breadth relationships, and vice-versa. It is very difficult to maintain a healthy marriage and family while trying to be Mother Teresa. If we want to serve hundreds of others (in the fashion of St. Francis Xavier, John Bosco, or Mother Teresa), then we may want to choose a life with less depth relationships, and vice-versa. Some people with remarkable psychic energy are capable of doing both, but the examples of those who have tried and failed are legion – either their spouses and children resent their service or they cannot live up to all the commitments to which they have obligated themselves (in order to fulfill their family responsibilities). So for those who do have families, it is best to sit down with one’s spouse and decide what is fair and feasible, and what can be done together with one’s family, before getting involved in ministry.

We should also be careful about the kind of service we choose. If our service is to be competent and enjoyable, it should correspond to our charisms, education, abilities and

availability. Those who have energy and physical health may want to choose corporal works of mercy (at a homeless shelter, a food bank, or international missions). Those who enjoy and understand young people may want to choose youth ministry or summer camps. Those who have educational gifts – particularly philosophical, theological or spiritual ones -- may want to choose adult education, confirmation programs or spiritual direction. Those having organizational skills may want to help with administration of parishes, schools, youth programs, etc. St. Paul recognized this diversity of service within the one body of Christ:

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12: 4-7).

Specialization of labor is nothing new in the Church – since the days of St. Paul, the Church has recognized different charisms, ministries, and kinds of service. Different religious orders (e.g., the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits) sprang up around these different charisms and ministerial specialties. Today every church community and parish recognizes these specializations in its core councils and committees – the parish council, the finance committee, the youth ministry committee, social action committee, liturgical committee, adult education committee, etc. This is the tip of the iceberg – we can become involved in our diocesan committees, school systems, confirmation programs, international charities, and hundreds of other forms of community service from Little League to the local food bank.

While Jesus Christ is the example *par excellence* of loving service, the Church also has a history of these examples in the lives of its holy men and women. The lives of these saints can provide additional diverse inspiration for compassionate service in imitation of Christ. There are some excellent hagiographies (lives of the saints) available today.

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, John XXII, 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 Saint 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, Saint Junipero Serra, Matteo Ricci, and Father Eusebio Kino.

The more we serve with the heart of Christ (within the context of our families, capacities, and charisms), the more Christ's heart speaks to us, transforms us, and guides us. Thus our lives of action feed back into our contemplative lives, leading to an ever increasing spiral of contemplation, moving to action, and action moving to contemplation. Eventually, we grow closer to the heart of unconditional love to which we are called.

V.

Conclusion

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We have looked into three ways in which the Church deepens our encounter and relationship with God – worship, learning, and serving. Though we have barely scraped the surface of these three dynamic vehicles of grace, we have presented some ways of entering into them according to our abilities, proclivities, and time. If we are to deepen our relationship with God through these vehicles, then we will want to be purposeful about reflecting and acting on each of them – participating in Mass (*worship*) as often as possible, participating in the sacrament of Reconciliation (particularly in the Advent and Lenten seasons), finding areas of *learning* that will deepen us according to our strengths and interests (for example, philosophy, scripture, theology, spirituality, history, literature, art, music, architecture, and poetry) and giving ourselves to loving *service* in accordance with our gifts, availability, and opportunities.

Notice that these three vehicles of grace feed into one another – sharing the word of God at mass could inspire an interest in learning; receiving the Holy Eucharist may inspire us to deepen our spiritual life; probing Christian literature, philosophy or theology could inspire a deeper relationship with God and greater purposefulness about worship and service; and service could inspire the desire to know more about Christ in scripture, and to worship the heart of unconditional love. Each vehicle develops a particular dimension of loving God and neighbor, and together, they enable us to live in and grow toward the heart of unconditional love. I can personally attest to the effects of these vehicles in my life and I cannot imagine what I or my relationship with God would be like were it not for the heart of the Church.

The reader may already have surmised the important undisclosed omission in the foregoing discussion – namely, personal prayer. As we shall see in Volumes 18 through 20, personal prayer can enhance worship, learning, and service within the Church, and more importantly, can deepen our relationship and journey with the Loving God.

Chapter Four

The Catholic Church's Structure

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The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church goes back to the First Century. In the apostolic church (when the apostles were still alive), there were five hierarchical offices: (1) the prime office of Peter, (2) the apostles, (3) prophets, (4) teachers, and (5) other offices of healing, helping, and guidance (see 1 Cor 12:28). Later (at the time of the Pastoral Letters – around 100 A.D.), the offices resemble those of the Church today: the Pope, then bishops, then priests (Presbyters), and then deacons. For a history of these offices, see Volume 9 (Chapter Two) and Volume 10 (Chapter Five). The need for hierarchical authority was not only initiated by Jesus' appointment of Peter, but also the need to resolve doctrinal and juridical disputes threatening to divide and undermine the *universal church*.

This need was particularly evident with respect to the initiation of the gentile church – which led to the Council of Jerusalem (in Jerusalem in 50 A.D.). Some leaders in the Jerusalem church wanted to impose the same mosaic dietary and circumcision prescriptions on gentile converts. The Council disagreed with those leaders and made special provisions for the gentiles. It divided its decision into two parts – the first, addressed to the universal church, was declared by St. Peter (Acts 15: 7-12), and the second, declared specifically to the Jerusalem church, was read by James -- who functioned as the head of that particular church (Acts 15: 13-21) (See above, Chapter Two, Section V).

At this very early time (50 A.D. – twelve years after Jesus' resurrection), Peter was functioning as *defacto* head of the universal Church, James was functioning as the *defacto* head (bishop) of the Jerusalem church, and the assembled apostles had gathered in the first ecumenical council. Why? To resolve a dispute that would have torn the Church apart – if the defined juridical and teaching authority had not been duly appointed and empowered to resolve it. Without this hierarchical authority and structure, the Church would have been divided and undermined countless times throughout its history, not only in the dispute about gentile converts, but also with respect to Gnosticism, Nestorianism, Arianism, Monophysitism, and many other serious doctrinal controversies.



Description of Offices

The Pope. particular Churches and provides the necessary central organization for the correct functioning of the Church and the achievement of its goals.²⁷

Archbishop. An archbishop is a higher rank of bishop with authority over a large diocese (an “archdiocese”), and frequently over a metropolitan region (See). For example, the Archbishop of Los Angeles is also the Metropolitan (regional) leader not only of his archdiocese, but also of several smaller dioceses in that region – e.g. Orange County and San Diego.

Bishop. A bishop is a consecrated and ordained member of the Catholic clergy who enjoys apostolic succession going back to the twelve apostles of Jesus. Bishops are given authority over a regional See and have Ordinary Magisterial authority when they are speaking about matters of faith and morals (that lead the faithful to salvation – and never away from it). They also have the power to ordain clergy – including other bishops. When they gather as an ecumenical council in concert with the Pope, they can collectively define doctrines infallibly (see below – Chapter Five).

²⁷ Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae universae*, 15 August 1967, publ. in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967), pp.885-928. See also *Code of Canon Law*, can. 360.

Priest. A priest is a mediating agent standing in the place of Christ who celebrates the holy sacrifice of the mass and confers other sacraments. Priests are authorized to preach, teach, and confer the sacraments wherever permission is granted by the local bishop. Diocesan priests have authority over a specific parish community.

Deacon. Permanent deacons may be married (if marriage occurs before their ordination to the diaconate). They are authorized to render service within a parish by preaching, teaching, baptizing, and witnessing marriages. They also help the pastor with other services.

Chapter Five

The Teaching Authority of the Church

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“Magisterium” refers to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church (derived from the Latin term “magister” – “master teacher”). There are three levels of magisterial authority pertaining to any official church teaching or pronouncement:

1. Extraordinary Magisterium
2. Ordinary Magisterium
3. Prudential Judgment

I will discuss each in turn, and then clarify the magisterial status of regional councils of bishops.

I. Extraordinary Magisterium

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Extraordinary Magisterium is concerned with defined doctrines of the Church. These are irrevocable decisions, by which the supreme teaching authority in the Church decides a question pertaining to faith or morals, and which binds the whole Church. Four conditions are required for a defined doctrine:

1. It must be a decision by the supreme teaching authority in the Church.
2. The decision must concern a doctrine of faith or morals.
3. The decision must bind the Universal Church.
4. The decision must be irrevocable (definitive).

With respect to the first condition, there are two organs of supreme authority in the Church:

- A. The Holy Father when he declares himself to be speaking as supreme teacher of all Christians (*Ex Cathedra*) and
- B. The Bishops of the Church united in ecumenical council in concert with the Pope.

With respect to the second condition (faith and morals), “faith” concerns what must be *believed* by Christians while “morals” concerns what must be *done* by Christians. The third condition requires a decree (from one of the two supreme authoritative organs of the Church) that binds all the faithful (not merely some part of the faithful). Finally, the fourth condition requires that one of the two organs declare that the decision is final and will never be changed (irrevocable).

II. Ordinary Magisterium

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Ordinary Magisterium, which can be infallible, is most often non-infallible. It is infallible *only* when the dispersed Bishops throughout the world are in union with the Pope over a long period of time and a particular teaching is to be held by the faithful for the sake of salvation. The reason that “*ordinary*” is used in conjunction with “*infallible*” here is that a particular teaching may begin as non-infallible Ordinary Magisterium but when the Pope and the Bishops throughout the world have taught the same doctrine of faith and morals, to be held by the faithful, over the course of some length of time, it takes on an infallible character, and is no longer non-infallible Ordinary Magisterium. This is also referred to as Ordinary Universal Magisterium.²⁸

²⁸ Many Church teachings have come to their doctrinal (universal, infallible) status in this way. Since there is no definitive declaration about this kind of Magisterium, there is ambiguity surrounding which doctrines qualify. For example, how long must a particular teaching be taught in this manner? Two generations? Five generations? Furthermore, does “universal” mean “all the Bishops with the Pope (no dissenters)” or “most of the Bishops (only a

The more common *non-infallible* Magisterium occurs in three ways:

1. When the Pope teaches authoritatively but not definitively and infallibly (e.g. a non-definitive encyclical letter or a papal allocution),
2. When an ecumenical council teaches authoritatively but not definitively and infallibly, and,
3. When individual Bishops exercise their teaching authority in matters of faith and morals. This may also occur through regional episcopal conferences (see below Section IV).

Individual Bishops do not have infallible teaching authority. If a Bishop is not speaking about theological truths or moral principles leading to salvation, then his pronouncement is not Ordinary Magisterium. It is a theological opinion or a prudential judgment (see below Section III). Furthermore, if a Bishop is not in communion with other Bishops or makes a pronouncement which contradicts the Extraordinary or Ordinary Universal Magisterium of the Church, then his pronouncement is evidently not Ordinary Magisterium. As will be discussed below, if a regional council of Bishops (e.g. the USCCB) is not speaking about theological truths or moral principles leading to salvation, their pronouncements are not Ordinary Magisterium, but only theological opinions or prudential judgments.

Why is this? Magisterial teachings by their very nature concern the salvation of human beings. Therefore, pronouncements that fall outside the domain of salvation (affirming what leads toward salvation and negating what leads away from salvation) cannot be Ordinary magisterium.

So what can be said about “*non-infallible* Ordinary Magisterium?” It designates teachings about salvation that are subject to limited error (that is, they could be incorrect or reversible in certain respects), but even if they are in error, they cannot lead away from our salvation.²⁹ They are subject only to *limited* error (i.e. they cannot be completely wrong) because they are guided by the Holy Spirit.

When a pronouncement of the Pope or Bishops is not defined infallibly, it is not Extraordinary Magisterium. When a teaching of the Pope or Bishops does not concern salvation (or there is uncertainty about whether it leads to salvation), it is not Ordinary Magisterium. It must therefore be considered either theological opinion (in the case of faith) or prudential judgment (in the case of morals).

For example, when the Bishops teach that the Columbia River watershed should not reach a specific level of pollution, or should be treated in a particular way, they are not implying that these truths are necessary for salvation. Rather, they are applying a principle of Catholic

few dissenters)”? Despite these ambiguities, the faithful may be sure that this kind of infallibility exists, and that when there is ambiguity, it is best to assume the infallible character of the teaching in question.

²⁹ Notice that we are not speaking about *infallible* Ordinary Magisterium here. If the Ordinary Magisterium is infallible (as described above) then that teaching cannot be subject to limited error. It is definitive.

Social Teaching (stewardship of the environment) to a particular region and time. Thus, their teaching is not Ordinary Magisterium, but prudential judgment (see below Section III).³⁰

III. Prudential Judgment and Catholic Social Teaching

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The above example leads us to the third category of Church teaching, namely, *prudential judgment*. This category is important with respect to *applying* the Church's social teaching to particular times and places and to pronouncements of regional councils of Bishops.

Let us begin with Papal pronouncements on Catholic Social Teaching. Papal encyclicals on social teaching contain both *principles* and *applications of principles*. Should both CST principles and their applications be considered Ordinary Magisterium? The answer may be inferred from the above general criteria for Ordinary Magisterium:

1. Since the *principles* of CST lead the faithful to salvation and are not likely to change over time, they qualify for "Ordinary Magisterium."
2. Conversely, specific *applications* of these principles may *not* be directly concerned with salvation and may change in different places and times. Therefore, they should be considered prudential judgments.

The Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace in its *Compendium on Catholic Social Doctrine* has declared that there are five major principles of CST which are binding on all the faithful:

1. The pursuit of the common good in a spirit of service,
2. The development of justice with particular attention to situations of poverty and suffering,
3. Respect for the autonomy of earthly realities,
4. The principle of subsidiarity (matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority),
5. The promotion of dialogue and peace in the context of solidarity.³¹

³⁰ See *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* - An International Pastoral Letter by the Catholic Bishops of the Watershed Region.

³¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2005. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. English trans by US Council of Catholic Bishops. (Washington D.C. US Council of Catholic Bishops) Section 565. Hereafter referred to as "Compendium of Social Doctrine." This is a universally binding obligation of the faithful set out by a Pontifical Commission which has been affirmed by the Bishops and the Pope for many years. It therefore qualifies as Ordinary Magisterium.

The Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace further declared in Section 565 that these five principles of CST are Ordinary Magisterium that obligates the Catholic faithful:

These are the criteria that *must* inspire the Christian laity in their political activity. *All* believers, insofar as they possess rights and duties as citizens, are *obligated* to respect these guiding principles.³²

There is also a sixth principle of CST implicit in the above list of five which forms the foundation of virtually every Papal social encyclical, namely, the principle of the intrinsic dignity (worth) of every human being. Henceforth, I will refer to the principles of CST, which are declared “Ordinary Magisterium,” as the “*six general* principles of CST.”

We may now return to the distinction between the principles of CST and the *application* of the *principles* of CST. From the above it is clear that the six general principles of CST are Ordinary Magisterium, but as the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace and the US Catholic Bishops declare, the applications of these principles are prudential judgments. Section 568 of the *Compendium on Catholic Social Doctrine* states:

When reality is the subject of careful attention and proper interpretation, concrete and effective choices can be made. However, an *absolute value* must *never* be attributed to these choices because no problem can be solved once and for all. ‘Christian faith has never presumed to impose a rigid framework on social and political questions, conscious that the historical dimension requires men and women to live in imperfect situations, which are also susceptible to rapid change’[1189].³³

How does this distinction work out in our daily lives? Let’s take an example. The principle of the intrinsic dignity of every human being is evidently important for our salvation and will not change over the course of time (i.e. meaning that it qualifies for Ordinary Magisterium). However, certain applications of this principle – say, membership in a particular Union, which might help workers to obtain their appropriate dignity – does not necessarily lead to salvation and could very well change over the course of time. Such an application of the principle of intrinsic dignity would not qualify for Ordinary Magisterium, and would then be a prudential judgment.

This distinction becomes more challenging when we are considering very *general* applications of the six major principles of CST (e.g. the right of labor to organize). Is this application only prudential judgment? Doesn’t the right to organize prevent all kinds of exploitation of labor? Wouldn’t this qualify as Ordinary Magisterium? It is easy to see how *specific* applications of CST (such as belonging to a particular Union) would not qualify for Ordinary Magisterium, but what about very general applications?

³² *Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine* Section 565.

³³ *Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine* 2005. Section 568.

One can see how the right of labor to organize could be considered a natural corollary to the principle of intrinsic human dignity of all people, and how this would lead to salvation. However, a closer examination of this idea reveals that there are many ways in which the organization of labor might not lead to salvation – and indeed, could lead away from it (e.g. many forms of Marxism, totalitarian communism, etc.). The ambiguity of the word “organize” makes it impossible to say that such an application of the principle of intrinsic human dignity would lead to salvation (and never away from it). Furthermore, the notion of organization of labor could change over the course of time and may be interpreted differently in various cultures. For these reasons, it seems that even *general* applications of CST principles should not qualify for Ordinary Magisterium.

As noted above, this is precisely the conclusion reached by the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace in Section 568. It was also anticipated by the US Council of Catholic Bishops in 1986 in its Pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*. In that letter the Bishops explicitly used and defined “prudential judgment” in the area of applying the principles of Catholic Social Teaching to concrete situations.³⁴

This was reaffirmed and explained in 2007 (after the publication of the *Pontifical Council’s Compendium* in 2005) in another Pastoral letter called *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*.³⁵ Once again, the Bishops make a careful distinction between principles and application of principles, and clearly indicate that the application of principles belongs to the domain of prudential judgment. Their recommendation may be summarized in the following two points:

1. The above six principles of CST apply to all political issues, but in many cases do not lead prudentially to one acceptable Catholic position.
2. While the six major principles of CST (and other teachings of the Pope and the Bishops on faith and morals which qualify as Ordinary Magisterium) are binding, their prudential judgments on policy, legislation, and other situational applications of principles *guide us but do not bind us*. The only exceptions to this are policies and practices concerned with infallible moral teaching – namely abortion, euthanasia, and marriage.

³⁴ See for example, “We do not claim to make these prudential judgments with the same kind of authority that marks our declarations of principle” in US Council of Catholic Bishops. 1986. *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*. (Washington D.C.: USCCB). p. xii.

³⁵ See for example, “Decisions about candidates and choices about public policies require clear commitment to moral principles, careful discernment and prudential judgments based on the values of our faith” in the United States Council of Catholic Bishops. 2007. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States – with an Introductory Note* (Washington, D.C. USCCB). Paragraph 50.

IV. The Status of Regional Conferences of Bishops [Back to top](#)

The Declarations of Regional Conferences of Bishops can sometimes be confusing to the faithful. Do these Conferences have any more authority than that vested in individual Bishops? Can Regional Councils of Bishops declare a teaching to be infallible (Extraordinary Magisterium)? Do Regional Councils of Bishops have similar authority to Ecumenical Councils of Bishops? As might be surmised from the above, Regional Councils of Bishops do not have the authority of an Ecumenical Council (in conjunction with the Pope), and therefore they cannot declare any teaching to be infallible (without error). Therefore, their teachings, though a manifestation of ecclesiastical solidarity and collegiality, are similar in authority to those of individual Bishops – that is, Ordinary Magisterium (when their teachings lead toward salvation and are unlikely to change with particular times and places).

In his apostolic letter, *Apostolos Suos*, Saint John Paul II made this quite clear:

At the level of particular Churches grouped together by geographic areas (by countries, regions, etc.), the Bishops in charge do not exercise pastoral care jointly with collegial acts equal to those of the College of Bishops.³⁶

A Regional Council of Bishops derives its teaching authority from that of the individual Bishops constituting it, and does not have any more authority than those individual bishops. Furthermore, the above-mentioned qualifications of Ordinary Magisterium apply to Regional Councils of Bishops in the same way they do to individual Bishops, therefore, in order to qualify as Ordinary Magisterium, their teachings must address truths that lead to salvation (and cannot lead away from salvation even if they are in limited error) and are unlikely to change from place to place and time to time. When Pastoral Councils are not teaching in this way, their declarations may be considered theological opinions or in the case of morals, “prudential judgments.” Thus, the distinction between principles and “applications of principles” made above applies to pastoral letters of Regional Councils of Bishops in the same fashion as Papal encyclicals and compendia of Pontifical Councils.

³⁶ POPE JOHN PAUL II. 1998. APOSTOLIC LETTER ISSUED “MOTU PROPRIO” *APOSTOLOS SUOS* ON THE THEOLOGICAL AND JURIDICAL NATURE OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES. Chapter II, Par 10.

Chapter Six

The Structure of Dioceses and Parishes

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Chapter Seven

Summary and Plan – Where Have we Come From and where are we going?

I.

Where Have we Come From?

The Reasonable and Responsible Affirmation of God, Jesus, and the Catholic Church

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How have we rationally justified the steps involved in coming to a reasonable and responsible belief in God, Jesus, and the Catholic Church so that we might proceed to a deeper investigation of the path to integrity, fulfillment, and our eternal salvation with the Holy Trinity? We have already answered these questions in three previous volumes which gave considerable evidence to substantiate Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of revelation and the Catholic Church (initiated by Jesus Christ) as his authentic interpreter in six major steps:

1. In Volume 1 (Chapter Two, Section I), we showed the extent to which reason can prove a Supreme Being (God) – an uncaused reality, which must be unique, absolutely simple, perfect intellection, transtemporal, and the Creator of all else that is. We noted there that reason could not answer 20 major questions of ultimate concern that center on God's heart (e.g. about suffering, prayer, heaven, guidance, providence, etc.). If God expected us to answer these questions – and wanted us to ask them – then He would have to provide an answer coming from a revelation of Himself.
2. In Volume 4 (Chapter One) we explored the seven major characteristics of revelation in the world's main religions (from Friedrich Heiler) – and noted how Rudolf Otto's numinous experience, and Mircea Eliade's intuition of the sacred were central to the universal recognition of God's transcendent goodness and love (two of Heiler's seven characteristics). But this left open the question of which religion (among the many world religions) presented the most deep and accurate revelation of God to humanity.
3. In Volume 4 (Chapter Two) we showed that Christianity presented the most reasonable and responsible case for the deepest and most accurate revelation of God to humanity, if we assent to love as the highest meaning of life. If readers did so assent to this truth of the heart, we showed how Christianity was different from other world religions in four respects concerned with love: (a) Jesus' definition of love (*agapè*), (b) His declaration about the *unrestricted* and *unconditional* love of God – using the analogy of the Father of the Prodigal Son, (c) His declaration that His Father loved the world so much that He sent Him into the world to reveal His love for us and sacrifice Himself unconditionally for us – in an unrestricted and unconditional act of love (self-gift), (d) that He and His Father are especially close to – and inhere in “the least of our brothers and sisters – slaves, sinners, the sick, the possessed, and the poor.”
4. In Volume 3 we gave a second reason why Christianity may be reasonably considered to be the most reasonable and responsible candidate for the deepest and most accurate presentation of God's self-revelation – Jesus' resurrection in glory, his miracles, and gift

of the Holy Spirit. We there gave the historico-critical evidence for Jesus' miracles and resurrection and the overwhelming evidence of the gift of the Holy Spirit still manifest today. We then gave the evidence for Jesus' powerful spiritual resurrection accessible to science through multiple scientific studies of the Shroud of Turin and correlated the Christian doctrine of the resurrection with peer-reviewed medical studies of near death experiences. In Volume 3 (Chapter Nine) we gave an extensive analysis of the scientific and medical investigations of nine contemporary miracles associated with Jesus, His Mother, and Christian saints. All of this points to Jesus being "Emmanuel" – "God with us." This evidence can establish Jesus' resurrection, claim to divine origin, and the truth of His unconditional love as reasonable and responsible. At this step in our argument, the evidence for Jesus Christ as risen, divine, and the height of God's self-revelation can have sufficient probative force to ground faith in Him as our ultimate source of revelation. It meets scientific, historical, and logical standards that can rationally justify faith in Him so long as we are open to belief. This enables us to proceed to the question about which church community was intended by Jesus to be the authentic interpreter of His words and actions. Note, we are not saying here that non-Catholic Christian Churches are not authentic interpreters of Jesus' words and actions. We are only asking the question – which Church did *Jesus* intend to be His authentic interpreter?

5. There is considerable evidence to show that Jesus intended to establish a church through Peter, to make Peter's primary authority extend to his successors, and to be present to Peter and his successors through the Holy Spirit until the end of time. What is this evidence?
 - (a) In this Volume (Chapter One) we discussed why a church community is essential, focusing on the need for an authentic interpretation of Jesus' revelation lest differences of opinion lead to an accelerating proliferation of churches and denominations. We have already seen this manifest in the Protestant Reformation where 30,000 denominations have been started during the last 500 years because of differences in the interpretation of Jesus' words and actions. We noted there that Jesus must have foreseen this possibility in starting His Church, and that He would have responded to this challenge by instituting a *supreme* (primary) teaching and juridical authority to be the final word on all such disputes.
 - (b) In this Volume (Chapter Two and Three) we discussed the evidence for Jesus initiating and authenticating the Catholic Church through the office of Peter and his successors:
 - We gave an extensive exegesis of Jesus' commission to Peter in Matthew 16: 17-19, and noted there the preponderance of evidence for Jesus indicating His intention to start a primary teaching and juridical office through Peter and his successors.
 - We also noted that the single account of this in Matthew is also substantiated in John 21: 15-17 (Jesus' special 3-fold commission to Peter), Acts 15: 6-12 (Peter speaking for the universal Church by his own authority at the first church council – the Council of Jerusalem), and the

implications of Jesus' special commission to Peter in Galatians 2: 7-11. See this Volume (Chapter Two).

(c) The Second Pope (Clement of Rome) and St. Ignatius of Antioch (early church father) acknowledge in the 1st century that the Bishop of Rome has primary authority over all other bishops.

- The successor to Peter, Clement of Rome (second pope in 80-99 A.D.) believed himself to be the supreme authority over all bishops (as bishop of Rome holding the office of Peter). He held that he had the authority to bind those bishops under pain of sin and holy obedience. If he did not have supreme authority, what would have provoked him to claim this – and to be obeyed?
- St. Ignatius of Antioch at the end of the 1st century writes a letter to the Roman Church stating twice that the Bishop of Rome has “the presidency over all the churches.” This shows a strong tradition by the end of the 1st century that the successor to Peter has authority over all other bishops.
- This view of the primacy of the Roman Church is clearly held by other early church fathers – e.g. St. Irenaeus and St. Cyprian of Carthage -- see this Volume, Chapter Two, Section VI.

(d) The above historical evidence is further corroborated by the nine contemporary scientifically validated miracles discussed above (explained in Volume 3, Chapter Nine). These miracles are directly connected with Mary (the Mother of Jesus), contemporary saints, and the real presence of Jesus' body in the Holy Eucharist. Inasmuch as all three of these doctrines are challenged by non-Catholic Christian churches, we might ask why God (the Father of Jesus Christ) would be working His supernatural power through these intermediaries toward ends that are specifically Catholic, if Jesus had not intended to invest Peter and his successors with the ultimate authority to interpret his revelation and oversee the community (juridical authority). When we combine this with the historical evidence summarized in (a) through (c) above, it is highly likely that Jesus did commission Peter to have this ultimate teaching and juridical authority, as well as his successors, implying that the Catholic Church is the authentic interpreter of the words and actions of Jesus.

6. What does the Catholic Church provide to believers which is not offered by any other Christian Church? What graces, guidance, teachings, and spiritual depth are unique to the Catholic Church in helping believers to live in the truth, form a steadfast unity with other believers leading to eternal salvation? Among many unique features, four are particularly important: (a) the Holy Eucharist, (b) the Church's magisterium, (c) the sacramental life of the Church, and (d) the richness of Catholic spiritual life, moral life, and intellectual life.

(a) *The Holy Eucharist*. Current historical and exegetical criticism strongly indicates that the Catholic Church has taught and actualized Jesus' true meaning of the *Holy Eucharist* – that is to make Himself *really present* in the species of bread and wine, which, if true, is the most significant spiritual gift provided by any church at any time.

This authentic interpretation of Jesus' intention in the Holy Eucharist – His real presence – is confirmed by current studies of the Jewish prophetic view of the “collapse of time” and Jesus' equation of unconditional self-sacrifice with unconditional love (self-gift). This belief in His real presence in the Eucharist is the universal view of the New Testament writers and the early Church fathers – see Volume 9 (Chapter One) on Jesus' intention in the Eucharist. See also Volume 9 (Chapter Two) on the Eucharist in the 1st century, and Chapter Three on transubstantiation.

- (b) The Church has maintained unity over the ages through the supreme magisterial authority invested in the unbroken line of successors given first to Peter and to his successors up to the present day. As noted above, without this supreme authority, there would be considerably more than 30,000 denominations – because the Catholic Church has lasted for 1,500 years longer than any protestant church. By that standard, there should be four times as many denominations – 120,000 of them. The absence of this fractioning – amidst considerable disagreement and dispute – evidences the presence of the Holy Spirit and a fulfillment of Christ's promise to Peter that he (Peter) would be the rock upon which the Church would be built and that the gates of the netherworld would not prevail against it (Mt. 16:18).
- (c) Though most Christian congregations support baptism, they do not support the other six sacraments. As noted above, they do not have a doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, their view of confirmation and marriage is non-sacramental, and they do not recognize the sacraments of reconciliation (confession), sacrament of the sick (last rites), and Holy Orders. These sacraments in the Catholic Church constitute a whole way of life with Christ through the Christian community which is inspiring, edifying, and grace-filled. See Volume 10 (for baptism, confirmation, reconciliation, last rites, and Holy Orders), and Volume 11 (for marriage), and as noted above, Volume 9 (for the mass of the Roman Rite and Holy Eucharist).
- (d) The richness of the Catholic Church in spiritual life, moral life, and intellectual life (the three modes of conversion):
 - *Spiritual Life* -- The many developments of spirituality (through religious orders and lay associations), the development of Christian mysticism from the desert fathers through the current day (especially the discalced Carmelites), and the development of multiple modes of prayer -- from *Lectio Divina* to the discernment of spirits – shows the presence of the Holy Spirit animating the Church's awareness and practice of deep, authentic, spiritual life. No other Christian church manifests anything close to this richness of spiritual depth and tradition. See Volumes Sixteen (Chapter One), Eighteen, and Twenty.
 - *The moral life* –The Catholic Church applied the teachings of Jesus to almost every aspect of moral, social, cultural, and political life, including the development of the notion of conscience (St. Paul), the notion of free will (St.

Augustine), the development of systematic moral theology (St. Thomas Aquinas and others), justice theory (St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and others), natural law theory (St. Thomas Aquinas), the universalization of personhood (Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas), inalienable rights theory (Fr. Francisco Suarez), and the social teaching of the Catholic Church (from Pope Leo XIII to today—virtually all Popes). There is nothing like this development, systemization, and socio-political application of moral thought in any other religion in world history. This again shows the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. See Volumes 13 through 17.

- *The intellectual life* -- The Catholic Church applied Christian religious and theological thought to virtually every area of science and the humanities.
 - With respect to *science*, its clergy made invaluable contributions to astronomy (Nicholas Copernicus – a Catholic cleric and the father of heliocentrism), biology-genetics (Abbott Gregor Mendel – the father of quantitative genetics), geology (Bishop Nicolas Steno – the father of contemporary geology and stratigraphy), and astrophysics-cosmology (Msgr Georges Lemaître—the father of the Big Bang Theory) – to mention but a few.³⁷
 - With respect to *philosophy* (St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Fr. Duns Scotus, Jacques Maritain, Fr. Joseph Marechal, Fr. Bernard Lonergan, Fr. Emerich Coreth, Fr. Karl Rahner, Josef Pieper, Gabriel Marcel, Henri Bergson, 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.
 - With respect to music and the fine arts, see Volume 12, Chapter Five, Section III.D.3.

³⁷ 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.

Given the above evidence from Scripture, the self-understanding of the early Popes, the unity of the Church (despite many contentious moments), the authentic interpretation of the Holy Eucharist, the richness of spirituality, moral and political theory, and the integration of theology with all natural disciplines, there is more than adequate rational and experiential evidence of the Spirit of Christ working through the Catholic Church. Though some leaders and movements in the Church did not adhere to the moral teachings of Christ, the Church did not succumb to these influences, but rather, rectified them through its authentic teaching and juridical authority – and moved beyond them through the remarkable love and faith manifest through its thousands of canonized saints.³⁸ As John Henry Newman might say, there is more than enough evidence throughout 2,000 years of history to justify a probative informal inference sufficient to rationally ground our little leap of faith³⁹ – faith that Jesus intended to make the Catholic Church (under the leadership of Peter and his successors) the definitive interpreter of His teaching and to be the vehicle of His presence in the Holy Eucharist, and the presence of His Spirit in the unfolding of doctrine, the spiritual life, the moral life, and a theologically integrated intellectual life.

II.

The Need for Faith

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Though the reasonable and responsible evidence for God, Jesus, and the Catholic Church is substantial, comprehensive, and probative, it is only sufficient to ground conviction of the mind, but not the heart. Yet the heart's reasons are crucial to the way we will live our faith and participate in the Church. To obtain this, we must have faith. Even the most cogent reasonable arguments and the best evidence from physics, logic, mathematics, medicine, history and exegesis will not be able to perfectly ground *faith* in the loving God, and life in the Church. As Dostoevsky noted in the *Grand Inquisitor*, God will not enslave us to a miracle. He will always leave room for us to escape His presence and reality, because He wants us to respond to His loving call with our own act of openness and love. Therefore, an element of faith will be required.

Nevertheless, the evidence and method of reason can be beneficial because it can make the leap of faith less onerous. God does not expect us to make an infinite Kierkegardian leap of faith, but only a little leap sufficient to respect our freedom to love and respond to His call. Thus God allows us to use reason to build, as it were, a bridge across the chasm from this world to the transcendent – but He does not provide enough material to make that bridge extend completely to the other side. We can get very close to the other side, but ultimately, we are going to have to make an act of the will, muster our resolve, and respond in love to what reason cannot accomplish. God does this – not to be elusive – but to protect our freedom, dignity, and love.

³⁸ Alban Butler 1956 *Butler's Lives of the Saints* (2nd edition) 4 vols. Ed. by Herbert J. Thurston and Donald Attwater (New York: Christian Classics).

³⁹ According to Newman, an informal inference occurs when multiple antecedently and independently probable sources of data corroborate and complement one another. See John Henry Newman 2013, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press) pp. 189-215.

So what is entailed by this “little leap of faith?” It is a movement of the heart to respond to God’s interior call within us. This interior call – this natural attraction to and awareness of the sacred and transcendent -- has been the source of hundreds of volumes of reflection by philosophers,⁴⁰ psychologists,⁴¹ and theologians.⁴² Mircea Eliade, Rudolf Otto, and Karl Rahner are particularly insightful (see Volume 2, Chapter Three).

As noted in Volume 2, virtually every culture throughout human history has had a natural proclivity toward religion, and that religion is the source not only of transcendent worship, but also of the law, healthcare, social welfare, and in some cases education. The reason for the omnipresence of religion and its powerful formative influence lies in the fact that virtually every person has *an interior awareness of the spiritual-sacred domain*. We instinctively believe that we are more than just our material bodies, that our lives extend beyond this world, and that our being is distinct from that of other animals. This “spiritual instinct” is so strong that it requires repeated education (or brainwashing) to drum it out of us.

This interior awareness of the divine is the invitation to “the leap of faith.” It draws us into the search for evidence from reason, to pursue religion, to be fulfilled by sacred worship and spiritual beauty, and to take the risk (in loving conviction) to leap into the transcendent domain where reason cannot take us.

⁴⁰ St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Karl Rahner, Mark Buber, Gabriel Marcel, and Max Scheler presented evidence and arguments for our natural awareness of God. Rahner’s “supernatural existential” is perhaps the most comprehensive explanation of it, because he brings out the relational dimension of God’s presence, and assesses it in light of human freedom. Mircea Eliade, in his sixteen volume encyclopedia of religion, takes an empirical approach to religious experience, assessing literally hundreds of world religions both historically and currently. See all of the references to these thinkers in Volume 2, Chapter Two.

⁴¹ The two most well-known psychologists commenting on religious experience are William James and Carl Jung. William James originated the school of transpersonal psychology which is the inspiration for the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. His book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is the classic work for American studies of the psychology of religious experience. See William James 2009 *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Independent Publishing Platform).

Carl Jung famously responded to Sigmund Freud by noting that the experience of a sacred and transcendent reality was integral to the human psyche (and could not be reduced to any other psychological phenomenon – e.g., fear or libido, etc.). He believed the sense of the transcendent manifested itself in archetypal symbols that appear to be present in most cultural myths. Jungian psychologists use these archetypes as the basis for dream analysis. See Carl Jung 1960 *Psychology and Religion: The Terry Lecture Series* (New York: Yale University Press); also 1955 *Modern Man in Search of the Soul* (New York: Harcourt Harvest); also 1980 *C. G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters* Ed by W. McGuire & R. F. C. Hull (London: Pan Books).

⁴² The philosophical work initiated by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas has borne considerable fruit in both Protestant and Catholic theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher initiated a resurgence in our natural awareness of God. Rudolf Otto developed Schleiermacher’s thought particularly in the area of creature consciousness and fascination (and attempted to show that this awareness is irreducible to any other interior disposition). Otto influenced a host of Protestant and Catholic philosophers and theologians including Mircea Eliade, Max Scheler, C.S. Lewis, Paul Tillich, and Karl Rahner – to name just a few. These thinkers stressed a systematic *explanation* (as well as description) of our interior awareness of God.

The Christian mystical tradition has also stressed our natural awareness of God, but these writings are mostly descriptive, and non-systematic. They do however speak much more fully about interior transformation when one responds to God’s initial invitation. The most particular presentation of this may be found in St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and in the contemporary work of Evelyn Underhill. See the References at the bottom of this document.

This is not a leap into the abyss, but rather a leap into a transcendent reality present to us, or as Rahner would say, a leap into a relationship with the transcendent Being. We are not forced or manipulated into this relationship, but only invited into it. Therefore, we are free to respond in whatever way we choose. That is why faith can never be a merely rational procedure (the assembling of scientific and rational evidence leading toward a well-founded *intellectual* conclusion). It must also include a dimension of the heart or the will, because faith is fundamentally a free response to the invitation of the transcendent personal Being within us.

This response is not automatic. Some people may not *want* (choose) to be in relationship with a “supernatural other,” some may see this “other” as an imposition, some may screen out or choose to ignore this Being’s presence for various motives, and some may be talked out of believing in this Being. Though most people choose to respond positively to this Being, it is clear that they do not have to – they are free to ignore or reject, or to resent or love this Being, because the Being does not *demand* a response but only offers an invitation.

Therefore, if we are to proceed with a life of faith (Level Four), we will have to choose to respond to the transcendent Being’s invitation; we will need a movement of our hearts and wills – not just an operation of our minds. Though evidence for God, the soul, and even the love of God can help to rationally ground and solidify our faith, it cannot take the place of faith. It can make our leap of faith smaller and less challenging, but it cannot replace the movement of the heart or will.

If we respond to God’s interior invitation to us, our relationship with Him becomes explicit which results in grace (favor from God, such as, inspiration, guidance, supernatural assistance, and a deeper and closer relationship with Him). Grace is a surprising and inspiring gift from God that leads us on a journey (or perhaps better, an adventure) directing us to our most pervasive, enduring, and deep purpose in life.

When we combine this little leap of faith with the rational evidence for God, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (summarized in Section One above), we are ready to proceed with life in Christ through His Church, which opens the path to living in the truth, spiritual community, and eternal salvation with the Holy Trinity.

III.

Where Do we Go from Here? Life in Christ through the Catholic Church

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The decisions about a church community and a definitive source and interpreter of revelation is the *most* important step in moving to a life in Christ because it grounds two critical dimensions for living this eternally transcendent life of hope – spiritual conversion and moral conversion. If we have chosen the Catholic Church (with its faith community, its teaching and juridical authority, and its practice of the sacraments), then we already have the guidance and support system needed to live within this transcendent domain (the Kingdom of God) brought to this world by the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Since our approach to spiritual and moral conversion is based on the Catholic Church's interpretation of the revelation of Jesus, the final three parts of *Credible Catholic Big Book* will depend on the reader's assent in faith to Jesus' intention to make the Catholic Church the authoritative interpreter of his teaching and leader of his community. Therefore, if the reader has not yet made a decision to be involved in the Catholic Church, the remainder of *Credible Catholic Big Book* will have limited value—relegated to merely intellectual interest, but unable to lead to deeper moral and spiritual conversion. However, if the reader has chosen Jesus as the ultimate source of revelation and the Catholic Church as His definitive interpreter (and has sacramentalized this choice through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist) then the rest of *Credible Catholic Big Book* will provide useful resources and a roadmap to deepen one's moral and spiritual conversion.

III.A Spiritual Conversion

Spiritual conversion within the Catholic Church has five major elements. Two of these elements are concerned with Church community, and are covered in Part Two of *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Three of them are concerned with personal prayer, and are covered in Part Four of *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The two elements concerned with the Church community are:

1. The sacramental life—including the Mass and the Holy Eucharist (Volume 9), Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Holy Orders, and Sacrament of the Sick (Volume 10), and Marriage (Volume 11).
2. Devotional life within the Catholic community (devotion to Mary and the saints, service within the Church, spiritual formation and education within the Church, community devotions, and sacramentals) – Volume 12.

The three elements concerned with personal prayer are:

3. Developing a personal relationship with the Lord (Volume 18).
4. Learning and using four kinds of prayer:
 - (a) Spontaneous prayers (in times of need and anxiety)—Volume 18.
 - (b) The Examen prayer (for deeper moral conversion)—Volume 20.
 - (c) A discipline for following the Holy Spirit (including: rules for discernment of spirits) – Volume 20.
 - (d) Contemplative prayer (including *Lectio Divina*, Ignatian meditation, prayer of silence, and Christian mysticism) – Volume 20 .
5. How to transform suffering through faith—including why an all-loving God would allow suffering – Volume 19.

III.B
Moral Conversion

Authentic moral conversion has five dimensions—all of which are covered in Part Three:

1. Belief in and rejection of spiritual evil and objective moral evil (Volume 14).
2. Awareness of how spiritual evil tempts and deceives – and how the seven capital sins can consume the soul (Volumes 14 & 15).
3. Awareness of how moral virtue, the sacraments and prayer can detach us from the influence of spiritual evil and the addictions of the capital sins (Volume 16).
4. Knowledge of basic objective moral principles and how to make a rational and good ethical decision (Volume 17).
5. The application of objective moral principles to social ethics and the law (Volume 17).

IV.
Conclusion
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As can be seen, there is a huge amount of material concerned with moral and spiritual conversion, and realism dictates that no human being can learn and incorporate all of this into a lifetime of even ardent desire and concerted effort. As will be emphasized throughout Parts Two through Four, the most important dimensions of both moral and spiritual conversion are our personal relationship with Christ and our active participation in the Catholic Church. This puts us on a journey with the Lord (through the Holy Spirit) which is likely to make progress in spiritual and moral conversion but highly unlikely to be complete upon our passing over to the Lord. This makes us dependent on the unconditional love and mercy of the Lord, extended to us through the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus. We can call upon His unconditional forgiveness and mercy through contrite prayer and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In light of this unconditional love, we can say with assurance that if we stay on the journey with the Lord (through some of the vehicles of moral and spiritual conversion recommended in Parts Two through Four) and if we sincerely repent for the times when we have failed morally and spiritually (through contrite prayer and the Sacrament of Reconciliation), then God will help us to do the rest either immediately after our death (in Heaven) or in the next life (in Purgatory). In either case, we may have certain hope that we will eventually be with Him and the Blessed in Heaven -- where we shall see Him as He is in the Beatific Vision.