

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*For those of us who had the privilege of going to seminary, this is a good review taking the reader back to school. For those who have not learned in this way, it might take the reader more time to digest the material.*

*The readers will learn or review vocabulary, definitions of words in ways other than common usage, new concepts of thinking, and thus be able to understand the theology behind their beliefs.*

*It was the title that interested me. Within the article there are links to earlier and later parts of this series. I intend to share them in the future, and then group them all together in one post.*

## **We can know with certainty that the Catholic religion is true: here's how**

*Throughout history the popes, councils of the Church, and wisdom of the saints and philosophers have given testimony to the truth of the claims of the Catholic Church.*



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“How many wonderful and shining proofs are ready at hand to convince the human reason in the clearest way that the religion of Christ is divine and that ‘the whole principle of our doctrines has taken root from the Lord of the heavens above’; therefore nothing exists more definite, more settled or more holy than our faith, which rests on the strongest foundations.” — Pope Pius IX, *Qui Pluribus*

([LifeSiteNews](#)) — With the above words Pope Pius IX clearly affirms that the Catholic Church’s claim to possess, to practice, and to transmit a divinely revealed religion can be clearly established by the natural light of human reason.

This natural knowledge of the credibility of the Church’s claim to have received a revelation from God provides a support for the supernatural virtue of faith “by means of which, with the grace of God inspiring and assisting us we believe to be true what He has revealed, not because we perceive its intrinsic truth by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God Himself who makes the revelation and can neither deceive nor be deceived.”<sup>[1]</sup>

We urgently need to know these ‘wonderful and shining proofs’

**It has never been more necessary for Catholics to have a strong grasp of the “wonderful and shining proofs” of which Pope Pius IX taught. This is because in our times the evils which the Holy Father warned of two centuries ago have been fully realized.**

Qui Pluribus, promulgated in 1846, was the first encyclical of Pius IX's pontificate and addressed the grave crisis facing the Church:

*Each of you has noticed, venerable brothers, that a very bitter and fearsome war against the whole Catholic commonwealth is being stirred up by men bound together in a lawless alliance. These men do not preserve sound doctrine, but turn their hearing from the truth. They eagerly attempt to produce from their darkness all sorts of prodigious beliefs, and then to magnify them with all their strength, and to publish them and spread them among ordinary people.*<sup>[2]</sup>

The pope explained that by means of “many harmful methods, plots and contrivances” these enemies of the Church “spread their hatred for truth and light.”<sup>[3]</sup>

As men “experienced and skillful in deceit” they “set in motion their plans to quench peoples’ zeal for piety, justice and virtue, to corrupt morals, to cast all divine and human laws into confusion, and to weaken and even possibly overthrow the Catholic religion and civil society.”<sup>[4]</sup>

This task has today been largely completed. The Catholic Church has been cast out of civil society, and the practice of the faith has been abandoned by hundreds of millions of people. The evil consequences of this all but universal defection from Jesus Christ beyond enumeration: more than a billion innocent babies murdered; families and societies destroyed; crime rampant; vice triumphant; and countless men and women living lives devoid of meaning and filled with anguish and despair. Finally – and worst of all – every day innumerable souls die without sanctifying grace and enter immediately into eternal perdition.

## **The assault on the credibility of the Catholic religion**

**One of the chief causes of the collapse of Christian civilization has been the successful propagation, by the Church's enemies, of the notion that the assent of faith is fundamentally unreasonable. They have set "faith" and "reason" in conflict with each other and, as a consequence, religion is presented as something irrational and lacking intellectual credibility.**

Pius IX exposed this strategy in 1846. He warned that in order to deceive others the enemies of God first affect wisdom:

They claim for themselves without hesitation the name of "philosophers." They feel as if philosophy, which is wholly concerned with the search for truth in nature, ought to reject those truths which God Himself, the supreme and merciful creator of nature, has deigned to make plain to men as a special gift. [5]

That is, they reject the arguments for the existence of God from the things that He has made.

By means "of an obviously ridiculous and extremely specious kind of argumentation" these "enemies" set up human reason "against the most holy faith of Christ, and they blather with great foolhardiness that this faith is opposed to human reason." [6]

This is, of course, false because, as the pope goes on to explain, **there can be no conflict between faith and reason:**

*For although faith is above reason, no real disagreement or opposition can ever be found between them; this is because both of them come from the same greatest source of unchanging and eternal truth, God. They give such reciprocal help to each other that true reason shows, maintains and protects the truth of the faith, while faith frees reason from all errors and wondrously enlightens, strengthens and perfects reason with the knowledge of divine matters. [7]*

**There is nothing contrary to reason in the revealed deposit of faith.** But the Catholic Church also teaches that the assent of faith is itself reasonable, as the pope explained in the quotation with which I opened this piece:

*But how many wonderful and shining proofs are ready at hand to convince the human reason in the clearest way that the religion of Christ is divine and that “the whole principle of our doctrines has taken root from the Lord of the heavens above”; therefore nothing exists more definite, more settled or more holy than our faith, which rests on the strongest foundations.[8]*

*When a man assents to the truth of the Catholic religion, when he takes the Catholic Church as his teacher in matters of revelation, this is no blind leap into the dark. It is, in reality, a reasonable act based on solid proofs that the Catholic Church is what she claims to be: an infallible and indefectible teacher, established by a Divine Messenger who was not only sent by God, but who was, in fact, God Himself.*

### **The popes on the motives of credibility**

The “wonderful and shining proofs” of which Pope Pius IX speaks are known as “the motives of credibility,” because they make manifest the credibility of the Church’s claims.

Pope Pius XI summarized the motives of credibility as follows:

*This faith, which teaches for life and points towards salvation, which casts out all vices and is the fruitful mother and nurse of the virtues, has been established by the birth, life, death, resurrection, wisdom, wonders and prophecies of Christ Jesus, its divine author and perfecter!*

*Shining forth in all directions with the light of teaching from on high and enriched with the treasures of heavenly wealth,*

*this faith grew famed and notable by the foretellings of so many prophets, the lustre of so many miracles, the steadfastness of so many martyrs, and the glory of so many saints! It made known the saving laws of Christ and, gaining in strength daily even when it was most cruelly persecuted, it made its way over the whole world by land and sea, from the sun's rising to its setting, under the single standard of the Cross! The deceit of idols was cast down and the mist of errors was scattered. By the defeat of all kinds of enemies, this faith enlightened with divine knowledge all peoples, races and nations, no matter how barbarous and savage, or how different in character, morals, laws and ways of life. It brought them under the sweet yoke of Christ Himself by proclaiming peace and good tidings to all men!*[\[9\]](#)

**The First Vatican Council, in its decree *Dei Filius*, taught:**

*Faith, declares the Apostle, is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Nevertheless, in order that the submission of our faith should be in accordance with reason, it was God's will that there should be linked to the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit external indications of his revelation, that is to say divine acts, and first and foremost miracles and prophecies, which clearly demonstrating as they do the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, are the most certain signs of revelation and are suited to the understanding of all.*[\[10\]](#)

The council continued:

*Hence Moses and the prophets, and especially Christ Our Lord Himself, worked many absolutely clear miracles and delivered prophecies; while of the apostles we read: And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Again it is written: We have the prophetic word made more sure; you will*

*do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place. [11]*

**By miracles and prophecies alone we can know the truth of the Catholic religion.** But these are not the only motives of credibility. The Catholic Church is herself “a kind of great and perpetual motive of credibility.”

The council taught:

*So that we could fulfill our duty of embracing the true faith and of persevering unwaveringly in it, God, through his only begotten Son, founded the church, and he endowed his institution with clear notes to the end that she might be recognised by all as the guardian and teacher of the revealed word.*

*To the Catholic Church alone belong all those things, so many and so marvelous, which have been divinely ordained to make for the manifest credibility of the Christian faith. What is more, the church herself by reason of her astonishing propagation, her outstanding holiness and her inexhaustible fertility in every kind of goodness, by her catholic unity and her unconquerable stability, is a kind of great and perpetual motive of credibility and an incontrovertible evidence of her own divine mission.*

*So it comes about that, like a standard lifted up for the nations, she both invites to herself those who have not yet believed, and likewise assures her sons and daughters that the faith they profess rests on the firmest of foundations. [12]*

In his encyclical letter *Immortale Dei* Pope Leo XIII also summarized the motives of credibility:

*Now, it cannot be difficult to find out which is the true religion, if only it be sought with an earnest and unbiased mind; for proofs are abundant and striking. We have, for example, the*

*fulfillment of prophecies, miracles in great numbers, the rapid spread of the faith in the midst of enemies and in face of overwhelming obstacles, the witness of the martyrs, and the like. From all these it is evident that the only true religion is the one established by Jesus Christ Himself, and which He committed to His Church to protect and to propagate.*[\[13\]](#)

And in *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII speaks of:

*[T]he many wonderful external signs God has given, which are sufficient to prove with certitude by the natural light of reason alone the divine origin of the Christian religion.*[\[14\]](#)

The moral certitude of the divine origin of the Christian religion, which is attained through the exercise of natural reason, must not be equated with the certitude proper to faith. Once the credibility of the Catholic religion has been recognized, the will – inspired and assisted by divine grace – may make the supernatural act of faith, whereby it assents to all that the Church proposes for belief, on account of the authority of God who has revealed all these truths to His Church.

**Reflecting on the motives of credibility is important for us all. For those who have not yet made the act of faith, these external signs provide a foundation for faith. For those who already possess supernatural faith, they serve as a safeguard and strengthening of faith.**

### **Common sense vs. scientific knowledge**

The motives of credibility are known and understood to different degrees by different people. This is because there are degrees of intellectual knowledge in man. As philosopher A. M. Woodbury writes:

*Intellectual human knowledge admits degrees. For we do not, by a single intuition, perfectly know anything; rather, we proceed, little by little, from a very imperfect knowledge to a more perfect knowledge.[15]*

*An important distinction can be drawn between “common sense knowledge” and “scientific knowledge.” Woodbury explains:*

***We know things first in a common-sense manner. We know something of them without properly knowing their nature, without knowing the laws by which they are governed, without knowing whence they come or whither they go.[16]***

He continues:

*Such is pre-scientific, or common-sense knowledge, employed in the daily conversation of men.[17]*

On the other hand:

*Scientific knowledge is opposed to common-sense knowledge: it is defined: “certain knowledge through causes.” [18]*

**We have scientific knowledge when we can explain a thing through its causes. Scientific knowledge is certain, not mere opinion, and is attained by demonstration from self-evident or previously established principles.**

Science treats of universals. For example, the science of geometry is concerned with what is universally true of triangles – for instance, that the interior angles of a triangle always equal two right angles – not with the accidental features of a particular

triangle drawn on a blackboard, such as whether it is drawn with white chalk or green.

Woodbury explains why this must be so:

*Now what is universally true of a subject can be known scientifically for it can be demonstrated (i.e. proved with certitude) from its causes, since it is a necessary effect of necessitating causes. But what is true only of this subject, cannot be scientifically demonstrated, because it is a contingent effect (i.e. an effect that can be and can not-be). Of singulars, knowledge is gained by experience or observation – not by scientific demonstration.[19]*

**The highest of all sciences that can be pursued by the light of natural reason is philosophy, because philosophy examines the ultimate causes of all things.** Metaphysics is the supreme part of philosophy, because it treats of the ultimate causes of being itself. The highest division of metaphysics is natural theology because it deals with the first cause and final end of all being – God Himself.

There is, however, an even higher science, which proceeds not by the natural light of human reason, but by the light of divine revelation. This science is sacred theology.

What kind of knowledge can we have about God and the claims of His Church?

Man can, by the light of natural reason, know that God exists. As we saw in [an earlier article](#), the knowledge of God is not self-evident to us. However, most people have a common-sense awareness of the existence of God, based on their experience of causality in the world around them.

Scientific knowledge of the existence of God can be acquired by philosophical demonstration. In the first instalments of this series, which can be read [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), I

outlined the key arguments by which the existence of God can be demonstrated by the light of natural reason.

**The claims of the Catholic Church can also be understood in a “common sense” or a “scientific” way. Of the “common sense” recognition that she is what she claims to be, John Henry Newman wrote, “she bears upon her the tokens of divinity, which come home to any mind at once, which has not been possessed by prejudice, and educated in suspicion.”[20]**

This “common sense” knowledge can be transformed into scientific knowledge, as Newman states:

*Moreover, it is possible to analyze the arguments and draw up in form the great proof, on which her claims rest.[21]*

**The science which analyzes the arguments for the credibility of the claims of the Catholic Church and draws up “in form the great proof, on which her claims rest,” is the science of fundamental theology.**

Just as the science of natural theology proves the existence of God, and can demonstrate many truths about His nature and His attributes, so fundamental theology demonstrates, with certainty, that the claims of the Catholic Church are credible. This is the science which establishes the claims of the Church and defends them against the attacks of her enemies.

### **The importance of studying fundamental theology**

**The human intellect was made to know.** The acquisition of knowledge is a good in and of itself, and not because of any utility that the knowledge may have. To deepen our understanding of the truth is itself a reason to deepen our grasp of this science. But there are two other important reasons for studying fundamental theology:

1. Scientific knowledge is more secure than common sense knowledge. **When we have certain knowledge of a thing through its causes, whether it be the existence of God or the credibility of the Catholic religion, we are much less likely to be taken in by specious arguments, because we know not only what we believe but why it necessarily must be so. The man or woman who only has “common sense” knowledge is much more vulnerable to opposing arguments, because they don’t fully understand the foundations on which their own position rests.**
2. Scientific knowledge helps us to share the truth with others more effectively. If we have scientific knowledge of the foundations of the faith, we are in a much better position to help others to arrive at the truth. We will be able to explain our position more clearly, answer the questions posed by others more satisfactorily, and respond to their objections more convincingly.

As Woodbury wrote:

*The scientific exposition of it yields to believers a greater firmness of faith, and to these who have not yet the faith, the preambles thereunto, as well as to Catholic apologists an abundance of proofs whereby they may co-operate towards leading men towards the faith.*[\[22\]](#)

These would be good reasons for studying this science in any era, but they are even more important for Catholics today because the dangers against which Pope Pius IX warned in *Qui Pluribus* have reached their full fruition.

**Common sense knowledge of the credibility of the Church’s claims might be sufficient for most men in**

**most times, but in our era, many who possess only this kind of knowledge will lose the faith or see those for whom they are responsible lose the faith.** Men and women who in other eras would have been moved to make the act of faith will not do so because, lacking a scientific exposition of these truths, they will not be able to overcome the opposing arguments which are so dominant in our age.

This science has been presented in many great works over past centuries but most of them are today out of print, or assume knowledge that many modern readers lack, or don't address questions that have arisen since their publication. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a demonstration of the credibility of the Catholic religion which is accessible to modern readers.

For this reason, having dealt briefly with key arguments for the existence of God, I will now turn to deal in much more detail with fundamental theology, "the science of the foundations of the faith."<sup>[23]</sup>

And it is to that description of the discipline that we will turn in the next installment.

## References

<sup>↑1</sup> First Vatican Council, Session 3, 24 April 1870, Decree Dei Filius, Chapter 3. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum20.htm>

<sup>↑2</sup>, <sup>↑3</sup>, <sup>↑4</sup> Pope Pius IX, Qui Pluribus, No. 4.

<sup>↑5</sup>, <sup>↑6</sup> Pope Pius IX, Qui Pluribus, No. 5.

<sup>↑7</sup> Pope Pius IX, Qui Pluribus, No. 6.

<sup>↑8</sup>, <sup>↑9</sup> Pope Pius IX, Qui Pluribus, No. 8.

<sup>↑10</sup> Vatican Council, Dei Filius.

<sup>↑11</sup>, <sup>↑12</sup> Vatican Council, Dei Filius.

<sup>↑13</sup> Pope Leo XIII, Immortale Dei, No. 7.

- ↑14 Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, No. 4.
- ↑15 A. M. Woodbury S.M., *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 6
- ↑16, ↑17 Woodbury, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 6.
- ↑18 Woodbury, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 7
- ↑19 Woodbury, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 8
- ↑20 John Henry Newman, “Mysteries of Nature and Grace,”  
*Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*.
- ↑21 John Henry Newman, “Mysteries of Nature and Grace,”  
*Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*.
- ↑22 A. M Woodbury S.M, *Apologetics*, A5, A, 3d.
- ↑23 Michaele Nicolau S.J., *Sacrae Theologiae Summa IA*,  
(translated by Kenneth Baker, S.J.), p32.