

PART FOUR
THE CHURCH AS MORAL TEACHER.

Guide me, Lord, in the way of your commands!

Behold my affliction, and rescue me,
for I have not forgotten your law.
Plead my cause, and redeem me;
for the sake of your promise give me life.

Guide me, Lord, in the way of your commands!

Far from sinners is salvation,
because they seek not your statutes.
I beheld the apostates with loathing,
because they kept not to your promise.

Guide me, Lord, in the way of your commands!

See how I love your precepts, O Lord;
in your kindness give me life.
Permanence is your word's chief trait;
each of your just ordinances is everlasting.

Guide me, Lord, in the way of your commands!

Psalm 119.153-155, 158-160

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: LIVING ONE'S CHRISTIAN LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

A. Introductory considerations

5 I promised to consider Christian life in this part insofar as the Christian lives for others--lives a redeeming life. However, many questions which fall under this general topic do not pertain to Christian Moral Principles. They will be considered in later volumes, when I examine the common responsibilities of all Christians, the special duties which pertain to some specific vocations, and the proper functions of various
10 parts of the Church. Moreover, the means by which the Church redeems her own--the liturgy and especially the sacraments--will be considered in part seven. In the present part, then, I consider only one aspect of the redemptive living of a Christian life: its service as a sign which reveals God's saving love. To serve as such a sign, one's Christian life must be formed by the Church's moral teaching. Thus the precise subject of
15 this part is designated by the title: "The Church as Moral Teacher."

To the extent that it is followed, the moral teaching of the Church shapes the lives of her children into a community of love in communion with the redemptive act of Christ. The actions which make up such lives are revelatory deeds which substantiate the words of the Gospel, thus to proclaim the redeeming love of God and to afford those who
20 hear this proclamation an opportunity to accept it in faith or to reject it with unbelief. Because this is so, every member of the Church must either live in full accord with her moral teaching or confess sin and do penance for failing to do so. That this obligation to conform one's life to the Church's moral teaching is real, serious, and exceptionless is the main point I try to clarify in this part.

25 Obviously, many today will regard this point as a controversial thesis. Many theologians, some bishops and priests, and a substantial segment of the laity maintain that Catholics need not conform to the Church's moral teaching, but need only take it into account together with other considerations in reaching a personal judgment of "conscience" which, they think, can rightly contradict the judgment which would simply conform to the
30 moral teaching of the Church.

For example, the Church teaches that it always is wrong to choose to kill the unborn or to choose to have sexual relations with a person not one's spouse. In 1968, certain moral theologians (and a far larger number of persons called "theologians" in the media but without special competence in the matter) asserted "that spouses may responsibly
35 decide according to their conscience that artificial contraception in some circumstances is permissible and indeed necessary to preserve and foster the values and sacredness of marriage." [1] By 1979 many theologians have asserted that anyone may responsibly decide according to his or her conscience that acts of any kind (including acts such as those mentioned) in some circumstances are permissible and even obligatory to preserve
40 and foster greater goods or to avoid greater evils. I call this position "radical dissent."

In the present part I provide reasons for thinking this position false. I do not say I will prove it to be false, as if its falsity could be established apart from the light of faith by some sort of mathematical demonstration. Rather, I will call attention
45 to a great many factors which usually are overlooked or only acknowledged in passing by those who radically dissent from the Church's moral teaching. I will make clear, as best I can, why persons who hold the Catholic faith and who wish to live up to it will do their best in their every single act to live in full accord with the Church's moral teaching.

50 In carrying out the work of this part, I cannot avoid calling into question not only the truth of what many persons have said but also the rightness of their saying it (and of various things they have done). In doing this, I am not questioning anyone's ultimate personal sincerity. One can condemn Nazi genocide without uttering the ultimate condemnation--which Christ forbids us to utter--upon Hitler and his associates.
55 Perhaps they were insane; perhaps they were misguided by factors beyond their control which we cannot assess; perhaps they were possessed by demons.

I am always prepared to entertain these and other possible grounds of nonculpability for those who urge Catholics to disregard the Church's moral teaching. I am not prepared to entertain the confused and sentimental assumption that the sincerity we must
60 presume for everyone renders uncharitable my challenge to the claim of those who hold opinions which radically dissent from the Church's moral teaching to be engaged in legitimate theological activity. The Church ought to make clear that no one who radically dissents from her teaching is a theologian of hers.

Obviously, if anyone has made up his or her mind that some moral teaching of the
65 Church will be disregarded no matter what the Church or anyone else might say, then he or she will find ways to ignore, misunderstand, or set aside what I say here against the radically dissenting position. Such a person is in bad faith; argument is useless, and one can only pray that eventually he or she will stop resisting God's grace. However, I do not assume anyone is in bad faith. Hence, I trust that what follows will be considered with open minds and hearts by all who initially might be inclined to share opinions
70 radically dissenting from the Church's moral teaching.

The present chapter will consider various aspects of our living the Christian life as members of the Catholic Church. Chapter fourteen will examine conscience and its principles; chapter fifteen, the Church's infallibility, the weight of her teaching, and
75 the very limited possibility of legitimate dissent from it; and chapter sixteen, various objections and replies.

Our life as members of the Catholic Church is a rich and complex reality which we know better in living it than in reflecting upon it. My considerations of this reality in the present chapter do not amount to a treatise on the Church. Rather, I offer a
80 series of meditations, viewing the subject from one angle after another. The reflections of the previous parts are relevant to this one; in many cases I indicate points of juncture. But to some extent I repeat what has been said before or cover the same ground twice even within this chapter. My aim is not so much to prove anything as to call to mind what we should mean when we say: Yes, I am a Catholic.

B. Divine revelation

I discussed revelation in chapter one, section F, and in chapter eleven, sections F and G. In the former chapter, the main point was that divine revelation is a total personal communication; in the latter chapter, the point was that the whole human life (including the death and resurrection) of Jesus reveals God's love most fully, and that Jesus as man willingly cooperated in the work of revelation. Here I wish to make a few further points about revelation which will be helpful for the purposes of the present part.[2]

Both Vatican I and Vatican II teach that God can be known from creation in which He gives humankind a permanent testimony to Himself (cf. DS 3004/1785; DV 3). This testimony, which can be grasped by the natural light of reason, is not called "revelation" by either Council. Although God's power and divinity can be seen from the things He has made (cf. Rom 1.20), awareness of God limited to this means hardly provides a basis for telling whether God is personal, much less for establishing any sort of interpersonal relationship with Him.

God freely chose to call human persons to share in His own divine life; this calling involves a special, supernatural, and personal communication by God to those He wishes to call (cf. DS 3004-3005/1785-1786). This teaching of Vatican I on the necessity of revelation that human persons might reach heaven precludes the view that what one can know by reason alone is sufficient for the living of a Christian life.[3]

God reveals Himself by speaking to human persons as friends, joining in their lives, and inviting and making them to share in His life (DV 2). Revelation, then, is not the unveiling of a transcendent object nor is it the communication of mere information. It is a personal communication, carried out by words and deeds. These hang together: God does certain things and supplies a set of verbal expressions which call attention to and explain what He is doing, while what He is doing substantiates the verbal account He provides (cf. DV 2). Clearly, revelation occurs in the created world; it is a certain set of created things, which are distinct from everything else in that they are divinely adapted to serve as signals from God.

Without a human recipient who grasps a signal as such, there would be no revelation, but only an attempt at it. Hence, while God reveals and primarily reveals Himself, God's revelation is not identical with Himself. The revelation, properly speaking, manifests God in a personal way, yet nevertheless belongs to the created world and can be grasped to some extent in human terms. If this were not so, communication would not occur. At the same time, the content grasped remains mysterious and leads the recipient to enter into the mystery; otherwise, the revelation would not point to God and initiate a relationship with Him.

Since revelation is a particular set of created things which can be grasped humanly, one cannot say that revealed truth is ineffable, nor that no human expression of it is altogether adequate and accurate so far as it goes. To say such things is to confuse revelation with God, and is implicitly to deny that God has managed to reveal Himself. Moreover, since revelation is a divine communication which reaches human persons as such and in a social setting, one cannot say that the content of revelation is given to the mind by some sort of nonconceptual intuition. The content is conveyed in the publicly given words and deeds, which can be observed and grasped by many persons together. For example, the revelation of God in Jesus was observed and appropriated by the Twelve (and perhaps by many others).

Since revelation is in a created medium and must be humanly accessible if it is to be successful, it must include and make use of many things already given and familiar. God could not reveal Himself to Moses without using existing human language and institutions, such as the form of covenant. At the same time, since revelation is a distinct signal capable of initiating an interpersonal relationship, it must center upon experiences--sets of words and deeds--which cannot be reasonably regarded as anything else than a communication from God (cf. Ex 3-4 with its account of miracles and a mysterious voice).

Prior to Christ, God reveals Himself through the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets (cf. DV 3). This revelation is divinely directed toward the fullness of revelation in Christ, the Son of God (cf. DV 4, 14-15; LG 9, NA 4). Israel is the matrix, the cultural womb of the messiah (cf. Rev 12.1-5). Just as Mary must be understood by relationship to Jesus (cf. LG 55-65), so the whole Old Testament must be understood by relationship to Jesus. The Word Incarnate is not simply a man of His culture, for God created this culture, just as He wished it, to serve as a medium of His work of revelation. God relates history to His own saving purposes (cf. Wis 19.6). The center of salvation history, the Incarnate Word, is not cast adrift in the stream of human history. Jesus completes what God all along intends (cf. Jn 19.28-30; 2 Cor 1.20; and all New Testament references to fulfillment of the Scriptures). Rather than Jesus being a man of His culture, His culture is the culture of this man.

Jesus in His humanity is the ultimate revelation of God (cf. Heb 1.1-2). He comes into the world to testify to the truth (cf. Jn 18.36-37); through Him the Father is perfectly revealed (cf. Mt 11.25-27; Lk 10.21-22; Jn 3.11). By the works Jesus does with divine power, and by the working of the Father and the Spirit in the hearts of those Jesus addresses, God also gives testimony to Jesus and His true glory (cf. Jn 5.36; 10.25; Lk 10.21-22; Jn 6.44-45; 1 Jn 5.6). Such testimony is the evidence and the necessary disposition to appreciate its significance: that God seeks to communicate His love. Yet even such evidence is not coercion. Those to whom it is addressed can believe it or refuse to believe it.

The reality of Jesus as man is far richer than a mere set of propositional truths. His whole human existence was a complex datum for the experience of the men He chose to be His witnesses. However, He did convey to them something of His self-understanding, of His intentions, or His expectations. These aspects of a person are or include propositions and are expressed in statements. Those who refused to accept the testimony of Jesus expressed in such statements did not believe in Him (cf. Jn 8.12-59), while His own who had faith in Him naturally accepted as true what He said about Himself (cf. Jn 16.29-30).

C. Faith in others

I briefly considered faith in chapter six, section I, and in chapter seven, section B. There I was interested in faith primarily because in it we freely accept God's proposal of intimate communion, and so are freed from sin and justified--that is, restored to divine friendship and constituted adopted members of God's family. In chapter twelve, sections B and G, I pointed out that we are united to the basic commitment of Jesus by the act of faith. Here I am concerned with faith mainly insofar as it is the most fundamental commitment of a Christian's life, the choice which conditions every other act one does insofar as one acts as a Christian should act.

To understand belief in God, one can begin from other cases of interpersonal belief. Most of what we think we know actually is taken on faith--faith in scientists and experts, faith in reporters and media of communication, faith in parents and teachers, and so forth. Even in a hard science like physics, most of what the expert in the field "knows" is accepted on faith from others in the field. Almost everything we "know" about the past is accepted by belief in witnesses.

However, most propositions accepted on faith could in principle be checked out--verified--in some way. A physicist with sufficient know-how, time, money, and helpers can try to verify the findings of other physicists. In principle, one could check out most everything one believes. In some cases, such as memories of past events, the verification of one witness can only be by finding other witnesses or material remains (but the latter always must be interpreted in respect to their past reference). But when one has faith in another person as a basis for a personal relationship, not even in principle nor even by other witnesses is verification possible.

Consider, for instance, the situation of a young man and woman who meet and begin to become seriously interested in one another. They exchange confidences, secrets about themselves. They exchange memories and feelings about these memories, experiences and evaluations of these, idle thoughts and wishes, hopes and dreams, plans and commitments. Hidden consciousness, only some of which usually is unveiled in outward behavior and some of which seems contradicted by outward behavior ("I really didn't mean to hurt your father's feelings; I just reacted when he said that"), is poured forth in words until one or both declare: "I love you."

This declaration and all that is most personally interesting and valuable of what precedes it must be taken, if it is taken at all, on faith. And faith here admits of no verification whatsoever. If factual content of personal communication proves to have been false, one always can write the false information off to honest mistakes or to weaknesses in self-expression. If others who know the person well have incompatible beliefs about him or her, these can be explained by the lower degree of communication and understanding the person has with others.

Faith in another person as the basis for personal relationship is an irreplaceable form of cognition. Faith is not experience; the other person's inner self remains hidden, and everything which is outwardly observable and can be experienced is secondary to the reality one grasps in faith: the self of the other. Without such faith, no intimate friendship can grow. By faith one accepts the truth of what the other person says about himself or herself, and so accepts the person. One proceeds to hope: to have confidence that the other will act as he or she promises, will carry out commitments and fulfill expressed intentions. One proceeds to love: to be disposed to commit oneself to communion in an ever-deepening friendship, to follow a common path through life wherever the path might lead, and to carry out one's own promises.

Finally, in the exchange of marriage vows, preparatory faith is fulfilled in living faith: I take you no matter what happens until death; I promise my faithfulness to you and to our common life until death. This faith, for those who are faithful to it, cannot be falsified and never is simply lost. As life together unfolds, faith deepens but is not replaced. Communion in action constantly confirms faith, until the couple at times feel almost transparent to one another, yet the mystery also always remains.

From the preceding, one can gather the following points about the faith which is necessary for interpersonal relationships. It cannot be replaced by any other mode of cognition. It is in the person and in the propositions the person expresses--the two are inseparable, for the person is (in part) the self-knowledge he or she expresses. It is the beginning of intimacy and points to greater intimacy. Thus it always refers to the future. It leads to a common life, in which each hopes in the other to fulfill commitments and lovingly commits himself or herself to the other as a partner. In other words, faith demands faithful fulfillment in action. Finally, for the faithful, faith cannot be falsified and never will be lost.

As I have been describing it, faith is mixed with emotion and the whole complex psychology of a romantic relationship. Most of the elements of such a relationship are nonessential. One can imagine a couple who have never met marrying one another by proxy, thus to commit themselves to a life-long union, arranged perhaps by a marriage broker. If they truly make and accept the mutual marriage vow, such a couple have faith in one another. All the essential aspects of faith are present in such a case.

I have described with care what is involved in our faith in other human persons. By the Incarnation of the Word, God reveals Himself in the medium of a man. "To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him. Any who did accept him he empowered to become children of God. These are they who believe in his name" (Jn 1.11-12). "Indeed, this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks upon the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life" (Jn 6.40). Like a marriage broker, Jesus mediates a personal relationship which goes beyond Himself:

"Whoever puts faith in me believes not so much in me as in him who sent me; and whoever looks on me is seeing him who sent me. I have come to the world as its light, to keep anyone who believes in me from remaining in the dark. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I am not the one to condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save it. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words already has his judge, namely, the word I have spoken" (Jn 12.44-48).

Moreover, faith in Jesus can be established through human persons who mediate it, having been authorized by Jesus to do so: "I solemnly assure you, he who accepts anyone I send accepts me, and in accepting me accepts him who sent me" (Jn 13.20).

5 Since faith in God is mediated by human faith, the various aspects of faith common to all human interpersonal relationships also can be discerned in Christian faith in God.

D. Faith in God and in the truths He reveals

10 God's secret which He reveals is not merely some fact about Himself or some event which we may expect (cf. Eph 1.9; 6.19). Revealing Himself in Jesus, God makes Himself personally known; in accepting and repaying Jesus' self-gift, God makes clear that He loves humankind and wishes us to share His own intimate life. God reveals His own inmost heart; there is no God beyond Him who reveals Himself, and we now have a way to Him: Jesus (cf. Eph 2.18; 3.12). Faith means acceptance of this personal communication.

15 Since this acceptance is the beginning of intimacy, faith is absolutely necessary; without it one cannot please God, and unless one stands fast in faith one cannot reach heaven (cf. DS 3012/1793; Heb 11.6; Mt 10.22; 24.13). The entire Bible makes clear that faith in God is necessary and that nothing else can substitute for it--neither human wisdom, nor religious experiences, nor good works (cf. 1 Cor 1-2; 1 Jn 4.1-6; Gal 3.1-9).

20 God reveals Himself by deeds and words (cf. DV 2). Deeds are not simply events or happenings; they are actions which carry personal meaning. Without mighty deeds, any set of words could reasonably be regarded as merely deceptive talk; thus revelation contains such deeds, especially miracles and fulfilled prophecies, which everyone can understand (cf. DS 3009/1790; 3034/1813). Without the words which interpret them, God's deeds in our world would seem to us merely odd and inexplicable events. Faith in God revealing means acceptance of Him as He communicates Himself, and so involves both welcoming His deeds and assenting to the truth of the words which articulate in propositional form the mystery contained in these deeds. Therefore, Vatican II teaches:

30 To see Jesus is to see His Father (Jn 14.9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through His whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself; through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover, He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed: that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.

35 The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Tm 6.14 and Ti 2.13). (DV 4)

40 The obedience of faith (Rom 16.26; cf. 1.5; 2 Cor 10.5-6) must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering "the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals" (DS 3008/1789), and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him (DV 5).

Thus Vatican II makes clear that by faith one personally submits to God and enters into a relationship with Him, and for this very reason one assents to revealed truth. Vatican I more explicitly and definitively teaches what truths must be believed:

45 Moreover, by divine and Catholic faith everything must be believed that is contained in the written word of God or in tradition, and that is proposed by the Church as a divinely revealed object of belief in a solemn decree or in her ordinary, universal teaching (DS 3011/1792).

50 A definite body of truths articulated in human language--the truths which the Church proposes for belief--constitutes the actual content of divine revelation as it is presented to us. It is in wholeheartedly accepting these truths and in no other way that we believe in God, for in wholeheartedly accepting these truths we welcome God's deeds, we take His promises to be true (cf. DS 1526/798), and we enter into relationship with God as He has made Himself present to us: in Jesus Christ and in the complex of salvation history which centers upon Him (cf. Eph 2.18; 3.12).

60 To attempt, as many today do attempt, to reduce revelation and faith to some sort of nonconceptual, nonpropositional, mysterious contact between God and the soul of the believer is to deny that revelation really has occurred, that God really communicates Himself to us in the medium of created words and deeds. For a Jew or a Moslem to deny that God acts and speaks in history by created media would be absurd; for a Christian, whose faith centers upon the Word Incarnate, to deny that what is to be believed is palpable and effable--and conveyed in a definite set of propositional truths--is doubly absurd (cf. 1 Jn 1.1-4).

65 We believe by hearing. "If what you heard from the beginning does remain in your hearts, then you in turn will remain in the Son and in the Father" (1 Jn 2.24). "You senseless Galatians! . . . I want to learn only one thing from you: how did you receive the Spirit? Was it through observance of the law or through faith in what you heard?" (Gal 3.1-2). Abraham "never questioned or doubted God's promise; rather he was strengthened in faith and gave glory to God, fully persuaded that God could do whatever He promised" (Rom 4.20-21). Faith provides the content of our hope and makes us certain about realities to which we have no other access (cf. Heb 11.1-3, 6). "Faith, then, comes through hearing, and what is heard is the word of Christ" (Rom 10.17).

75 The faith is professed aloud by one who seeks baptism (cf. 1 Tm 6.12), and by all who sincerely say the Creed. It is a common faith (cf. Ti 1.4), because there is only one true faith (cf. Eph 4.5). This word of faith, which is the word of the Lord, is preached (cf. Rom 10.8). One who keeps it and stands firm in it can be proud of so doing (cf. 2 Tm 4.7). When imposters who are moved by godless passions, people devoid of the Spirit, create divisions in the Christian community, the faithful must "remember the prophetic words of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 17). "Be on your guard lest you be led astray by the error of the wicked, and forfeit the security you enjoy" (2 Pt 3.17).

80 Vatican II firmly insists that in all aspects of their work, "the task of priests is not to teach their own wisdom but God's Word, and to summon all men urgently to

conversion and to holiness" (PO 4). "Whoever teaches in any other way, not holding to the sound doctrines of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching proper to true religion, should be recognized as both conceited and ignorant, a sick man in his passion for polemics and controversy" (1 Tm 6.3-4).

5 In his teaching a bishop "must hold fast to the authentic message, so that he will be able to encourage men to follow sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it" (Ti 1.9). Unfortunately, the task is not easy: "For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but, following their own desires, will surround themselves with teachers who tickle their ears. They will stop listening to the truth and
10 will wander off to fables. As for you, be steady and self-possessed; put up with hardship, perform your work as an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tm 4.3-5).

E. The dynamics of the act of faith

15 The beginning of faith and its relationship to love already were considered in chapter six, section I, and chapter seven, section B. Because the truth of faith is not evident, one can refuse to assent to it, and one's choice to assent is free (cf. DS 1525/797; 1554/814). However, the act of faith is not an arbitrary leap in the dark, a matter of blind impulse. Rather, it is a reasonable submission (cf. DS 3009/1790). A
20 person who rightly believes does so in fulfillment of the duty of conscience to seek the truth and to embrace it once it is found (cf. DH 2 and 10).

If the truth of faith is not evident, how does one know that one has found this truth when one hears the teaching of Christ? In answering this question, one must distinguish carefully between the factors which make possible assent as a reasonable human act and the special divine gift which makes possible assent as a personal surrender to
25 God revealing Himself. Faith is at once a human act and a gift of God; the two aspects cannot be separated and ought not to be confused.

The factors which make assent possible as a free human act are twofold. On the one hand, because human knowledge and interpersonal relationships in general rely very
30 heavily upon faith, everyone knows that as a rule testimony ought to be believed, provided that the one giving testimony offers no ground for suspicion and shows some basis for competence in the matter under consideration. On the other hand, the preaching of the Gospel is accompanied by signs which are sufficient to show that despite its extraordinary content, those who proclaim it are sincere and qualified in the field of the
35 religious truth of humankind's relationship to God. Vatican I emphasized the effectiveness not only of miracles and prophecies, but also and especially of the Church herself as a sign of credibility of her message:

Indeed, the Church itself, because of its marvelous propagation, its exalted sanctity, and its inexhaustible fruitfulness in all that is good, because of its
40 catholic unity and its unshaken stability, is a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefutable proof of its own divine mission. Consequently, the Church, like a standard lifted up for the nations (cf. Is 11.12), not only calls to herself those who have not yet believed, but also she proves to her own children that the faith they profess rests on a most solid foundation (DS 3013-3014/1794).
45 If these words today sound brave but slightly hollow, the reason is that the Church is not something other than us, the People of God (cf. LG 9-17). The power of the Church as a motive of credibility depends on our manifesting the love of Christ in our lives--on our living redemptively. I shall consider this point in section I, below.

In chapter eleven, section I, I pointed out that Jesus normally did signs in response to an incipient faith, and by means of these signs elicited faith in His revelation. Faith is given to provide eyes to see and ears to hear if one is willing to accept it (cf. Mk 8.14-21; Mt 16.5-12). But no cogent sign is offered to the closed-minded
50 who are not prepared to enter a personal relationship with God's saving love (cf. Mk 8.11-13; Mt 16.1-4; Lk 12.54-56). Confronted with facts, people do not automatically believe in the relevant way (cf. Lk 24.11, 37, 41; Mk 16.11-14; Mt 28.17). There are provisional grounds of faith which finally matures into absolute acceptance of God's self-revelation (cf. Jn 4.6-42; Mk 8.22-26; 9.14-29). These data from Scripture confirm the teaching of the Council of Trent that in the process of justification one makes preparatory acts of faith, hope, and charity, and that human freedom has a role in these preparatory acts (cf. DS 1525-1526/797-798).
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Living faith not only is a human act but also is a gift of God which is infused when one receives the sacrament of baptism. God overcomes the alienation of sin, unites one with Christ, and gives the Spirit who pours forth love which remains in the one baptized. Faith, hope, and charity are received together at the same time sin is overcome.
65 Only this living faith brings one to eternal life (cf. DS 1529-1530/799-800). Here then is the special divine gift which makes it possible for us to assent to divine truth with a personal surrender to God revealing Himself.

Vatican I definitively teaches that by this living faith "with the inspiration and help of God's grace, we believe that what he has revealed is true--not because its intrinsic truth is seen with the natural light of reason--but because of the authority of
70 God who reveals it, of God who can neither deceive nor be deceived" (DS 3008/1789; 3032/1811). Vatican II likewise teaches that for living faith

... the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind, and
75 giving "joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it" (DS 3010/1791). To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation, the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts (DV 5).

The believer is aware of an important fact about his or her own Christian faith: It has absolute certitude. This fact cannot be accounted for by the factors which make faith
80 possible as a free human act. The absolute certitude of Christian faith is accounted for by faith's own teaching that faith is a divine gift. Hence, our experience of the certitude of our own faith is a datum, and this datum is an important sign of the divine source of our faith.

Scripture teaches that God mysteriously moves one to faith: "No one can come to

me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn 6.44). Jesus attributes to revelation by His Father Peter's recognition of Him as the Christ (cf. Mt 16.17). "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4.6). Faith in Christ is backed by the testimony of God the Father and the Spirit of truth (cf. 1 Jn 5.6-9).

It is important to notice that while faith is impossible without this inward testimony of God, this testimony does not provide content for faith. The content is the propositions which are openly communicated by which we grasp the created, revelatory realities, most especially the humanity and career of Christ. Nothing in the Church's teaching nor in Scripture suggests that God's inward testimony adds to, alters, or in any way constitutes the content of faith.

On the contrary, Jesus manifested the whole content of revelation to His chosen witnesses (cf. Jn 15.15). The Spirit adds nothing to this content, but helps those to whom it is given to appropriate it (cf. Jn 14.26; 16.13-15). St. Paul's teaching that Christian wisdom is revealed through the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2.10-16) does not support a different position, for Paul states that the content of "words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor 2.13) derives from "my message and my preaching," and this message has "the convincing power of the Spirit" (1 Cor 2.4).

Even God's self-identification as God is a particular truth--a primary item in the content--which is revealed (cf. Ex 3.6, 14; 20.2; Dt 5.6; Jn 8.24, 58). One who accepts this truth accepts all the rest. Thus, all that the Spirit need make us know is the identifying truth--for example, that Jesus Christ is the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 12.3; 1 Jn 4.15). One is moved by God to recognize God communicating in the revealing medium: the words and deeds of God at the Exodus, of Jesus during His earthly life, and of Him today acting in the preaching and life of the Church.

Very often the acts of faith, hope, and charity have been thought of as if they were separate. It seems to me that in living faith, the three virtues concur in a single act. St. Paul closely and dynamically links the three (cf. Rom 5.1-5; Gal 5.5-6; Col 1.4; also Heb 10.22-24; 1 Pt 1.3-8). Also, there are suggestions in the First Epistle of John that faith is a consequence of love (1 Jn 5.1). Since faith, hope, and love are received together and since faith usually is considered the basis (cf. Rom 5.1-5), the priority of love can hardly be understood unless in living faith the virtues concur in one and the same act. St. Thomas locates only one free human act in the person who is justified at the moment of justification; it is the assent of faith.[4]

The act of faith-hope-love can be viewed in this way: By faith we accept the truth of God's self-revelation; acceptance of His truth makes us hope with confidence that He will fulfill the personal relationship He has initiated; this hope enables us to be disposed in love to live according to His will and so come to perfect communion with Him. The act also can be viewed in this way: By love we share in God's own life and are disposed to fulfillment in it; the experience of this love and its dynamism makes us hope with confidence for fulfillment; this personal trust in God renders our assent in faith to His revealed truth absolutely certain and unshakeable.

This second way of viewing the dynamic unity of the three aspects of our personal relationship to God could clarify how justifying faith differs from preparatory acts of faith, why believing in God out of love of Him justifies, and also how God testifies and the Spirit convinces. For if the assent of living faith is the first human act we do out of the love of God poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, then I see no reason to suppose that anything other than the gift of this love is required to make us certain beyond human certitude that what appears to be divine revelation most surely and truly is so: God's proposal of communion is surely true, for we find ourselves beginning to live in it.

The Council of Trent definitively teaches that by every mortal sin one loses grace or charity, but not faith except by sin contrary to it (cf. DS 1544/808; 1577-1578/837-838). The faith which remains when one is in mortal sin is "true faith, granted it is not a living faith" (DS 1578/838). One remains a Christian, a child of God although a prodigal one. I am inclined to think that this teaching is a very important reason why Catholics have tended to suppose that there are three distinct acts of the theological virtues, not one single act as I have been suggesting. How can I reconcile my view with what Trent teaches about the faith of a person in mortal sin?

My answer is that when one continues to believe in God while standing against Him in sin, one's act of faith obviously cannot be motivated by love. Yet on the account I have just now sketched, the past experience of God's love still can have its effect by the medium of hope. One in sin remembers better days when love was there. The past experience of love is sufficient to keep alive confidence in God's mercy, and this confidence can preserve one's certitude that what is revealed truly is God's absolutely trustworthy communication. Even if I sin mortally, I know who is unfaithful. God's love I have known. It endures. He can be trusted; there is no reason to doubt His word.

F. Sin: the only real obstacle and threat to faith

The parable of the sower (Mk 8.13-20; Mt 13.18-23; Lk 8.11-15) suggests that whether revelation is received and flourishes into Christian life depends upon the dispositions of its recipients, and that rejection of faith is due to immorality which sets up resistance to God's love. The same thing is stated more bluntly in John's Gospel:

"God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Whoever believes in him avoids condemnation, but whoever does not believe is already condemned for not believing in the name of God's only Son.

The judgment of condemnation is this: the light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were wicked. Everyone who practices evil hates the light; he does not come near it for fear his deeds will be exposed.

But he who acts in truth comes into the light, to make clear that his deeds are done in God" (Jn 3.17-21).

The explanation for unbelief is clear and it is simple: Sin and rationalization block one's readiness to be open to God's truth. I have explained why this is so in chapter seven, section F: One who sins does not love himself or herself properly, and so cannot remain open to infinite goodness of which one's own goodness is a participation. Those who oppose Jesus are willfully blind to the truth (cf. Jn 9.39-41).

As I will explain more fully later in this chapter, faith is inherently demanding in the moral sphere. Of itself, faith requires obedience (cf. Rom 16.26; Jn 3.36). One who loves God is going to have to keep His commandments (cf. Dt 6.4-6; Jn 15.10; Mt 19.16-21). One who is unwilling to keep the commandments will be unable to believe, for faith would call for love and the doing of God's will.

The word of God is an indestructible seed; unlike all human things, which can be lost or destroyed, the word of God stands firm (cf. 1 Pt 1.23-25; Is 40.6-8). Hence, once we receive faith, we cannot lose it. We will remain partners of Christ as long as we do not rebel against the truth we accepted in faith (cf. Heb 3.14-16). One must fight the good fight and hold fast to faith and a good conscience; unfortunately, "Some men, by rejecting the guidance of conscience, have made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tm 1.19). Vatican I teaches that God

. . .strengthens with his grace those whom he has brought out of darkness into his marvelous light (cf. 1 Pt 2.9), so that they may remain in this light. Therefore, the position of those who have embraced the Catholic truth by the heavenly gift of faith and of those who have been misled by human opinions and follow a false religion is by no means the same, for the former, who have accepted the faith under the teaching authority of the Church, can never have any just reason for changing that faith or calling it into question (DS 3014/1794).

To deny this teaching not only is to reject Vatican I, but also is to reject the premise from which Vatican I draws it: that God is faithful and never abandons anyone unless they first abandon Him (cf. DS 3014/1794; 1537/804). Anyone who denies this obviously is an unbeliever.

Mortal sin does not at once destroy faith, unless it is a sin against faith. But mortal sin sets up a crisis of faith. One in mortal sin who still believes is existentially torn between the lie of sin and the truth of God which condemns this lie (cf. Rev 21.8). Christians who admit their sin can receive God's merciful forgiveness, but only if they will accept this forgiveness and renew their commitment of living faith. For a Catholic, this means the confession of the sin or the desire to confess it when possible (cf. DS 1542-1543/807). To pretend that one is not in sin when one is in it is to make oneself a liar, to practice self-deception, to resist God's mercy, and ultimately to make shipwreck of one's faith.

Since many people today seem to be losing their faith, this point seems harsh and is not readily accepted by a great many Catholics. I make it not to call into question and judge the moral status of any individual. Some who seem to have lost their faith perhaps in reality have not done so, but only act as if they had because of confusion; others who seem to have lost their faith perhaps never really had it. Moreover, if some have lost their faith after having been taught to practice self-deception by priests they trusted, then the guilt of those scandalized might be slight in comparison with the guilt of those who gave them scandal (cf. Mt 18.6-7; Mk 9.42; Lk 17.1-3).

The very fact that faith is most centrally a personal acceptance of God excludes one from picking and choosing among the truths of faith, obeying some of its demands and disregarding others. God's truth is one and His holy will is one. We receive His one truth in many doctrines and His one will in many moral norms. To deny any one doctrine or to set aside any single moral norm--I say "to set aside," not merely to violate--is to make a commitment incompatible with faith. One can continue to think that one has faith; one can continue to behave in many respects like a good Catholic. One will be counted as a Catholic by those who take polls. But one has become an infidel, and this has happened not by loss of faith, but by unfaithfulness to God. Even so, God's love endures and His mercy would be given if it were asked for. But how can one seek mercy if one has convinced oneself that one's sin is justified by one's "conscience"?

By revealing Himself to us in Jesus, God permits our act of faith in Him to have the qualities of faith in a man. Faith in a human person can take many forms and have many degrees. It can be genuine and yet rather weak; it can be real and yet taken for granted amid other concerns; it can be sincere and yet lack depth of insight. For a child, Christian faith is mediated by trust in parents and teachers, but is no less truly faith in God; for a barbarian tribe faith was mediated by loyalty to a leader (King So-and-so and all his people were baptized), but was no less truly Christian faith. God only wishes us to accept Him in the manner and with the freedom possible for us; He grants His love freely provided only that we do not resist it.

G. Faith as commitment to covenant

In chapter twelve, especially sections C and J, I touched upon the conception of covenant. In revealing Himself and establishing humankind in community with Himself, God made use of this institution to structure the relationship. Walking with and following God and Christ is required because we are bound to them by covenant. The Eucharist makes present to us the sacrifice of Christ by which He consummated the new and everlasting covenant between God and humankind. One who hears the Gospel and is prepared to accept it comes to the Church, seeks living faith, and receives it in baptism, which is initiation into the new covenant. (Baptism will be discussed in part seven.) Here I wish only to clarify a few implications of the fact that the act of faith is a commitment to God's new and eternal covenant.

Vatican II begins its teaching upon the Church as the People of God by calling attention to God's methods of redemption:

At all times and among every people, God has given welcome to whomsoever fears Him and does what is right (cf. Acts 10.35). It has pleased God, however, to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and

serves Him in holiness. He therefore chose the race of Israel as a people unto Himself. With it He set up a covenant. Step by step He taught this people by manifesting in its history both Himself and the decrees of His will, and by making it holy unto Himself. All these things, however, were done by way of preparation and as a figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ, and of that more luminous revelation which was to be given through God's very Word made flesh.

"Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. . . . I will give my law in their bowels, and I will write it in their heart: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . . For all shall know me, from the least of them even to the greatest, saith the Lord" (Jer 31.31-34). Christ instituted this new covenant, that is to say, the new testament, in His blood (cf. 1 Cor 11.25), by calling together a people made up of Jew and Gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit (LG 9).

This passage explicitly mentions three aspects of the life of a Christian which follow from its being life within the covenant. First, the Christian lives within the covenant community which is the Church; one's Christian life is not primarily that of an individual before God. Second, one is joined into the new covenant not by the flesh (by birth as a Jew) but by the Spirit (by the grace of justification which gives living faith). Third, in the new covenant, one receives a law which must be lived, and it is all the more effective because it is written on the heart of every Christian, not merely inscribed on stone or in the Torah, accessible only to scholars. (I discussed the conception of the new law as the gift of the Spirit in chapter twelve, section P.)

Like almost everything else God uses in establishing community with us, the covenant existed beforehand as an ordinary human institution.[5] Treaties were needed to cover relationships not enforceable at law. A covenant was such a treaty, and it took the form of a complex oath--a promise before gods. There were two essential components of a covenant: the thing to be done, and the oath invoking divine vengeance if the promise was not kept.

A typical covenant takes the following form. The preamble to the covenant sets out who is granting it. Both parties can give covenant to one another, or a superior party can grant covenant to an inferior (for example, a powerful king to a vassal). There follows a historical prologue, describing prior relationships. This history in effect identifies the parties in relation to one another and provides the basis for the further relationship to be established by the covenant itself. Obligations are laid upon an inferior party; the overlord does not promise anything specific, but recalls his prior good treatment of the inferior. The stipulation as to what must be performed has a personal character--"I" and "you"--unlike the impersonal expressions of a legal code. There follow provisions for public reading of the covenant, so that those bound by it will bear it in mind and fulfill it. Then there is an invocation of the gods to back up the agreement by their blessings, if it is kept, or curses, if it is violated. The ceremony of swearing takes various forms; in Israel a calf was cut in two and the parties passed between its parts.

Exodus, chapters twenty and twenty-four (the intervening chapters contain details of the law), present the relationship between God and Israel as a covenant. The former chapter begins with identification and history; the acts of God in the exodus provide the basis for the relationship to be established. Then follow stipulations (the Ten Commandments). These require exclusive loyalty of the people to God; they also regulate the relationships of members of the vassal community among themselves, since they must maintain their own unity if they are to stay in common allegiance to their covenant Lord. God takes no oath; the covenant is mutual in that there are two free parties, but not in the sense that God assumes obligations. (The oath is replaced by God's own unflinching faithfulness, His merciful love.) Divine witnesses are excluded, since God does not need gods to back up His relationships with anyone.

Chapter twenty-four of Exodus completes the account of the covenant. The agreement is read, the people accept it, it is sealed with blood, and there is a covenant meal in the sight of the Lord (Ex 24.3-11).

The structure of our Mass obviously has this same pattern. The word of God is read, for the Scriptures contain salvation history and stipulate how we are to live. The faithful accept this word, by saying, "Thanks be to God," "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ," and (at some Masses) the Creed. The consecration makes present Christ's shedding of His blood, which puts the covenant into effect by reuniting sinful humankind with God. (Since blood contains life, it makes the word of God and our word of faith come to life; the blood of Jesus makes a perfect bond since He is both God and man.) Finally, by our offering and by the communion we receive, the common life instituted by the covenant is shared and enjoyed by God and His adopted children.

It is important to notice that God first redeems, then offers the covenant. The covenant contains stipulations which require a certain style of life, but the fulfillment of these stipulations is not a condition of entering the relationship. Rather, it is a requirement which arises from the relationship which one freely accepts. For people recently freed from slavery and used to being treated arbitrarily, law is a blessing and a real necessity for developing an orderly life in common. God provides law so that as free persons His people can cooperate together in their valued personal relationship with Him. Unlike a code of law, God's commandments are not backed by arbitrarily attached sanctions and enforced by a penal apparatus--police courts, jails, and the like. Rather, one who refuses to keep God's law fails to love Him, follows other gods, and invites disaster, since the other gods are false and powerless to save (cf. Dt 13.1-6).

As life in a covenant community, Christian life is primarily communal. The Church is not merely a collection of individuals who believe in God; it is a community of faith; by entering it people accept the redemptive love of God in Christ. The communal character of the Church is not based merely upon the social nature of humankind; ultimately this social nature itself is created for the sake of humankind's communal destiny to share in the fulfillment of all things in Christ, which I described in part two. The

Church is not absolutely identical with the eternal kingdom, yet the kingdom already is present in mystery in the Church and is growing visibly in her (cf. LG 3). We are privileged to live now as members of the Church, God's pilgrim people, because this people is the nucleus of the heavenly city of God (cf. Heb 8.7-13; 11.13-16; 39-40; Rev 21.1-7).

5 We are not members of the new covenant except by faith. By faith we accept redemption in Christ, by hope we confide in God to carry out His promises (His part of the covenant), and by love we fulfill His will (our part of the covenant). The Eucharist is the ark of the new covenant; in it we hear God's word and are refreshed and strengthened to fulfill it. In Christ God shares our life and is our daily bread (cf. Jn 1.10-14, 10 16-18, 45; 6.51-58). What I said in chapter twelve, sections K-L, about the Eucharist as the center of Christian life and about the whole of Christian life as liturgy ought to be recalled here.

15 The covenant contains the statutes of life (cf. Ex 33.35). God shows us the path of life in which we must walk (cf. Ps 16.10-11; Acts 2.28). It is not easy to find the way of life (cf. Mt 7.11). God gives us knowledge of salvation and guides our feet into the way of peace (cf. Lk 1.79). The way is Christ (cf. Jn 14.6; 21.19). One who lives in His love keeps His commandments (cf. Jn 15.10).

20 One who keeps the commandments will live (cf. Lk 10.28). The way to be sure of our relationship with Jesus "is to keep his commandments. The man who claims, 'I have known him,' without keeping his commandments, is a liar" (1 Jn 1.3-4). The mandate to the apostles is to make disciples, to baptize them, and to "teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28.20).

25 Here everything I explained about the requirements of love in chapter seven, section D, and everything I said about following Christ in chapter twelve, sections C-E should be recalled. In section J, below, I will explain more fully the inherent normativity of Christian faith. The essential point, however, cannot be stated too often. To be a Christian is not simply to be a decent person of human good-will; it is to be an adopted child of God eager to do His will, no matter what the cost.

30 H. Faith handed on by those who are sent

All truth originates with the Father, who "wills to bring us to birth with a word spoken in truth" (Jas 1.18). The Father first sends His Son into the world to bear witness to the truth (cf. Jn 18.37). The teaching of Jesus is not His own (cf. Jn 7.16-18). 35 He teaches only and all that the Father has handed over to Him (cf. Jn 8.26-28; 42-47). But He does not teach everything to everyone; only His chosen friends receive everything He has heard from the Father (cf. Jn 15.15-16; Mk 8.29; Lk 10.23-24).

"Apostle" means one who is sent.[6] Jesus Himself is an apostle of the Father (cf. Heb 3.1). As one authorized to carry out a mission, He has the full authority of the 40 one who sends Him to do what He is sent to do (cf. Jn 17.7-8; Mt 28.18). Like a minister or envoy sent with unconditional power by a government, the act of an apostle within his sphere of authority is of itself the act of the one for whom he speaks.

The salvation announced by Jesus was confirmed to others by those who heard Him (cf. Heb 2.3). God gave witness to their teaching by signs--miracles and gifts of the 45 Spirit (cf. Heb 2.4). Jesus had chosen men to be His apostles, to bear witness to Him (cf. Jn 15.27). When He first sent them out, He told them they would speak for Him (cf. Mt 10.40; Lk 9.48). "He who accepts anyone I send accepts me, and in accepting me accepts him who sent me" (Jn 13.20). Subsequently, He sent them to convey His Gospel to humankind and gave them all the authority necessary to act for Him on earth (cf. Mk 50 16.15-20; Mt 28.16-20; Lk 24.44-49 with Acts 1.8; Jn 20.21-22; Mt 16.18-19).

Although "apostle" can be used more or less loosely for others sent to preach the Gospel, it applies in a special way to the Twelve (cf. JBC 78.161-182). Paul, although not one of the Twelve, was an apostle in the same sense as they, for He also had seen the risen Christ and been sent to bear witness to Him (cf. Acts 10.41; 26.16-17; Rom 1.1, 55 5; 11.17; 1 Cor 9.1-2; 12.28; Gal 1.16; 2.8). Hence the Church is built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles (cf. Eph 2.20); the faithful are the living stones of this structure (cf. 1 Pt 2.5).

In the apostolic foundation, which Jesus Himself lays, Peter has a special place; he is the rock (cf. Mt 16.13-20). His faith wavers, but is supported by a special grace 60 for which Jesus prays, so that Peter can firmly support the faith of the rest (cf. Lk 22.31-32). Peter's role is to be a service of love (cf. Jn 21.15-17 with 6.68-70). In general, the work of the apostles is to serve the faith of others, just as Jesus served others and communicated God's truth and love to them (cf. Mk 10.41-45; Mt 20.24-28; Jn 13.12-17, 34-38).

65 After Jesus returns to the Father, the apostles proceed to carry out the work He set them. Peter takes the initiative in replacing Judas (cf. Acts 1.15). All are filled with the Spirit on Pentecost; Peter takes the lead in preaching (cf. Acts 2.4, 14-41). Before the Sanhedrin, the apostles claim their teaching and the witness of the Spirit are the same (cf. Acts 5.32-39). Peter takes the lead in accepting non-Jews as 70 Christians (cf. Acts 10.34; 15.7-10). When the decision is adopted by all, it is asserted as the decision of the Spirit (cf. Acts 15.28). Paul also carries on the work of Jesus; the Lord comes to reassure him (cf. Acts 18.9-10; 23.11).

The position of the apostles is unique, since they are original witnesses of Jesus (cf. 1 Jn 1.3). With the gift of the Spirit, they appropriate the revelation of God in 75 Jesus, thus to complete the communication relationship, which cannot exist without a recipient (cf. Jn 14.20, 26; 16.12-13).[7] The apostolic testimony is the necessary medium of our own faith in Jesus (cf. Acts 4.33; 10.39-42). The result is that those who believe the apostolic testimony accept not the word of men, but the word of God (cf. 1 Thes 2.13). The apostle conveys the commands of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 14.36-38). God 80 appeals through and Christ speaks in the apostle (cf. 2 Cor 5.20; 13.3).

But the faith does not end with the apostles; it only begins from them its journey through history until Jesus comes again (cf. Mt 20.28). Paul makes clear that he only hands on what he has received (cf. JBC 79.16). Those who receive the teaching are to preserve it carefully (cf. Rom 16.17; 1 Cor 15.1-3). In a departing statement to the

presbyters of the Church of Ephesus, Paul exhorts them to guard the flock and defend the faith (cf. Acts 20.28-31). That part of the apostolic task which is not unique is handed on to successors (cf. 2 Tm 4.1-5).

5 The Catholic Church firmly teaches that her bishops are the successors of the apostles of Christ:

To the Lord was given all power in heaven and on earth. As successors of the apostles, bishops receive from Him the mission to teach all nations and to preach the gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain to salvation by faith, baptism, and the fulfillment of the commandments (cf. Mt 28.18; Mk 16.15-16; Acts 26.17 f.). To fulfill this mission, Christ the Lord promised the Holy Spirit to 10 the apostles, and on Pentecost day sent the Spirit from heaven (LG 24).

The mission of the apostles lasts until the end of the world (cf. LG 20). In the bishops Jesus Himself is present to believers to preach the Gospel and administer His sacraments (cf. LG 21). The teaching office of the apostles belongs to the bishops (cf. DV 7). In 15 its Decree on Ecumenism, Vatican II asserts with great clarity the special role of the Twelve, of Peter, and of Catholic "bishops with Peter's successor at their head" (UR 2). Bishops are not merely appointed by men, but are appointed by the Holy Spirit and empowered to act by Christ (cf. CD 2).

As I explained in chapter eleven, section B, God chooses to redeem humankind with 20 human cooperation, for this procedure fittingly manifests His goodness and love, and most fully enhances human dignity. The apostolic office of bishops primarily is for this: that these men might be ennobled by sharing in a special way in the mission of the Son to the world. Graced with the Spirit they speak and act for Christ, thus to make Him present in the word of the Gospel, in the gesture of forgiveness, in the leadership 25 of the Church, and in the sacraments, especially the sacrament of the altar; thus to respond to Him in the needs of the poor and in the hearts of His little ones.

The teaching of the bishop, then, conveys faith: the personal relationship with God in Christ. Faith cannot be reduced to mere knowing; scholarly reflection upon faith 30 always presupposes and can never replace the teaching of Christ through His bishops. No theologian as a theologian can say what any bishop as a bishop must say: If you reject me, you reject our Lord Jesus, and you reject Him who sent the Son into the world.

I. The unity of God's People

35 The unity of the Church is complex, somewhat in the way that the unity of the United States is complex. The United States is many states which enjoy a certain independence relative to one another, but it also is one nation indivisible. People live in the United States who are not citizens; some have permanent status as residents and some do not. Some American citizens live abroad and perhaps never have lived in the United 40 States. Some people think they are citizens but are not; others are citizens without knowing it. Moreover, in some matters of international relations--for example, if there were to be a large war between the United States and a European power--Canada and the United States are more one nation than most world powers which usually are regarded as unified nations. All of this complexity does not mean that the United States is not 45 really one nation, nor does it mean that everyone who somehow "belongs" to the United States enjoys all the privileges and immunities of American citizens residing in the United States and conscious of their status.

Since the unity of the Church is complex, the truth that there is no salvation apart from the Church is a subtle one (cf. DS 802/430). Trent teaches that one can be 50 saved by baptism of desire (cf. DS 1524, 1604/796, 847). In 1949 the Holy See teaches clearly, and backs its teaching with an excommunication of those who obstinately reject it, that the saving desire can be merely implicit, but that it must necessarily be informed by perfect charity and have with it supernatural faith (cf. DS 3866-3873). Vatican II teaches that God welcomes all who fear him and do what is right (cf. LG 9). To 55 be saved one must be converted to Christ, for there is no salvation except in Him; nevertheless, "God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him" (AG 7). No one can be saved outside the Church of Christ, but obviously some can be saved who are ignorant of the Gospel and so who would not consider themselves (or be counted sociologically) as Chris- 60 tians (cf. LG 16).

The universal salvific power of Christ corresponds to the embracing salvific will of the Father, who "wants all men to be saved and come to know the truth. And the truth is this: 'God is one. One also is the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus'" (1 Tm 2.4-5). God wants everyone to know Christ, but His redemptive love comes to 65 some even before they enjoy this great blessing, provided that they do what is right as God enlightens them to know what is right.

The whole human race from the beginning has been given helps sufficient for salvation (cf. LG 2). Historically, the roots of the Church reach back to the beginnings of 70 revelation recorded in the Old Testament (cf. DV 3). Yet the whole of human history centers upon Christ, for fulfillment in Christ--which I discussed at length in part two--is the destiny toward which all creation is directed. In becoming Incarnate, the Word gathers all history to Himself and provides within history the central reference-point to which everything else is relative (cf. GS 38). In its all-embracing unity, the gathering together of humankind in Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit, who was at work 75 from the beginning, throughout the Old Testament, and who now dwells on earth permanently in Christ's Church and impels it to its full expansion and ultimate, perfect, heavenly unity (cf. LG 4, 6; DV 2; AG 2, 4, 5, 7, 15; GS 10; and so on).

More obviously, those whose awareness of Christ is conscious and explicit, who knowingly commit themselves to Him in faith, and who receive the sacrament of baptism in 80 Christ and bear the name "Christian" live within the unity of the Church (cf. UR 22-23).

Nevertheless, our separated brethren, whether considered as individuals or as Communities and Churches, are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those whom He has regenerated and vivified into one body and newness of life--that unity which the holy Scriptures and the revered tradition of

the Church proclaim. For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who already belong in any way to God's People (UR 3). The Spirit is at work amid our separated brothers and sisters (cf. UR 3); we are united with them in Christ and the Holy Spirit (cf. LG 15). The Church constituted and organized in the world as a society subsists in the Catholic Church (cf. LG 8), yet those separated from the Catholic Church are not wholly separated from Christ's Church (cf. LG 15), because they still live in a real, "though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church" (UR 3). To put the matter bluntly: Christians who do not regard themselves as Catholics are so despite themselves, just insofar as they truly are Christians. (This blunt way of putting the situation obviously is not likely to be appreciated by our separated brothers and sisters.) There is an obvious divergence between Catholics and other Christians and a need for ecumenical discussion about the moral implications of the Gospel (cf. UR 23). Therefore, Catholics cannot assume that the moral opinions of Protestants which differ from Catholic teaching have any weight as evidence of Christian moral judgment.

From what I have explained it follows that without excluding non-Christians and separated Christians from salvation in Christ, we must find the oneness of the only Church of Christ in the enduring unity of the Catholic Church (cf. LG 8). She alone is the body of Christ, united in the same Eucharist (cf. LG 7), which, as I explained in chapter twelve, sections L and M, makes one family of faith sharing one common life from Pentecost until Christ comes again in glory. She alone enjoys all of the other sacraments of salvation (cf. LG 11). She alone recognizes the principle of unity and cooperation established by Christ: the collegial episcopacy centered upon the successor of Peter, who is the Vicar of Christ and head of the whole Church (cf. LG 18).

Only in the Catholic Church is a redeemed person fully aware of his or her own calling. Hence, only a Catholic can fully appreciate and apply the plea of St. Paul . . . to live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another lovingly. Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force. There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all (Eph 4.1-6). "Let us, then, be children no longer, tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine that originates in human trickery and skill in proposing error" (Eph 4.14). The body of Christ is to build herself up in love; since the project is one, the Church remains one until the work is completed (cf. Eph 4.15-6.20).

Hence a Catholic must and can "know what kind of conduct befits a member of God's household, the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of truth" (1 Tm 3.15). Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you; consider how their lives ended, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching (Heb 13.7-9). To be a Catholic is to be historically conscious. History centers on Jesus. We look forward to the year of Our Lord 2000 and beyond it to His coming again. We judge contemporary opinions and all things in the light of our Lord Jesus and by the standard of His truth. For us the division of history into ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary is a senseless construct of the darkness of Enlightenment unbelief. Jesus lives and we are His contemporaries. Any contemporary moral norm which diverges from His mind deserves no respect whatsoever.

J. The inherent normativity of faith for moral life

By faith one enters into the new creation which God has begun with the resurrection of Christ. Since one's existence is new, one's life must be renewed to conform to this new existence (cf. Gal 6.14-16). Everyone who professes Christ's name must abandon evil (cf. 2 Tm 2.19). God's word demands that those who hear it adhere obediently to it (cf. Rom 1.5; 10.16; 16.26; Acts 6.7; 2 Cor 10.5). The word of God is divisive; it demands a response and everyone must render an account (cf. Heb 4.12-13).

The situation is disastrous when there is lack of fidelity, mercy, and remembrance of God (cf. Hos 4.1-2)--that is, adherence in life to His word. The faith which saves is the faith which works through love (cf. Gal 5.6; 1 Thes 1.3; 2 Thes 1.11). Not everyone who says "Lord, lord" will enter heaven; one must do the Father's will and build one's life on the solid foundation of faith (cf. Mt 7.21-27; Lk 6.46-49). To do the Father's will is not to comply merely verbally, but to carry it out in fact, however reluctant one is to do so (cf. Mt 21.28-31).

"You must consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus. Do not, therefore, let sin rule your mortal body and make you obey its lusts" (Rom 6.11-12). "Thanks be to God, though once you were slaves of sin, you sincerely obeyed that rule of teaching which was imparted to you; freed from your sin, you became slaves of justice" (Rom 6.17-18).

The grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all men. It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires, and live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age as we await our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of the Great God and our Savior Christ Jesus. It was he who sacrificed himself for us, to redeem us from all unrighteousness and to cleanse for himself a people of his own, eager to do what is right (Ti 2.11-14).

Act on this word. If all you do is listen to it, you are deceiving yourselves. A man who listens to God's word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks into a mirror at the face he was born with; he looks at himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like. There is, on the other hand, the man who peers into freedom's ideal law and abides by it. He is no forgetful listener, but one who carries out the law in practice. Happy will this man be in whatever he does (Jas 1.22-25).

The "split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age" (GS 43).

Love means performance: "Little children, let us love in deed and in truth and not merely talk about it" (1 Jn 3.18). The permanent gift of the Spirit is contingent upon one's obedience: "If you love me and obey the commands I give you, I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete--to be with you always" (Jn 14.15-16). The Ten Commandments are among those to be obeyed by Christians (cf. Mt 19.17-19).

The Council of Trent teaches that those who are justified must and can keep the commandments. Children of God love Christ, keep His words, and with the grace of God certainly can do so (cf. DS 1536/804). This same Council defines as a truth of faith:

If anyone says that a justified man, however perfect he might be, is not bound to observe the commandments of God and of the Church, but is bound only to believe, as if the gospel, apart from the observance of the commandments, were an unconditional and absolute promise of eternal life: let him be anathema (DS 1570/830).

"The commandments of God and of the Church"--this is the rule of faith which we must adhere to unconditionally and strive always to fulfill if we wish to enter eternal life. Not only sins against faith, but other mortal sins as well, exclude one from heaven (cf. DS 1544/808; 1 Cor 6.9-10). Anyone who preaches or teaches Christ's faithful about the commandments of God and of the Church also should bear in mind: "It would be better for anyone who leads astray one of these little ones who believe in me, to be drowned by a millstone around his neck, in the depths of the sea" (Mt 18.5; cf. Mk 9.42; Lk 17.2). Happy is the priest who is not a dissenter from the Church's moral teaching.

K. The prophetic office of the Church of Christ

A prophet is one who speaks before others. True prophets of the Old Testament received divine revelation and uttered the Lord's word to His people. Their work supplemented the Torah and kept its truth alive, especially by reiteration and application of its moral implications. The prophets exhort, admonish, threaten, promise; they constantly demand in God's name that the people repent and begin to live more genuinely as God's holy people.[8]

A prophet's life is not a happy one. The prophet is given his task whether he wants it or not; he has no discretion about the content of his message; he not only must speak but even must live out God's message; he inevitably encounters a more or less resistant audience; and he often is killed or otherwise persecuted.

Old Testament prophecy constantly points toward and prepares the way for Jesus. It culminates in John the Baptist. In many ways, Jesus Himself is a prophet, but is so much more (since He is the fulfillment of all prophecy) that the title seems unsuitable for Him. The role of prophet continues in the New Testament; with the Spirit's coming to the Church on Pentecost, all who belong to Christ share in prophecy, and some are especially gifted in this respect. Therefore, Vatican II teaches:

Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the kingdom of His Father by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfills His prophetic office until His full glory is revealed. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity. For that very purpose He made them His witnesses and gave them understanding of the faith and grace of speech (cf. Acts 2.17-18; Rev 19.10), so that the power of the gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life (LG 35).

As prophets of Christ, all Christians are called to communicate Him in speech and in action. The deeds and words which are revelatory should be found in the life of every Christian; God's saving truth and love should be experienced by those who meet each Christian just as they were experienced by those who met Jesus during His earthly life (cf. AA 6).

Before going on to develop in a positive way the theme of the prophetic responsibility of every Christian, I call attention to certain aspects of this responsibility which arise from the very nature of the prophetic office.

First, the true prophet is sent by God and communicates what God wishes communicated; false prophets speak in their own name, follow their own inspirations, or ignore the limits of their commission (cf. Jer 14.14-15; 23.16; 27.15; Ez 13.3). Jesus communicated effectively because He said only what He was told to say and did only what the Father willed (cf. Jn 5.19; 6.38; 14.10, 24). We must be like Him in this.

Second, the true prophet does not conform to the conventional morality of the time--to the morality of the world (cf. Jer 23.9-40; Jas 4.4; 1 Jn 2.15-17). It seems obvious to St. Paul that if one seeks human approval, one fails to serve Christ (cf. Gal 1.9-10). Jesus communicated effectively because He wished only to please the Father, no matter whom He might offend in doing so (cf. Jn 8.12-59; Mt 23). We must be like Him in this.

Third, the true prophet encounters a hostile reaction, because his or her words and deeds reprove sin (cf. Jer 6.10; 20.7-8; 23.28-29; Wis 2.12-20). A prophet cannot expect to be popular; the purer and truer the prophetic voice, the more likely it is to be an irritating, minority voice crying in a spiritual and moral wilderness. Jesus communicated effectively because He encountered and suffered the hostile reaction His message deserved from a sinful world. We must be like Him in this (cf. Mt 10.17-25; 23.29-32; Jn 15.18-20; 1 Thes 3.3-4; 2 Tm 3.12).

Fourth, the true prophet is faithful to the tradition of the covenant, even as he creatively unfolds and applies it (cf. Jer 11). Jesus fulfills, not abolishes, the law and the prophets (cf. Mt 5.17-20). We must be like Him in this (cf. 2 Thes 2.15; 1 Cor 11.2; 15.2; 1 Tm 1.2-4; 2 Tm 3.1-5; 4.1-5; Ti 1.13; Heb 3.13-14; 2 Pt 2).

False prophets are easily detectable. They sometimes do signs and wonders, for they are permitted this power to test faith. But the false prophet urges God's people to follow other gods, to ignore God's own commandments (cf. Dt 13.1-6). The children of God have His Spirit:

You are of God, you little ones, and thus you have conquered the false prophets.

For there is One greater in you than there is in the world.

Those others belong to the world; that is why

theirs is the language of the world and why the world listens to them.
We belong to God and anyone who has knowledge of God gives us a hearing,
while anyone who is not of God refuses to hear us.

Thus do we distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of deception (1 Jn 4.4-6).
5 The teaching of Jesus could not be subjected to such a test, since His teaching provides
the ultimate criterion by which teaching of others is tested. But the kindly words and
virtuous life by which we fulfill our prophetic office must meet the test: They must
show others how to follow Christ and fulfill His commandments. If they do not do this,
we are false prophets.

10

L. Prophetic Christian life brings redemption to others

Vatican II teaches that the primary condition for effective missionary activity is
interior renewal. All the faithful are duty-bound to share in the expansion of Christ's
15 Body, so that they can bring it to fullness as quickly as possible (cf. AG 36; Eph 4.13).
So the faithful should nourish a real Catholic spirit in themselves. The primary respon-
sibility in the spreading of the faith is to lead a fully Christian life. Such a life
will make the Church appear as Christ intended her to be: a sign lifted before the na-
tions--the salt of the earth, the light of the world (cf. AG 36; Is 11.12; Mt 5.13-14).

20

Christians who live a Christian life among others must communicate to them God's
truth and love by revelatory words and deeds:

25

For, wherever they live, all Christians are bound to show forth, by the example of
their lives and by the witness of their speech, that new man which they put on at
baptism, and that power of the Holy Spirit by whom they were strengthened at con-
firmation. Thus other men, observing their good works, can glorify the Father (cf.
Mt 5.16) and can better perceive the real meaning of human life and the bond which
ties the whole human community together (AG 11).

30

The divisions among Christians seriously interfere with this sign, which ought to be
given to nonbelievers (cf. UR 1).

35

Laypersons, nourished and strengthened by the ministry of the word and sacraments
entrusted by Christ to His priests, have their own role in the apostolate. Their good
works done out of love of God draw others to belief in God. Their Christian words both
to nonbelievers and to fellow believers also communicate Christ's message.

40

Since, in this age of ours, new problems are arising and extremely serious
errors are gaining currency which tend to undermine the foundations of religion,
the moral order, and human society itself, this sacred Synod earnestly exhorts
laymen, each according to his natural gifts and learning, to be more diligent in
doing their part according to the mind of the Church, to explain and defend Chris-
tian principles, and to apply them rightly to the problems of our era (AA 6).

45

"According to the mind of the Church"--the witness of the laity is effective only if it
is authentic, only if it meets the requirements of true prophecy.

50

By their life and ministry priests must bear witness to the truth and life which
is Christ (cf. LG 28, 41; PO 3). Parish priests are to preach in such a way as to lead
their people to mature life in Christ, which will bear the witness of love according to
45 Christ's command (cf. CD 30). Religious by the integrity of their faith and the charity
of their lives are to give a witness to Christ which no one can miss (cf. PC 25). "The
Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the kingdom of God and the
hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the
world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth" (LG 35).

55

Clearly, if we are to fulfill our prophetic responsibilities, our lives and our
faith must be of a piece. The deeds and words--as ever in revelation--can only work if
they work together. Moreover, since we must proclaim the faith together, in one and the
same Spirit, we must live the same kind of life, according to the pattern of Christ.
Dissent destroys witness. Divergent moral standards reduce the Church's witness to
55 Christ to confusion and babel.

60

The life of the Church is a participation in divine love. Christ's disciples are
known and make Him known by their love (cf. Jn 13.34-35; 17.22-23; 1 Jn 4.7). The many
believers must live with a single mind and heart (cf. Acts 4.32). Of course, there is
room for plurality, but Christian plurality can involve no inconsistency. It can only
60 involve the richness of many gifts united in the one body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12-13).
Christian life must appear before the world not as a free-for-all at a rummage sale, but
as an orderly cooperation in work at a world-wide construction site.

65

The unity of the Church is modeled upon that of the Triune God (cf. UR 2), who
acts outwardly always as one only God (cf. DS 1331/704). If the Church is to communi-
cate the truth and love of God by its outward life before the world, we must show an
65 image of the unity of God's action. Of course, the image cannot have the absolute unity
of its model. But the image certainly will be diminished in its clarity and effective-
ness by any conflict among us.[9]

70

Therefore, Christian moral standards must be articulated and they must be shared
70 by all even in their details. All must adhere to the same plan of life and act together
to lend substance to the truth we profess. The Church must have only one mind: the mind
of Christ. Moreover, in a prophetic morality, there is no room for the idea that pas-
toral sensitivity demands accomodation (instead of penance) for individual deviations
from our common moral standards. The Church must have only one heart: the heart of
75 Christ. He is merciful toward sinners, but intransigent toward evil; He knows that
sinners are engaged in existential self-destruction and that the evil of sin is hated
by God.

80

Moreover, the covenant commitment must be defined by some very definite and abso-
lute standards. As the very word "martyr" suggests--the Greek word means "witness"--
80 martyrdom always has been the primary prophetic Christian act. Martyrs lay down their
lives rather than violate some standard of Christian morality, or rather than forego the
generous fulfillment of their Christian vocations.

St. Maria Goretti, for instance, died rather than submit to illicit sexual ad-
vances. If fornication were not always wrong, she would only be a foolish child, not a

Catholic saint. If false-swearing were not always wrong, St. Thomas More was irresponsible to his wife and family, not a Catholic saint. Or shall we say they were saints only because they acted according to erroneous but sincere Christian consciences--ones which would have been formed more adequately had they been able to read today's radically dissenting theologians?

To be prophetic, Christian life must really be humanly good, not merely conventionally good. The sinful world knows and understands its own; its own tell it nothing new. Supernatural truth as such the world cannot at once grasp. The truly fulfilling for human persons, however, is something even sinful persons can recognize and wonder at. The purity and courage of Maria, the noble loyalty and truthfulness of Thomas--even men and women who are children of this corrupt generation can grasp the sign in such virtue. Mother Teresa presents a challenge which can be matched by no amount of theology; her life is a better witness to Christ than this whole work--than all contemporary theology together.[10]

Free choice as such is not ultimately intelligible; there is no sufficient reason for any free choice. However, when a person acts out of self interest and when people choose according to expediency, then all the world can explain such acts and lives: Nothing is done which does not serve the individual's desires or the group's conception of its common interests.

If one lives by the principle that the end justifies the means--if one forms one's conscience on the advice of radically dissenting theologians--the world understands perfectly the meaning of one's life. Therefore, one's life has no value whatsoever as a witness to Christ. But if one lives by the absolute standards of Christian morality, then one's life becomes a wonder, unintelligible to the world. Yet it is a fact. Like a miracle, it cannot be denied, but only accepted as a sign (as it will be by those open to God) or thrust aside as a kind of foolishness or insanity (as it will be by those who love darkness).

Each truly Christian life points to something beyond this world. In doing so, it is a powerful sign. It makes credible the words of faith which explain it. Those who encounter it are put to the test and are saved or condemned by its truth and love.

Of course, not all of us are saints. Many of us are miserably weak and sinful. How can our lives bear witness to the truth and love of God? Despite our sins, they can. The Catholic is called to repentance and the Sacrament of Penance (cf. DS 1542-1543/807). The injustices, the quarrels, the sins of weakness, and all the others which we must confess do not themselves communicate the truth and love of our Lord Jesus. But the line of people waiting to go to confession and the tears of grateful penitents--these are something beautiful for God. Where they are seen, they help to make of the Church a sign which challenges the unbelief and the hatred of the world.

40 Notes to chapter thirteen

1. See Charles E. Curran et al., Dissent In and For the Church: Theologians and Humanae Vitae (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969), p. 26.

2. The most useful general theological treatment of revelation is René Latourelle, S.J., Theology of Revelation (Cork: Mercier Press, 1968).

3. In section I, below, I will show that Vatican II teaches that persons who have not heard the Gospel can be saved; they are not saved without supernatural faith and love; therefore, it seems that they receive some sort of revelation. This situation presents a theological puzzle of great interest and possibly of some importance; I have no solution to suggest. However, no speculation about this problem should lead anyone to reduce the unique value of what we know to be God's revealed word to the same level as the possible revelatory value, under certain conditions, of the phenomena of nature, of the vedic scriptures, or of anything else whatsoever.

4. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 113, art. 4; De veritate qu. 28, art. 4.

5. On covenant see Delbert R. Hillers, Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), pp. 28-70. A very helpful brief treatment is William G. Most, "A Biblical Theology of Redemption in a Covenant Framework," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 29 (1967), pp. 1-19.

6. For the subject discussed in this section, see also Michael Schmaus, Dogma, vol. 4, The Church: Its Origin and Structure (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1972), pp. 132-199.

7. See Latourelle, op. cit., pp. 369-372.

8. See Xavier Léon-Dufour, Dictionary of the Bible, 2nd ed. rev. (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), entry under "Prophet." See also James J. Mulligan, The Theology of Revelation, vol. 1, Scriptural Considerations (Emmitsburg, Maryland: Mount Saint Mary's Seminary, 1968), pp. 16-36, 89-101.

9. See Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation within the Church ("Paterna cum benevolentia," December 8, 1974), in which is described the effort of some today to bring about a revolution comparable to the Protestant revolt in the Church, the damage this process does to the Church as sign, and the large role in this process of false "pluralism" in dissenting theology. (No particular theologians are named or dissenting positions described.)

10. On Christian life as sign, see René Latourelle, S.J., Christ and the Church: Signs of Salvation (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1972), pp. 18-38, 254-264, and 285-319.

Questions for study and review will be found on p. 13-15.

Questions for study and review

1. Criticize the following: All language is inadequate to divine reality; therefore, no formula can really capture God's revelation, and so we must replace the old dogmas with something which contemporary men and women can make sense of.
2. Criticize the following: Jesus lived a long time ago in a culture very different from ours; therefore, His moral ideas have little relevance for us.
3. Compared with belief which can be replaced, faith in a person has a number of characteristics. What are these?
4. Criticize the following: I believe in God, not in a lot of dogmas; therefore, I don't see that it makes that much difference if I accept most of the teaching of the Church and reject only a few things which make no sense to me.
5. What role do signs have in the act of faith insofar as it is a human act? What does Vatican I teach about the sign-value of the Church herself? Discuss the point I suggest: To the believer, the very certitude of faith itself is a sign.
6. What does Vatican I teach upon God's authority in the act of faith? Summarize the account I give of this. What basis is there for denying that God interiorly communicates the content of faith?
7. Discuss the complex relationship among faith, hope, and love in terms of what is said here and in previous chapters.
8. What is Vatican I's teaching about the loss of faith. Many today reject this teaching. In doing so, what very fundamental truth are they rejecting (apart from the truth about the credibility of a council)?
9. In general, how and why are sin and faith at odds? How can mortal sin and supernatural faith possibly coexist?
10. By faith we enter into a covenant. What are the implications of this fact for the communal character of faith? For its inherent normativity?
11. Compare Exodus 24 with the Mass.
12. In what respect were the Twelve (plus St. Paul) unique? What does it mean to say that the bishops are successors of the apostles?
13. What has Vatican II taught about the unity of the Church? In what sense is it true that there is no salvation outside the Church? If people can be saved without knowing the Gospel, why is it important that they know it? If Protestants can be holier than Catholics, why is reconciliation important, and why can we not accomplish it by simply agreeing to disagree about our differences?
14. Consider the Church over time, from Pentecost until Christ comes again. What are all the unifying factors, beginning with the risen Lord Himself?
15. Be prepared to write a brief essay, in the form of a short homily, on the inherent normativity of Christian faith.
16. What are prophets? What are the characteristics of true prophets? How can false prophets be detected if they can do miracles?
17. Summarize the teaching of Vatican II that Christian life should have the value of a sign. What are the implications of this teaching for the position that the Church need only provide some general moral guidelines, surely not including the exclusion of acts of any kind as always wrong, regardless of consequences?