

Fr. Perozich comments —

My faith experience reflects that of the author Emma Newgarden.

I never did and still do not understand everything with logical proof through the scientific method. If I did, it would only be knowledge and not be faith. As St. Paul says in 1Cor 13:9 For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

I do not know anyone who does not have relatives who have abandoned the Catholic faith and the church in favor of comfort of the limited understanding of what they choose to know and to believe.

“It is painful, when someone you love and look up to rejects what you truly believe most important, not to be able to justify your certainty on his terms.”

*While parents may instill the faith very well, at some point each of their offspring needs to own that faith through encounters with Jesus in word, sacrament, and charity, **“to be totally convicted of the need to make Jesus the center of our lives, despite not being able to rattle off philosophical proofs in His defense.”***

“To fall properly into the realm of belief, a subject must be in some way beyond the believer’s individual capacity to verify empirically; the will must move the intellect to assent, not to apparent evidence, but to both someone and something.”

“While “cradle Catholics” are introduced to Jesus first by our parents, it is ultimately we ourselves who make the free decision about whether to trust Him, to accept and respond to what He reveals.”

“Yet I would not say now that I believe only because my parents told me about Him, but because He has revealed Himself throughout my life, education, and formation.”

“It is entirely by His gift of grace that we can make the choice to continue believing despite not having all the answers, humble ourselves to say yes to what is often beyond our power to articulate or even comprehend, and let our certainty rest in God.”

Why (Still) Believe?

Faith and the Cradle Catholic



It is difficult to name the reason I first began to believe in Jesus because I can't recall a time when I did not. That said, I suppose this difficulty itself indicates the most basic reason: **my parents believed and took care to raise me in their faith. They ensured that I grew up in a Catholic household, going to Mass every Sunday, receiving all my sacraments, and saying grace before meals**—norms which led most of my friends even then to consider our family “really religious.” **Talking to Jesus and hearing about Him was a normal, integrated part of everyday life, and it never occurred to me *not* to believe.**

Much easier to pinpoint are the moments I first wondered *why* I did: a science vs religion “debate” on the playground of my k-8 Catholic school, lined up by a self-proclaimed atheist eighth grader. **This bold challenge made me sad and angry but never doubtful. I trusted absolutely in the Church and**

her teachings; I was only frustrated with myself, for not knowing enough to respond in the moment. But of course, this was only the beginning, as the older I grew, the more of my friends and family members fell away from the Church. It seemed there were endless questions I could not answer—did this make me a hypocrite, professing beliefs I had no evidence for? How could St. John Henry Newman’s “ten difficulties do not make a single doubt” be true for me but not for so many I’d grown up alongside?

This is a tension that many “cradle Catholics”—here meaning, those of us blessed to be baptized before the age of reason who continue to practice as adults—wrestle with. **To be totally convicted of the need to make Jesus the center of our lives, despite not being able to rattle off philosophical proofs in His defense,** can seem perilously close to that ever-contemptible “blind faith”—in German, *Köhlerglauben*, the faith of the charcoal burner. Is there something intellectually inferior about belief in Christ and the Church’s teachings simply because we were raised to do so?

Josef Pieper, in his essay [“On Faith,”](#) provides a definition of **belief** that is helpful for unraveling this question: **“to accept something unconditionally as real and true on the testimony of someone else who understands the matter out of his own knowledge.”** To fall properly into the realm of *belief*, a subject must be in some way beyond the believer’s individual capacity to verify empirically; **the will must move the intellect to assent, not to apparent evidence, but to both someone and something.** The believer in the proper sense decides to take the witness of this “someone” not because he fails to critically examine the “something,” but because **it is inherently out of his capacity to investigate, and he would rather risk opening himself to greater contact with reality than remain totally in the dark beyond his own limited reach.**

Pieper demonstrates that belief as a mode of communicating truth should be accepted as readily in the field of religious faith as it is in every other. For instance, since very few of us can really understand and explain the mechanics of forces on sub-atomic particles, it stands to reason that in matters of quantum physics we have no qualms subscribing for our opinions to those genius minds who study such truths, and when we do so, truly “participate, in a completely legitimate fashion, in the truth of the prime discoverer.”

Just so, in the matter of divine revelation, we can truly do no better than to say like the German charcoal burner, “I believe what the Church believes.” **In this *fides implicita*, “implicit faith,” the believer can share in truths otherwise beyond his grasp, “by virtue of his believing tie to one who knows at first hand—which in this case means not only to the first recipient of the divine speech but to its Author himself.”**

To speak of belief in this way is not at all to diminish the importance of evidence-based argumentation for religious truth (as Pieper mentions, the existence of God or the historicity of the Bible) and even less to imply that the layman should not seek understanding of his faith. It is only to remind us that when all is said and done, *faith is not a logical conclusion to think our way into, nor is Fides implicita what remains when one refuses to seek the truth for oneself.* **On the contrary, it is a perfection of the will, infused in us by God, that enables us to assent unconditionally to His divine self-revelation and so to genuinely participate in that deposit of truth handed down from the apostles through the Church over 2000 years and counting.** This is the sense in which Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and the Church fathers taught that belief may be infinitely surer than any earthly knowledge or insight: in faith, the witness assented to is Christ Himself—at once the messenger and the message.

It is painful, when someone you love and look up to rejects what you truly believe most important, not to be able to justify your certainty on his terms. Sometimes it is tempting to fear that if our faith was authentic, we should be able to pull down irrefutable explanations from some Archimedean point, without reverting to Catholic teachings and worldview, when called upon to “give the reason for your hope.” But trusting the Church to guide our belief does not take away from its legitimacy, any more than would trusting a newspaper reporter describing an event one has not personally witnessed; **we must all choose to trust the word of those closest to the source about those things we cannot see.**

While “cradle Catholics” are introduced to Jesus first by our parents, it is ultimately we ourselves who make the free decision about whether to trust Him, to accept and respond to what He reveals.

I cannot know why in my case, or at precisely what moment, the seed that my parents passed down took root. **Yet I would not say now that I believe only because my parents told me about Him, but because He has revealed Himself throughout my life, education, and formation.** We don't have to be knowledgeable Bible scholars or quick-thinking apologists to recognize that **we have encountered Jesus in our lives, experienced His desire to draw near to us and been captivated by the goodness and beauty of His Word.** Through all of this He invokes in us the response of faith, still yearning to understand; but in humble and total acceptance, questions need not be obstacles.

In this way it is entirely by His gift of grace that we can make the choice to continue believing despite not having all the answers, humble ourselves to say yes to what is often beyond our power to articulate or even comprehend, and let our certainty rest in God.

Photo by [Julia Michelle](#) on [Unsplash](#)



By Emma Newgarden

Emma Newgarden is a graduate student at Seton Hall University, pursuing a master's degree in moral theology. As an undergraduate at the same institution, she studied Classical studies and was a member of the women's cross-country team. Emma lives in Staten Island, NY, where she spends her free time reading, running, and coming up with new baked-goods recipes.