

# ***TAKING THE RISK OF FAITH***

April 10, 2024



The man who never made a mistake never made anything. Likewise, the man who never takes a risk never gets ahead. Whether it is starting your own business, getting engaged, pursuing your dream career, getting a great education, or achieving athletic greatness, **if you don't take a risk you don't take the prize.**

This is why the story of Peter walking on the waves is one of my favorite encounters with Christ. Despite the storms, Peter had to get up, see the situation, hear the call of Christ and risk everything to go wave walking. In every area of life, to succeed taking a risk is necessary, and yet in the area of our spiritual life we too often do just the opposite.

Jesus Christ presents each of us with a challenge and a call. Will we step out of the boat to walk on the waves with him? Will we leave everything to follow Christ? The problem with too many

**Catholics is that we have forgotten this primary call to discipleship and have settled for a religion in which there is no risk, no call, and no challenge.**

When I served as a high school chaplain I observed three essential responses to the challenge of faith in the lives of my students. The three responses are most clearly seen during adolescence because that is when so many life choices are being made. However, **the same three responses can be observed among people at every stage of life.**

**The first response to the challenge of faith is “polite conformity.” In this response, the young person regards the challenges of the faith with a benign detachment.** He shrugs and says, “I suppose if the grown-ups say this is true I’ll go along with it.” He conforms to the norms not because he is committed to them, but because it is the path of least resistance. “You want me to go to Mass on Sunday? OK. I’ll go. Will you then stop bugging me please?”

**The Catholic who responds to the challenge of Christ with polite conformity simply goes with the flow. His faith becomes part of his comfortable life and as he matures he goes no further in the faith.** The Catholic Church in America today is full of men who still occupy the pew because it is the path of least resistance. They punch the churchy time clock. They put in their time. They fulfill their obligation. They not only don’t step out of the boat, they never even rock the boat. They are polite conformists. Furthermore, the path of polite conformity seems to pay off. They become respectable. They fit in. **It all seems snug, secure, cozy, and comfortable.**

**One of the big problems with catechesis in the past is that our church leaders, teachers, and catechists have been content for the pew sitters to be polite conformists. They have schooled children in their religious duties and proper moral behavior and never expected anything more.** In The Book of Revelation, the Lord has a few choice

words for the polite conformists: “Because you are lukewarm I will spit you out of my mouth.”

**The second type of response to Christ’s call is “outright rebellion.”** This is when the teen says, “Fuggedaboutit. This religion thing is dumb and all the grown-ups who say they believe are a load of hypocrites. I’m outta here.” It’s an understandable adolescent response. Too often the same response carries on into adulthood. In “outright rebellion” the individual is actively opposed to Christ and his church and believes he has good reason to be.

When I talk on this subject I ask teenagers, “Which is better, ‘polite conformity’ or ‘outright rebellion.’?” They always get it right and reply, “Outright rebellion.” This shocking answer is correct because at least the person who is in outright rebellion has taken the claims of the faith seriously and although he has rejected it, he is thinking it through. **The polite conformist never thinks it through and may mistake his polite conformity for real faith for his whole life. Cocooned in a secure world with other polite conformists he never once gives the reality of his faith a second thought.**

**The third response is “intelligent enquiry”.** The person who responds to the challenge of faith most authentically does so with intelligence, wit, and grace. **He questions in a spirit of honest enquiry and curiosity. In other words, he takes the risk of faith.** He steps out to discover for himself and learn about the faith through his own experience. He doesn’t mind challenging his religious teachers, but he does so with a genuine desire to learn and grow.

**To really explore the faith demands not only an intellectual quest to understand, but the risk of commitment, self-discipline, study, and self-sacrifice.** Through intelligent enquiry one embarks on a heroic adventure. We call it a risk because to go on that adventure requires one to leave his old world behind and launch out into the unknown.

St Paul says, “We walk by faith and not by sight.” What he means is that the life of faith is a great adventure or it is nothing at all. **Outright rebellion is a sad and immature rejection of the faith, and polite conformity is no faith at all. Intelligent enquiry launches us out of our comfort zone to take the risk of faith.**

**That risk is the risk of everything, so at the end of our exploring, we will have reached the omega point where all is harvest—where we gain all things, know all things, and are known and welcomed home.**

Reprinted with permission from Those Catholic Men. Check out more articles like this one in [Sword&Spade](#).

*Fr. Dwight Longenecker is an American who has spent most of his life living and working in England.*

*Fr Longenecker was brought up in an Evangelical home in Pennsylvania. After graduating from the fundamentalist Bob Jones University with a degree in Speech and English, he went to study theology at Oxford University. He was eventually ordained as an Anglican priest and served as a curate, a school chaplain in Cambridge and a country parson on the Isle of Wight.*

*Realizing that he and the Anglican Church were on divergent paths, in 1995 Fr. Dwight and his family were received into the Catholic Church. Fr Dwight spent the next ten years working as a freelance Catholic writer, contributing to over twenty-five magazines, papers and journals in Britain, Ireland and the USA. In addition he has written sixteen books on Catholic spirituality, apologetics and culture and he has one of America’s top rated religious blogs—*Standing on My Head*.*

*In 2006 Dwight returned with his family to the United States and was ordained as a Catholic priest under the Pastoral Provision—a system through which married former Protestant ministers may receive a dispensation from the vow of celibacy in order to be ordained as Catholic priests. He is the parish priest of Our Lady of the Rosary church in Greenville, South Carolina. Visit his website and browse his books at [dwightlongenecker.com](http://dwightlongenecker.com).*