

## Session 6: The Light of Faith

HYMN: Firmly I Believe, and Truly



Firmly I believe, and truly,  
 God is three and God is One.  
 And I next acknowledge duly  
 manhood taken by the Son.

And I trust and hope most fully  
 in that manhood crucified;  
 and each thought and deed unruly  
 put to death, as He has died.

Simply to His grace, and wholly,  
 light and life and strength belong,  
 and I love supremely, solely,  
 Him the holy, Him the strong.

And I hold in veneration,  
 for the love of Him alone,  
 holy Church, as His creation,  
 and her teachings, as His own.

(Bow) Adoration e'er be given,  
 with and through the angel host,  
 to the God of earth and Heaven:  
 Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

PRAYER: See Eph 1:17-19.

Let us pray: O God,  
 grant us a spirit  
 of wisdom and insight  
 to know You clearly.  
 Enlighten our innermost vision,  
 that we may know the great hope  
 to which You have called us,  
 the wealth of Your glorious heritage  
 to be distributed  
 among the members of the Church,  
 and the immeasurable scope  
 of Your power  
 in us who believe.  
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 Your Son,  
 Who lives and reigns with You  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 God, for ever and ever.  
 — Amen

READING:

Mt 11:25-30

The Lord be with you.

— *And with your spirit*A Reading from the holy Gospel  
 according to Matthew— *Glory to You, O Lord*

At that time Jesus said,  
 "I give praise to You,  
 Father, Lord of heaven and earth,  
 for although

You have hidden these things  
 from the wise and the learned,  
 You have revealed them  
 to the childlike.

"Yes, Father,  
 such has been Your gracious will.

"All things  
 have been handed over to Me  
 by My Father.

No one knows the Son  
 except the Father,  
 and no one knows the Father  
 except the Son,  
 and anyone to whom  
 the Son wishes to reveal Him.

"Come to Me,  
 all you who labour  
 and are burdened,  
 and I will give you rest.  
 Take My yoke upon you  
 and learn from Me,  
 for I am meek and humble of heart,  
 and you will find rest  
 for your selves.  
 For My yoke is easy,  
 and My burden light."  
 The Gospel of the Lord  
 — *Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Faith is  
 a supernatural gift of God,  
 which enables us to believe  
 without doubting  
 whatever God has revealed.  
 We must believe  
 whatever God has revealed  
 because God is Truth,  
 and can neither deceive  
 nor be deceived. —

## Session 6

We know what God has revealed  
by the testimony,  
teaching,  
and authority  
of the Catholic Church,  
whom Jesus Christ  
gave divine authority to teach  
when He said,  
"Go and teach all nations."

Through His Church,  
Christ offers us everlasting life.  
That means living for ever  
in the glory and happiness  
of Heaven:

seeing,  
loving,  
and enjoying God forever.  
Scripture says of this happiness  
"that eye has not seen,  
ear has not heard,  
nor has it  
so much as dawned on man  
what God has prepared  
for those who love Him."

If we hope to be saved  
and enter Heaven,  
we must follow the rule of life  
taught by Jesus Christ,  
if we know it.  
By that rule,  
we are bound to love God  
above all things,  
and with our whole heart,  
often remembering how good He is,  
often speaking to Him in our hearts,  
and always seeking to please Him.

We are also bound  
to love one another for His sake,  
by wishing one another well,  
by praying for one another,  
and by never injuring anyone  
by any thought,  
word,  
or deed.

We are to love all persons  
in this way,  
*without exception*,  
including our enemies,  
whom we must forgive  
from our hearts.

Following Jesus' rule of life  
means hating sin  
above all other evils,  
resolving never to commit  
a willful sin

for the love or fear  
of anything whatsoever.

Jesus said,  
"If any man will come after Me,  
let him deny himself,  
and take up his cross daily,  
and follow Me."

We deny ourselves  
by giving up our own will —  
by going against  
our own humours (moods),  
inclinations,  
and passions.

We are bound to do this  
because our fallen nature  
inclines us to evil  
from our birth and,  
if not corrected by self-denial,  
will certainly carry us to Hell.

We "take up our cross"  
by submitting daily,  
with patience,  
to the labours and sufferings  
of this short life,  
bearing them willingly  
for the love of God.

### BIBLE READING

Jos 1-24

This week,  
your Bible reading  
will move into what we call  
the historical books.

In the Book of Joshua,  
successor to Moses,  
you will see  
how God gave the Israelites  
the land He had promised them  
so that they would have  
a space in which to *worship* Him,  
the one, true God.

For that purpose,  
He helped them drive out  
the original inhabitants,  
who worshipped not Him,  
but false idols.

Before he died,  
Joshua warned the people  
against the worship of idols.

Next week,  
when we talk about "Prayer,"  
we will see that  
one of its chief purposes  
is to *worship* God.

## The Light of Faith

### Introduction

Let us summarize what we have studied in this course so far.

- God created all that is, and He created it good. In particular, He created man and woman in the image of Himself. However, the first man and the first woman, wanting to know good and evil *for themselves*, stopped trusting God and disobeyed Him, thus bringing sin and death into the world.<sup>1</sup>
- God became Man in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, therefore, is both fully God and fully Man.<sup>2</sup>
- For our salvation, Jesus took upon Himself the sin of the whole world and made reparation for it by His life and death.<sup>3</sup>
- By His Resurrection and Ascension, Jesus did not just restore the original dignity of human nature, but, in fact, surpassed it.<sup>4</sup>
- In order to dispense divine life to us, Jesus founded the Church, which He guards from error and leads into all truth through His Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

In speaking of all this, we appealed to your intellect — your natural power of reasoning. For example, we appealed to the Gospels *as historical documents only*, not as the inspired word of God. We also appealed to your imagination — your power of making images. For example, we used C.S. Lewis' descriptions to help you imagine Adam and Eve as God created them.

Intellect and imagination are both important. "Reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning."<sup>6</sup> "The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description."<sup>7</sup>

From now on, however, we are also going to appeal to your *faith*. Just as we need our powers of reasoning to "make sense of" what we observe,<sup>8</sup> so we need faith to "make sense of" our natural reasoning.<sup>9</sup>

### Gift of faith

"Faith" has two meanings. One is "the body of truth" found in the Creeds, Church documents, *etc.*, and "especially in the Bible."<sup>10</sup> This is what the priest means when he says, "Let us profess our faith." This is what we study in this course.

As we have seen, much of this "body of truth" is beyond human reasoning; God had to *reveal* it.<sup>11</sup> Jesus made this distinction when Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," and Jesus replied, "No mere man has revealed this to you, but My heavenly Father."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, we call it "divine" truth, "supernatural" truth, or "revealed" truth.

The appropriate response to such truth is *belief*. "What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason." No; "we believe because of the authority of God Himself Who reveals them, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived."<sup>13</sup>

1 See the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

2 See the talk on "Who is Jesus Christ?"

3 See the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

4 See the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

5 See the talk on "What is the Catholic Church?"

6 C.S. Lewis: *Literary Essays*, "Bluspels and Flalansferes"

7 John Henry Newman: *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Chapter Four, 3. Born February 21 1801, Newman, an Anglican clergyman, was influential in the Oxford Movement, an Anglican High Church effort to return to Christianity's foundations and to affirm the status of the Anglican Communion as the *via media* ("middle way") between Catholicism and Protestantism. Newman was received into the Catholic Church October 9 1845, ordained a priest the next year, and made a cardinal by Pope Leo XIII in 1879. He died August 11 1890. Pope John Paul II declared him "venerable" January 22 1991, Pope Benedict XVI beatified him September 19 2010, and Pope Francis canonized him October 13 2019.

8 Otherwise our observations would be no different from those of animals.

9 See the talk on "The Contradictions of Atheism."

10 See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, "Faith."

11 First through the prophets, then through His Son, and finally through His Son's Church.

12 Mt 16:16-17

This brings us to the second meaning of "faith": the "human response to divine truth."<sup>14</sup> Faith in this sense is a supernatural *gift* from God<sup>15</sup> "which enables us to believe without doubting"<sup>16</sup> whatever God has revealed."<sup>17</sup>

God gives us this gift in Baptism. In reply to the question, "What do you ask of God's Church?" either we or our godparents answer, "Faith!"<sup>18</sup>

("Faith" in the Christian sense does *not* mean the conviction that we will get what we want — which is what people usually mean when they say, "Have faith!" That is the state of mind produced by "desperate desire working on a strong imagination," a "feat of psychological gymnastics."<sup>19</sup>)

### The light of faith

"Revealed truths can seem obscure to human reason and experience."<sup>20</sup> Without God's gift of faith, we would remain "in the dark" about them. Accordingly, we speak of "the light of faith."<sup>21</sup>

"I am the light of the world," Jesus said. "No follower of Mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life."<sup>22</sup>

This light gives us greater "certainty" about supernatural truth than "the light of natural human reason" gives us about any human knowledge, because "it is founded on the very word of God, Who cannot lie."<sup>23</sup> The "light of faith" is like sunlight, by which we see things in the day that we cannot see at night. It is like x-rays, by which we see through a rough wooden crate to the gold and jewels inside.

However, our eyes must be able to detect this light. "The eye is the body's lamp," Jesus said. "If your eyes are good, your body will be filled with light."<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, we also speak of "the eyes of faith," which can see more than ordinary eyes because they are sensitive to "the light of faith."<sup>25</sup>

That is why there are such huge differences between the "faithful" and the "faithless" on important subjects like pain, sorrow, sin, happiness, marriage, children, education, life, and death. In fact, the differences are so great that the "faithful" and the "faithless" have trouble communicating, as if they speak different languages, or as if the "faithful" can see while the "faithless" are blind. For example,

- the faithless look at the Host in the tabernacle and see a small piece of thin flatbread; the faithful "see" the living Body of Christ.<sup>26</sup>
- the faithless look at a cancer patient and see valueless suffering; the faithful "see" a soul co-operating in Jesus' redemption of the world.<sup>27</sup>
- the faithless regard a human embryo as a bit of disposable biological material; the faithful "see" a unique person called to live with God in Heaven.<sup>28</sup>
- the faithless see the Bible as an "ill-assorted ensemble of bits of literature";<sup>29</sup> the faithful "see" how the Old Testament foreshadows the New and the New fulfils the Old, with Christ as the key to interpreting both.<sup>30</sup>
- the faithless look at the Catholic Church and see only the grievous sins of her members; the faithful also "see" that her Head is seated "at the right hand of

13 CCC 156

14 See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, "Faith."

15 See CCC 153.

16 "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt" (John Henry Newman: *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 5).

17 See *The Penny Catechism*, 9.

18 See CCC 1253, 1266.

19 C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, XI

20 CCC 157. See Joseph Ratzinger: *God and the World*, Part II, 13, "The Rosary."

21 See Pope John Paul II: *Lumen Fidei* ("The Light of Faith"), 1, 2, 4, 6, 12, 30, 32, 34, 46, 51, 57, 60.

22 Jn 8:12. See also Jn 9:5, 12:36.

23 See CCC 157.

24 Mt 6:22. See also Lk 11:34-36.

25 See Pope John Paul II: *Lumen Fidei* ("The Light of Faith"), 4, 18, 21-22, 26-27, 29-31, 35, 46, 60.

26 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

27 See the talk on "The Question of Suffering."

28 See the talk on "The Last Seven Commandments."

29 See Pope Benedict XVI: *Theology of the Liturgy*, "The Principles of Theological Research" (lecture delivered during the *Journées Liturgique de Fontgombault* July 22-24 2001).

30 See the talk on "Divine Revelation."

God the Father Almighty."<sup>31</sup>

"Those who believe, see; they see with a light that illumines their entire journey, for it comes from the risen Christ, the morning star that never sets."<sup>32</sup>

### Living in faith

In this course so far, we have evaluated the claims of Christ and His Church rather like a banker questioning a man who wants a mortgage. If the man's answers are convincing, the banker will extend his credit.<sup>33</sup>

That is how the faithless judge supernatural truth, weighing it against their own standards or the standards of the world. However, the faithful accept it *on the authority* of Christ and His Church, just as a child believes things on the authority of his parents. The faithless see only arguments that demand their assent; the faithful see a Person Who asks for their confidence.

The faithful realize that in this confidence, they will often have to trust beyond the arguments. They know that we are finite and fallen human beings, while Jesus is perfect God. They know that Christ founded His Church to tell us about God, give us His life, and teach us His ways. They know that they will not always understand, any more than a child always understands what his parents tell him.<sup>34</sup>

For example, when my sister Léonie, who is a nurse, took her baby daughter Angela to a clinic for her first shots, she introduced the nurse to her, showed her how the hypodermic needle works, and said, "This lady is a nurse, like Mummy. She is going to prick you with this needle. It's going to hurt, but it will do you good. It will stop you getting sick." And the nurse, who had suggested taking Angela by surprise before she could object, was amazed at how quietly she accepted it.

Angela could see and feel the needle, but she did not understand vaccination. I doubt whether she even knew what it was to get sick. She had no knowledge of her own against which to test what Léonie said. But *she trusted her mother*.

Take another example. When Jesus said that we would have to eat His Body and drink His Blood, many people left Him.<sup>35</sup> When He asked His apostles whether they were going to leave, too, Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life. We have come to believe; we are convinced that you are God's holy One."<sup>36</sup>

Peter did not understand *what Jesus meant*, but he knew *Who Jesus was*. He said, in effect, "I know Who You are, so I accept what You say, even when I don't understand."

Such childlike trust is not opposed to reason. God wants a loving interpersonal relationship with us, and trust is an essential ingredient.<sup>37</sup> "To love involves trusting the beloved beyond the evidence, even against much evidence."<sup>38</sup>

This is how Angela trusted her mother. This — but infinitely more — is how we should trust Christ. "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these,"<sup>39</sup> Jesus said. "I assure you: unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of God."<sup>40</sup>

### Christ-and-His-Church

Now if we trust Christ, we must trust the Church He founded when she speaks in His name, with His authority.

About Christ and His Church, St. Paul says, "Husbands should love their wives as

31 See the talk on "What is the Catholic Church?"

32 Easter Vigil: *Exsultet*; Pope John Paul II: *Lumen Fidei* ("The Light of Faith"), 1

33 From the Latin *creditum* ("believed").

34 "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are My ways above your ways" (Is 55:9).

35 Jn 6:60

36 Jn 6:68-69

37 See the talk on "Who is Jesus Christ?"

38 C.S. Lewis: *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, "On Obstinacy in Belief." Also see CCC 157.

39 Mt 19:14. See also Mk 10:14; Lk 18:16.

40 Mt 18:3; see also Mk 10:15.

their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Observe that no man ever hates his own flesh; no, he nourishes it and takes care of it as Christ cares for the Church — for we are members of His Body. 'That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.'<sup>4 1</sup> This is a great foreshadowing; I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church."<sup>4 2</sup>

"Here St. Paul mixes two metaphors, or images, to describe the Church. According to one, she is Christ's bride; according to the other, she is His Body. But if the Church is Christ's bride, then Christ is one Body with her. As members of the Church, therefore, we are members of His Body."<sup>4 3</sup>

The Catholic Church is so intimately connected to Christ that the two can be called one Person. "Christ and His Church" together "make up the whole Christ":<sup>4 4</sup>

- "Our Redeemer has shown Himself to be one Person with the holy Church whom He has taken to Himself."<sup>4 5</sup>
- "Head and members form as it were one and the same mystical Person."<sup>4 6</sup>
- "About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they're just one thing, and we shouldn't complicate the matter."<sup>4 7</sup>

Accepting someone as a person means accepting him *in his totality* — as a package deal, so to speak. For example, this is how spouses accept each other in a valid marriage.<sup>4 8</sup> To accept only part of someone is to *use* him. For example, to accept only his service is to use him as a slave. To accept only the sexual pleasure he can give is to use him as a sex object.<sup>4 9</sup>

To accept Christ in His totality as a Person we must accept His Body, the Church. As one convert put it,<sup>5 0</sup> "Scripture states [that] the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ and Christ is its Head. One can't have a personal relationship with the Head as Lord and Saviour in its fullness if one doesn't embrace the Body as well. One can't decapitate Jesus from the Body and expect to have a 'personal' relationship with just the severed Head. This isn't what Jesus intended for us" when He prayed that we "all may be one."<sup>5 1</sup>

The Sacraments of Initiation — Baptism,<sup>5 2</sup> Confirmation,<sup>5 3</sup> and Eucharist<sup>5 4</sup> — are not just ceremonies which initiate us into the Catholic Church as into a club; they are Sacraments which *incorporate*<sup>5 5</sup> us into Christ. In Baptism we "unite" ourselves to "Christ's death and Resurrection"; in Confirmation God breathes His Holy Spirit into us;<sup>5 6</sup> and in the Eucharist, we share "in the Body of the Lord."<sup>5 7</sup>

St. Augustine said, "Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have become not only Christians, but Christ Himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God's grace toward us? Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ. For if He is the Head, we are the members [of His Body]; He and we together are the whole Man.... The fullness of Christ then is the Head and the members. But what does 'head and members' mean? Christ and the Church."<sup>5 8</sup>

41 Gn 2:24

42 Eph 5:28-31

43 Vincent Hawkswell and Maureen Creelman: *Human Sexuality: Its Christian Meaning*, Chapter 4

44 See CCC 795.

45 Gregory the Great (Pope 590-604): *Morals on the Book of Job*, The First Part, The Preface, 14

46 Thomas Aquinas (Dominican monk and theologian 1225-1274): *Summa Theologiae* III, 48, 2

47 Acts of the Trial of Joan of Arc (1412-1431)

48 In contrast, see the 1953 movie *The Captain's Paradise*, in which Alec Guinness accepts only the "partying" traits of one wife and only the "home-loving" traits of another.

49 See Joseph Ratzinger: *God and the World*, Part I, 2, "What Does God Want?" A person's totality includes all of his life: "love is not love which alters when it alteration finds" (Shakespeare: Sonnet 116).

50 Patrick Madrid, Editor: *Surprised by Truth*, "Into the Crimson Light"

51 Jn 17:20-21

52 See the talk on "Baptism and Confirmation."

53 See the talk on "Baptism and Confirmation."

54 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

55 From the Latin *corpus, corporis* ("body").

56 See Jn 20:22.

57 See CCC 790.

58 Augustine: *Tractate 21 on the Gospel of John*, 8

### Accepting the teaching

As we said, God's gift of faith enables us to perceive truths that are beyond our natural reasoning powers. Now God does not impart supernatural truths to us individually, mystically, without credentials.<sup>59</sup> No; "it is the Church that believes first, and so bears, nourishes, and sustains [our] faith."<sup>60</sup>

The faithful, therefore, will acknowledge, accept, and embrace the teaching of Christ-and-His-Church as absolutely certain — not necessarily evident or obvious to their natural reasoning powers, and not just probably or partially true, but certain in a way that nothing else is certain: *because it comes from Him Who can neither deceive nor be deceived.*<sup>61</sup>

Scripture shows that Christ did not teach "a mere collection of truths," nor "a philosophical view," nor "a religious sentiment or spirit," nor "a special morality poured out upon mankind as a stream might pour itself into the sea, mixing with the world's thought" to modify, purify, and invigorate it.<sup>62</sup>

No; Christ said, "Follow Me."<sup>63</sup> He founded *His Church.*<sup>64</sup> The teaching of Christ-and-His-Church is internally coherent, keeps itself together as one, and is the same always and everywhere. It demands to be received as "one doctrine, discipline, and devotion," given directly by God. The "credentials" with which it comes to us are those of Christ-and-His-Church.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, the faithful are not free to choose from its contents according to their own judgement. They must accept it as they find it, for the authority that upholds any part of it upholds it all.<sup>66</sup> For example, they cannot accept what it says about forgiveness, but reject what it says about divorce; or accept what it says about loving one's neighbour, but reject what it says about contraception.

Belief in Christ-and-His-Church, then, means trusting even when we do not understand. However, it means more: it means trusting and submitting even when our human reason prompts us to think otherwise.

For example, in 1994, Pope John Paul II issued a document in which he said, "In virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren,<sup>67</sup> I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgement is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful."<sup>68</sup>

The accompanying "presentation note"<sup>69</sup> explained that by these words, "the supreme Pontiff Pope John Paul II expressly intended to fulfil his office as successor of Peter" and that the doctrine contained in the document was "proposed not as a prudential teaching, nor as a more probable opinion, nor as a mere matter of discipline, but as certainly true": no longer "open to dispute," but requiring "full and unconditional assent."<sup>70</sup>

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### Unconditional assent

Unconditional assent may be easier to understand in some other discipline.

Take Physics, for example. In Grade 11, students perform experiments to observe how water waves behave. Next they observe how light behaves. From the close similarities they observe, they develop the idea that light is some kind of wave.

Then, in order to test their idea, they use these similarities to predict how light will behave in a new situation. Finally, they check the behaviour they have

59 From the Latin *credo* ("I believe").

60 CCC 168

61 See John Henry Newman: *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Chapter 10.

62 See John Henry Newman: *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Chapter 10.

63 See Mt 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24, 19:21; Mk 2:14, 8:34, 10:21; Lk 5:27, 9:23, 59, 18:22; Jn 1:43, 10:27, 12:26, 21:19, 22.

64 See Mt 16:18.

65 See John Henry Newman: *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Chapter 10.

66 See John Henry Newman: *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Chapter 10.

67 See Lk 22:32.

68 Pope John Paul II: *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 4

69 From the Vatican; see the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice," Appendix 3.

70 Pope John Paul II: *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Presentation Note

predicted, and become convinced that their idea is right. (We say "idea" rather than "theory," because "theory" suggests uncertainty. Scientists are often very sure of their ideas. However, physicists who come up with ideas are called "theoretical" physicists, while those who make observations are called "experimental" physicists.)

Briefly, physicists base their ideas on observations, and check them against observations.

Now, just as physicists study observable things, theologians<sup>71</sup> study spiritual things: often, things that we know only from Revelation — what God has revealed.<sup>72</sup> Like physicists, theologians come up with ideas. Unlike physicists, they cannot check their ideas against observations; instead, they have to check them against Revelation.

Briefly, theologians base their ideas on Revelation, and check them against Revelation.

Therefore, the Church, the *guardian*<sup>73</sup> of Revelation, has the right *and the duty* to check theologians' ideas,<sup>74</sup> just as experimental physicists have the right and the duty to check theoretical physicists' ideas. If theologians did not accept Church teaching — either as the basis for their ideas or the check on them — theology would dwindle into personal opinion.

Theology cannot "deny its own foundation." For theology, the Church's doctrine is "not a limitation, but rather the charter of its existence and freedom to be itself."<sup>75</sup> Similarly, observation is not a limitation on scientific ideas: rather it underlies them and validates them.

Just as scientists have to discard or modify ideas that disagree with observation, so theologians have to discard or modify ideas that disagree with Revelation — as expounded by the guardian to whom Christ entrusted it, His Church.

It occurred in Physics at the end of the nineteenth century. Experimental physicists observed light behaving not like a water wave,<sup>76</sup> but more like a stream of particles, so they informed theoretical physicists that they would have to modify their ideas.<sup>77</sup> And if a similar thing happens in theology, the Church, with the authority of Christ, informs theologians that they must do the same.

We should not be surprised. After all, light is not a water wave. God's ways are not our ways.<sup>78</sup>

Far from being a setback, the discovery that light was not exactly like a water wave represented an *advance* in Physics: both an *opportunity* and an *impulse* to understand light more deeply.

Similarly, the Church's formal and definitive declaration about women priests provides "an opportunity for all Christians to deepen their understanding" of the priesthood.<sup>79</sup>

71 Theology is the science which studies God and His relation to human beings.

72 See the talk on "Divine Revelation."

73 See CCC 1205.

74 "When the Magisterium of the Church makes an infallible pronouncement and solemnly declares that a teaching is found in Revelation, the assent called for is that of theological faith. This kind of adherence is to be given even to the teaching of the ordinary and universal Magisterium when it proposes for belief a teaching of faith as divinely revealed. When the Magisterium proposes 'in a definitive way' truths concerning faith and morals, which, even if not divinely revealed, are nevertheless strictly and intimately connected with Revelation, these must be firmly accepted and held. When the Magisterium, not intending to act 'definitively,' teaches a doctrine to aid a better understanding of Revelation and make explicit its contents, or to recall how some teaching is in conformity with the truths of faith, or finally to guard against ideas that are incompatible with these truths, the response called for is that of the religious submission of will and intellect. This kind of response cannot be simply exterior or disciplinary but must be understood within the logic of faith and under the impulse of obedience to the faith" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, 23).

75 Cardinal Avery Dulles: *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, Chapter 11, "The Teaching Mission of the Church and Academic Freedom." Dulles, born August 24 1918, was raised Presbyterian but by age 18 was an agnostic. "Impressed with the consistency and sublimity of Catholic doctrine," he became a Catholic at age 22. Pope John Paul II made him a cardinal February 21 2001 and he died December 12 2008.

76 Scientists called it the "ultra-violet catastrophe."

77 To include what we now call Quantum Mechanics.

78 See Is 55:8-9.



But even when we do not understand, "there should never be a diminishment of that fundamental openness loyally to accept the teaching" of the Church. "The theologian will strive to understand this teaching in its contents, arguments, and purposes. This will mean an intense and patient reflection on his part and a readiness, if need be, to revise his own opinions."<sup>80</sup>

After all, what we need is not really "a religion that is right where we are right;" what we need is "a religion that is right where we are wrong."<sup>81</sup>

### A 'dangerous' view?

A theologian who rejects the teaching of Christ-and-His-Church is *unreasonable* — like a scientist who rejects observations or a mathematician who rejects logic.

Consider the following news item, a *précis* of *Catholic News Service* reports after one such theologian was debarred from teaching at a Catholic university. (Only the name has been changed.)

"Theologian Father John Smith has vowed to fight a Vatican ruling that he can no longer teach theology at a Catholic university because he disagrees with Church teaching on masturbation and artificial birth control. He says that university officials knew of his dissent when he was hired and later given tenure. He contends that the university has violated his academic freedom and argues that his disciplining is based on a 'dangerous' view of theology which, if accepted, would 'dry up' theological creativity."

To see how utterly unreasonable this is, compare the following fictitious "news reports," composed to match, in other disciplines:

- Theoretical chemist Dr. Mark Browning has vowed to fight a ruling that he can no longer teach chemistry at a university because he disagrees with the results of experiments showing that oxygen is an element and water a compound. He says that university officials knew of his dissent when he was hired and later given tenure. He contends that the university has violated his academic freedom and argues that his disciplining is based on a "dangerous" view of chemistry which, if accepted, would "dry up" chemical creativity.
- Mathematician Dr. Jack Tremblay has vowed to fight a ruling that he can no longer teach mathematics at a university because he disagrees with logical theorems showing that two plus two equals four and the sum of the angles in a triangle is 180 degrees. He says that university officials knew of his dissent when he was hired and later given tenure. He contends that the university has violated his academic freedom and argues that his disciplining is based on a "dangerous" view of mathematics which, if accepted, would "dry up" mathematical creativity.
- Tennis pro Ralph Mason has vowed to fight a ruling that he can no longer play tennis at Wimbledon because he refuses to accept the lines on the court and the need for a net. He says that officials knew of his dissent when he was invited to play and later when he won his first cup. He contends that the pro association has violated his athletic freedom and argues that his disciplining is based on a "dangerous" view of tennis which, if accepted, would "dry up" athletic creativity. "Next thing, they'll be painting white lines all over a football field," he predicted.

### Accepting the gift

God grants the gift of faith to anyone who wants it. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you," Jesus

79 Pope John Paul II: *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Presentation Note

80 Pope John Paul II: *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Presentation Note. For example, before Mary's Assumption (see the talk on "Mary and Joseph") was dogmatically defined in 1950, Pope Pius XII consulted the world's theologians. One of them, after arguing "passionately" against it, was asked, "What will you do if the dogma is nevertheless defined? Won't you then have to turn your back on the Catholic Church?" After a moment's reflection, the theologian replied, "If the dogma comes, then I will remember that the Church is wiser than I and that I must trust her more than my own erudition" (see Joseph Ratzinger: *Milestones*, 6).

81 G.K. Chesterton: *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, Chapter V. Chesterton, born May 29 1874, a well known writer and lecturer, was received into the Catholic Church at the age of 48 and died June 14 1936.

promised. "For the one who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, enters."<sup>82</sup>

Then why do we not all possess this gift? The reason must be that *we do not all want it*. "The judgement of condemnation is this: the light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light," Jesus told Nicodemus.<sup>83</sup>

1) Many people do not know that they are in the dark. Right now, they think, they can see everything they care about well enough. Faith, they think, is not something they need. It is only when disaster strikes that they begin searching for more light; for example, when they become ill, or a loved one dies.<sup>84</sup>

2) Some people think that "having faith" means believing what is contrary to reason. *It does not*. Rather, faith gives us certainty about truths which are beyond human reason — things we could never reason out for ourselves — but which have been revealed by God.<sup>85</sup>

3) Some people think that "having faith" means ceasing to think for themselves. *It does not*.<sup>86</sup> When we accept the gift of faith, we do not give up our reason or our freedom to use it. Rather, faith opens up new fields of vision, new worlds, in which our reasoning is still valid.<sup>87</sup>

In fact, "a believer desires to know better the One in Whom he has put his faith and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith.... 'I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe.'"<sup>88</sup>

4) Many people refuse the gift of faith out of *pride*. Like Adam and Eve, they want to discover truth for themselves, not accept it on someone else's authority.<sup>89</sup>

Pride blinds us to spiritual truth, for in pride we refuse to learn it in the only way we can — from God's Revelation. "No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son — and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him."<sup>90</sup>

Pride blinds us to our own blindness. "If you were blind, there would be no sin in that," Jesus told the Pharisees. "'But we see,' you say, and your sin remains."<sup>91</sup>

Pride in this sense is expressed perfectly in the lyrics to *My Way*: "For what is a man; what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught. To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels — the record shows I took the blows and did it my way!"<sup>92</sup>

A person who is disposed to accept the gift of faith is, indeed, "one who kneels."

The humble man "goes to meet the truth," while the proud man "thinks that the Truth ought to come to *him*. The one examines into the proof that God has spoken; the other waits till this is proved to him.

"He feels no personal interest in it; he thinks it not his own concern, but (if I may say so) God Almighty's concern. He does not care to make the most of his knowledge; he does not put things together; he does not add up his facts and

82 Mt 7:7-8. Also see Mt 7:9-11.

83 Jn 3:19

84 "They are contented with themselves; they think themselves as happily conditioned as they can be under the circumstances; they only wish to be let alone; they have no need of priest or prophet; they live in their own way and in their own home, pursuing their own tastes, never looking out of doors; perhaps with natural virtues, perhaps not, but with no distinct or religious sense.... [They] have nothing of those dispositions at all which lead to faith" (John Henry Newman: *Dispositions for Faith*).

85 See CCC 159.

86 See Pope John Paul II: *Lumen Fidei* ("The Light of Faith"), 35.

87 See CCC 158. "To become a Catholic is not to leave off thinking, but to learn how to think." (Similarly, when a baby learns to walk, he does not leave off moving, but learns how to move.) "The Catholic convert has for the first time a starting-point for straight and strenuous thinking. He has for the first time a way of testing the truth in any question that he raises" (G.K. Chesterton: *The Catholic Church and Conversion*: Chapter IV, "The World Inside Out").

88 CCC 158

89 See the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

90 Mt 11:27

91 Jn 9:41

92 These are "the lyrics for a song from Hell," said Father Larry Richards, a priest of the Diocese of Erie Pennsylvania and founder of *The Reason for our Hope* Foundation. He spoke to Vancouver archdiocesan

cumulate his arguments; he leaves all this to be done by him who speaks to him; and if he is to have any trouble in the matter, then he is willing to dismiss it altogether.

"And next, supposing proof<sup>93</sup> is actually offered him, he feels no sort of gratitude or delicacy toward him who offers it: he says without compunction, 'I do not see this' and 'That does not follow,' for he is a critic and a judge, not an enquirer, and he negotiates and bargains, when he ought to be praying for light."<sup>94</sup>

"And thus he learns nothing rightly, and goes the way to reject a divine message, because he will not throw himself upon and into the evidence; while his neighbour, who has a real concern for his own salvation, finds it and believes."<sup>95</sup>

Jesus said, "I offer You praise, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because what You have hidden from the learned and the clever You have revealed to the merest children."<sup>96</sup>

### Obedience

Finally, many people would accept the gift of faith if it meant simply believing in the Holy Trinity,<sup>97</sup> Christ's divinity,<sup>98</sup> or the Real Presence in the Eucharist.<sup>99</sup> They admit that there may be more to life than what they see by the light of natural reason.

However, they refuse the gift when they find that it means obeying God's commandments.<sup>100</sup> "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult, and left untried."<sup>101</sup>

And yet "what good is it to profess faith without practising it?"<sup>102</sup> A man I know asks, "Do you have faith in your dentist?" If people say "yes," he responds, "Are you doing everything he tells you?"

We may or may not find God's commandments difficult to obey. But, in either case, obedience always demands humility.

"Instinctively we want to be masters of our fate; we want to be self-starters. If God should wish us to do something, let Him persuade us, convince us, cajole us. But let Him not command, for command offends our autonomy.

"It is easier to accept truth,<sup>103</sup> for our minds are disposed to discover facts which are, to a degree, independent of us. The command, however, is designed, by its very nature, to interfere with and to sway our daily lives and actions. It enters what is most mine; *i.e.*, my doing and deciding, and is thus likely to raise my hackles.

"At the moment it reaches my ears, it has, to a degree at least, already attained its purpose: whether I obey or disobey, I have been effectively notified that I am not my own; I am deprived of my self-produced equilibrium and disturbed in the peace I have created for myself. Even if command does no more than irritate me, it has had some effect.

"Behind our stress on love,<sup>104</sup> our demand for co-responsibility,<sup>105</sup> the demand that commands be explained and convincing, there lurks at times an unspoken and unadmitted demand that God approach us on our terms and acquiesce in our declaration of independence.

"While John's emphasis on God's love<sup>106</sup> must be kept in mind at all costs and

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priests during the "Be a Man" Conference held at St. Patrick's Parish in Vancouver June 15 2012.

93 See the "Introduction" to this course.

94 See Pope John Paul II: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 14 (see the talk on "Mary and Joseph," Appendix 2).

95 John Henry Newman: *Dispositions for Faith*

96 Lk 10:21

97 See the talk on "God: Unity and Trinity."

98 See the talk on "Who is Jesus Christ?"

99 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."

100 See CCC 144-149. Also see the talks on "The First Three Commandments" and "The Last Seven Commandments."

101 G.K. Chesterton: *What's Wrong With the World*, V.

102 Jas 2:14. See also Jas 1:22-25, 2:14-26.

103 Like the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, or the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

104 See the talk on "Love of God and Neighbour."

105 See the talk on "God's Will."

Paul's stress on grace<sup>107</sup> never forgotten, Matthew's insistence on command<sup>108</sup> must also be retained; if it is not, our vision of God and our spirituality will be deprived of an essential component.

"God's command reveals, in a concrete and inescapable manner, Who God is and who I am. It demands obedience absolutely, thus containing the claim that the One doing the demanding is absolute, having the right to my unquestioned obedience. It rests on the assumption that whatever God commands makes sense, whether I understand it or not."<sup>109</sup>

### Counting the cost

God gives us the gift of faith in the Sacrament of Baptism.<sup>110</sup> Now if someone accepts, by human reason, all we have expounded in the first few talks, why does the Church (normally) not allow him to be baptized at once?

The answer is that he must take time to "consider the cost" of becoming a Catholic.<sup>111</sup>

The cost is high, as Christ Himself warned. "If anyone comes to Me without turning his back on his father and mother, his wife and his children, his brothers and sisters, indeed his very self, he cannot be My follower," He said. "Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple."<sup>112</sup> We must put Christ first, ahead of everything and everyone else.

We must consider this "cost" carefully. "If one of you decides to build a tower, will he not first sit down and calculate the outlay to see if he has enough money to complete the project?" Jesus asked. "He will do that for fear of laying the foundation and then not being able to complete the work."<sup>113</sup>

### The promise

And, if we are prepared to pay the cost, what are we promised?

St. Peter asked that, too. "Here we have put aside everything to follow You," he said to Christ. "What can we expect from it?"<sup>114</sup>

"I give you My solemn word," Jesus said, "when the Son of Man takes His seat upon a throne befitting His glory, you who have followed Me shall likewise take your places on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Moreover, everyone who has given up home, brothers or sisters, father or mother, wife or children or property for My sake will receive many times as much and inherit everlasting life."<sup>115</sup>

And that is all we know, for "eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love Him."<sup>116</sup>

We rely on Christ's promise: "I came that [you] might have life, and have it to the full."<sup>117</sup>

To be sure, when we try to keep God's law, we find the first reward of our obedience in our increasing power to desire what Christ promises. But it takes time and patience: "poetry replaces grammar, gospel replaces law, longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship."<sup>118</sup>

106 See Jn 13:34-35, 14:15,21,23-24, 15:9-17; 1 Jn 2:10, 3:10-11,14,16-18,23, 4:7-12,19-21, 5:1-3; 2 Jn 1:5-6.

107 See Rom 3:24, 5:15-17,20-21, 6:14-15, 11:5-6; 2 Cor 1:12, 4:15, 12:9; Gal 2:21, 5:4; Eph 2:8, 4:7; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:9; Ti 2:11, 3:7.

108 See Mt 5:19-43, 19:16-19; 22:36-40.

109 Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic of Toronto (January 27 1930 - August 26 2011), in an intervention delivered to the Synod of Bishops in Rome October 6 1994. Pope John Paul II personally appointed him to the Synod.

110 See the talk on "Baptism and Confirmation."

111 See CCC 1247.

112 Lk 14:26-27

113 Lk 14:28-29

114 Mt 19:27

115 Mt 19:28-29

116 1 Cor 2:9

117 Jn 10:10

118 C.S. Lewis: *The Weight of Glory*, "The Weight of Glory"

At first, we simply obey God's commands. However, in "the love-story between God and man," our "communion of will" develops into a communion of thought and feeling, "and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide." God's will ceases to be "alien," imposed on us by the commandments; it becomes our own.<sup>119</sup>

Meanwhile, paradoxically, we get hints that we were made for another world in the insatiable longings and inevitable disappointments of this life.<sup>120</sup> The pleasures of this world arouse our desires, but they can only suggest the pleasures of our real life in Heaven.

### Conclusion

When an unbaptized person becomes Catholic, he is asked to declare<sup>121</sup> his belief in "God, the Father Almighty," in "Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord," in "the Holy Spirit," and in "the holy catholic Church."<sup>122</sup> A baptized person<sup>123</sup> is asked to declare that he "believes and professes all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God."

No one is asked whether he knows and understands everything the Church teaches. Rather, he is asked to sign a blank cheque, so to speak. A scientist writes such a "blank cheque" in favour of observations; mathematicians, in favour of logic; and athletes, in favour of the rules of the game. In fact, it is so taken for granted that they will, that they are never even asked to do so.<sup>124</sup>

Such a "blank cheque" should not frighten anyone away from the Church, for the Person we are asked to trust is Jesus Christ, God the Son and the Head of the Catholic Church — which, as His Bride, He loves as His own Body.<sup>125</sup>

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119 See Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 17.

120 "In the last analysis, what we all ardently desire is to be happy" (John Hardon: address to the Vancouver Archdiocesan Catechetical Institute, 1991). "We desire happiness, but we experience sadness. We want joy and laughter, but we experience tears. We want energy, strength, and health, but we experience illness, pain, and infirmity. We want peace and harmony, but we experience misunderstandings, conflict, and even violence. We want prosperity for everyone, but we shudder at the poverty around us. We want caring, life-giving relationships and friends, but we experience rejection and terrible loneliness. We have an innate desire to be free and fly like a bird, but we become entangled in situations, relationships, and addictions that are sometimes worse than a physical prison" (Archbishop Adam Exner OMI of Vancouver: address to the Vancouver Archdiocesan Catechetical Conference, 1996). See the talk on "The Question of Suffering."

121 In the words of the Apostles' Creed.

122 *Catholic* means *universal*. This Creed was first used when "catholic" could only have meant "Catholic."

123 In another Christian denomination.

124 However, in February 1989 Pope John Paul II asked theologians to take an oath of loyalty to the Church. The 1998 version contains the following: "With firm faith, I also [that is, in addition to the contents of the Nicene Creed] believe everything contained in the Word of God, whether written or handed down in Tradition, which the Church, either by a solemn judgement or by the ordinary and universal Magisterium, sets forth to be believed as divinely revealed. I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals. Moreover, I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic Magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, July 1998: *Profession of Faith and the Oath of Fidelity on Assuming an Office to be Exercised in the Name of the Church*, I).

125 Just think of how much you pledge when you get married, or when you become a Canadian citizen. Christ and His Church are infinitely more deserving of our trust. See CCC 154.

## Appendix: "That Faith Might Be Stronger"

We sometimes think how wonderful it would have been to live in the time of Jesus, when we could actually see Him, hear Him, and touch Him. We wonder why He did not stay with us longer than 40 days after His Resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, Jesus did not think it important for us to see Him with our physical eyes. In fact, when Thomas demanded physical proof that Jesus had risen from the dead, Jesus said to him, "You became a believer because you saw Me. Blest are they who have not seen and have believed."<sup>2</sup> We have the advantage He spoke of: we are "blest" precisely *in not having seen Him*.

After the Ascension, the apostles experienced this "blessedness," for "their faith did not fail, their hope did not waver, and their love did not grow cold." Instead, they lifted "the whole contemplation of their mind to the Godhead of Him Who sat at the Father's right hand." Bodily sight no longer hindered them from directing their minds to Him Who "had never quitted the Father's side in descending to earth, and had not forsaken the disciples in ascending to Heaven."

Jesus left us so that faith "might be more excellent and stronger,"<sup>3</sup> says Pope Leo the Great. While Jesus had been among them bodily, they could touch His Body, but by His Body "He is less than the Father." Now, with their "better instructed faith," they "began to draw closer to a conception of the Son's equality with the Father," realizing that "in an ineffable manner" He had begun to be "nearer to the Father in respect of His Godhead, after having become further away in respect of His Manhood." They began to realize that "He who descended is the very One Who ascended high above the heavens, that He might fill all men with His gifts."<sup>4</sup>

When Jesus told Mary Magdalene after His Resurrection, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father,"<sup>5</sup> He meant, says Pope Leo, "I would not have you come to Me as to a human Body, nor yet recognize Me by fleshly perceptions: I put you off for higher things; I prepare greater things for you; when I have ascended to My Father, then you shall handle Me more perfectly and truly, for you shall grasp what you cannot touch and believe what you cannot see."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the angels chided the disciples: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the skies? This Jesus Who has been taken from you will return, just as you saw Him go up into the heavens."<sup>7</sup> He will come to judge the living and the dead "in the same flesh in which He ascended," Pope Leo says.

Until then, His presence among us is "a sacramental presence";<sup>8</sup> at His Ascension, "sight gave way to doctrine." In prayer — our "living relationship" with God<sup>9</sup> — we "raise our hearts' eyes unimpeded to those heights where Christ is"; we raise minds not "pressed down by earthly affections."<sup>10</sup>

We saw the joy among the Poles at the election of Pope John Paul II, among the Germans at the election of Pope Benedict XVI, and among the Argentinians at the election of Pope Francis. How much more should we all rejoice at Christ's Ascension, when a Man, One of us, "took His seat at God's right hand!"<sup>11</sup>

"Christ's Ascension is our uplifting,"<sup>12</sup> says Pope Leo. We should not regret that Jesus has left us, then, but, like the apostles, be "filled with joy."<sup>13</sup>

"Christian faith is either an encounter with Him alive, or it does not exist."<sup>14</sup>

1 See Acts 1:3.

2 See Jn 20:24-29.

3 See Pope Leo the Great: *Sermon 74*, 2.

4 Eph 4:10

5 Jn 20:17

6 In contrast, He had told His apostles, who "were indredulous" and "thought they were seeing a ghost," to "touch" Him (see Lk 24:36-41).

7 Acts 1:11

8 See the talk on "Grace and the Sacraments."

9 See CCC 2565. Also see the talk on "Prayer."

10 Pope Leo I: *Sermon 74*, 5

11 Mk 16:19

12 Pope Leo I: *Sermon 73*, 4

13 Lk 24:52

14 Pope Francis: *Desiderio Desideravi*, 10