

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.

Here is PART 1 of the series.

The claims of the Catholic Church remain unassailable despite the current crisis

Even today, when the Church seems to be eclipsed by the actions of evil men, we can identify where she is, and where she is not; and by submitting to her magisterium, and receiving her sacraments, we can be transformed and made ready for eternal life.

Matthew McCusker

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“Do not let anyone find the means of leading you astray. The apostasy must come first.” (2 Th 2:3)

([LifeSiteNews](#)) — The classic apocalyptic novel *Lord of the World*, by Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, opens with two young priests, Father Percy and Father Francis, questioning an old statesman about a century of decline for the Church.

The old man recounts endless losses and setbacks for Church, and the triumphs of her enemies, and ends with a verdict that contains both despair and hope:

‘We are losing; and we shall go on losing, and I think we must even be ready for a catastrophe at any moment.’

He continues:

‘You think that weak for an old man on the edge of the grave. Well, it is what I think. I see no hope. In fact, it seems to me that even now something may come on us quickly. No; I see no hope until—’

Percy looked up sharply.

‘Until our Lord comes back,’ said the old statesman.

Father Francis sighed once more, and there fell a silence.

The old man’s words certainly provide some grounds for Father Francis’s despair, but seen in the light of divine revelation, they also express **great hope: the return of Our Lord in glory**. For “then it is that the rebel will shew himself; and the Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth, overwhelming him with the brightness of his presence.” (2 Th 2:8) But only one of the two priests is able to see this hope and remain faithful.

Some weeks later Father Francis reports to Father Percy that he has lost the faith. Father Percy understands the cause:

He had talked to this man during a period of over eight months, ever since Father Francis had first confided in him that his faith was going. He understood perfectly what a strain it had been; he felt bitterly compassionate towards this poor creature who had become caught up somehow into the dizzy triumphant whirl of the New Humanity.

External facts were horribly strong just now; and faith, except to one who had learned that Will and Grace were all and emotion nothing, was as a child crawling about in the midst of some huge machinery: it might survive or it might not; but it required nerves of steel to keep steady. It was hard to know where

blame could be assigned; yet Percy's faith told him that there was blame due.

Father Francis has **lost the faith partly under the pressure of external events and of the relentless spread of error at the expense of the Catholic faith.** But this is not the fundamental cause of his apostasy. In fact, the blame lies to a great extent in Father Francis's **failure to truly understand the grounds of the Catholic religion:**

In the ages of faith a very inadequate grasp of religion would pass muster; in these searching days none but the humble and the pure could stand the test for long, unless indeed they were protected by a miracle of ignorance. The alliance of Psychology and Materialism did indeed seem, looked at from one angle, to account for everything; it needed a robust supernatural perception to understand their practical inadequacy.

The crisis of faith

I began with this extract from Lord of the World because it has come to mind frequently over the past few months.

I have noticed, and perhaps you have too, that more people than ever before are losing the Catholic faith. Some are attracted to other religions, and some have simply apostatized.

There are many factors at play. **There is the relentless falling away of the world, not just from the Church and the practice of the true religion, but also from the natural order established by God. The pressure to conform has become intolerable for many. And we are living in a world which seems to be structured against any kind of union with God.** Almost a century ago, the French novelist, George Bernanos, wrote that **"the modern world is a universal conspiracy against the interior life," and this becomes more and more true every year.**

Another important element is the scandal that comes from those who claim to hold the highest offices in the Catholic Church.

Many people find they cannot reconcile what the Church has always taught with what is now being professed by those who assert to occupy these offices. Fiducia Supplicans has precipitated a crisis of faith for many, and we must expect many more such scandals in the months and years to come.

In such conditions it can be difficult to maintain the Catholic faith, and it can seem all but impossible to bring other people to Christ.

But we must follow the injunction of St Paul to resist “the working of Satan” and the “operation of iniquity” and hold on to the Catholic faith:

God is letting loose among them a deceiving influence, so that they give credit to falsehood; he will single out for judgment all those who refused credence to the truth, and took their pleasure in wrong-doing.

We must always give thanks in your name, brethren whom the Lord has so favored. God has picked you out as the first-fruits in the harvest of salvation, by sanctifying your spirits and convincing you of his truth; he has called you, through our preaching, to attain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Stand firm, then, brethren, and hold by the traditions you have learned, in word or in writing, from us. (2 Thes 2: 10-14).

How will we remain faithful?

The text from Benson indicates one of the crucial elements which will assist us. **We need to have a firm “grasp of religion” and with it a “robust supernatural perception.”** With these acquisitions we will begin to see the “inadequacy” of the false philosophies and ideologies that dominate the modern world, and we will see what our ancestors have been able to see for two thousand years: that the Catholic religion is true and that assent to it reasonable and necessary.

Assent to the Catholic faith is a reasonable act

The human intellect was made for truth. We human beings want to assent to truth. We want to know that our beliefs and actions are reasonable.

Is it reasonable to become a Catholic, and to remain faithful to the Church despite the storms that engulf her?

The answer to that question is a definitive yes. The following schema shows how we can come to know with certainty that the Catholic faith is true.

Step 1: By the use of our natural reasoning powers, we can come to know with certainty that God exists, and we can gain knowledge, albeit incomplete, of His nature and attributes.

Step 2: By reflecting on what we have discovered about God and His nature, as well as what reason tells us about man and his nature, we can reach the further conclusion that God is capable of bestowing a revelation upon mankind, which we are capable of recognizing and receiving.

Step 3: By the use of our natural reasoning powers applied to the evidence for divine revelation, and especially the evidence of miracles and prophecies, we can attain certain knowledge that over the course of centuries God has indeed revealed Himself, and that this revelation culminates in Jesus Christ, whom we can identify as the Divine Legate sent by God.

Step 4: Having recognized Jesus Christ as the Divine Legate, we will, by receiving His teachings, attain certain knowledge that not only is He from God, but that He is God. Furthermore, we will learn from Him that He has established a Church to which He has delivered the fullness of His Divine Revelation. This Church will, He has promised, infallibly transmit this deposit of the faith until the end of time.

Step 5: On examining the claims of the churches, we will discover that only one possesses those marks and attributes that identify her as the Church founded by Jesus Christ. We will become certain that the Church of Christ is the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, which has the Bishop of Rome as her visible head. By this means we will demonstrate the right of the Catholic Church to propose and teach the doctrine of divine revelation.

Step 6: By an act of supernatural faith, we will give intellectual assent to all the truths which have been revealed by God and which are presented for our belief by the teaching authority (magisterium) of the Catholic Church.

This schema leads us from the experience of our senses (Step 1) right through to the supernatural act of faith (Step 6). At each stage we can reach the certainty required to move on to the next stage. The final step is an act of faith, by which we choose to cooperate with the grace offered to us.

Of course, not everybody goes through this process sequentially. Many people receive the supernatural virtue of faith in baptism as infants, and the doctrine of the faith directly from their parents as children, and never lose it.

However, everyone can benefit from understanding the grounds of the faith more deeply; and in our day it has become even more indispensable. **The more we understand the grounds of our religion, the stronger we will be against the “seduction of iniquity”** and the better we will be able to fulfill St Peter’s injunction:

If anyone asks you to give an account of the hope which you cherish, be ready at all times to answer for it. (1 Pet 3:15)

Natural Theology

In Step 1 of the schema above, our natural reasoning powers reach the certainty of God's existence from the knowledge acquired by our senses.

The discipline which studies the deepest causes and reasons of the world around us, as they can be known by natural reason, is called *philosophy*. The study of God by natural reason is therefore a branch of philosophy. We call it "*Natural Theology*" or "Theodicy."

Natural Theology can be distinguished from Sacred Theology. **Sacred Theology, as I have explained elsewhere, is "the science about God and about divine realities."**[1]

It studies God as He is known by divine revelation.

Natural Theology and Sacred Theology study the same object, God, but they do so from different perspectives. **Natural Theology tells us what can be known about God through our reason and Sacred Theology tells us what God has revealed about Himself by revelation.** In other words:

- **God as known by the light of human reason – Natural Theology**
- **God as known by the light of divine revelation – Sacred Theology**
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This, however, leaves us with a puzzle. Natural Theology can give us the required certainty that God exists, but how do we know He has spoken? Why should we accept that the revelation studied by Sacred Theology is actually true?

Fundamental Theology

The discipline that answers this question, and thus acts as the bridge between Natural Theology and Sacred Theology, is called Fundamental Theology.

Fundamental Theology is the science which exists to “demonstrate the fundamental fact of divine revelation through Jesus Christ, and also to protect and explain the office committed to the Catholic Church concerning the Christian revelation.”^[2]

It is called “fundamental” theology because it has to do with the very foundations of the faith. Steps 2 – 6 in the schema above belong to the discipline of Fundamental Theology. **Together with Natural Theology, it prepares the mind for making an act of supernatural faith.**

The whole process from the first reflection of the mind on the world around us in Step 1, right up to the submission of the intellect to the magisterium of the Church in Step 6, is reasonable, rational and logical. At every step certainty can be reached and there are no flaws in the reasoning. The claims of the Catholic Church are true – of that we can be sure.

However, I don’t ask you simply to believe me. In the weeks and months ahead, we are going to go through this process step-by-step, and if you join us I think you will agree that the claims of the Catholic Church are unassailable.

Even today, when the Church seems to be eclipsed by the actions of evil men, we can identify where she is, and where she is not; and by submitting to her magisterium, and receiving her sacraments, we can be transformed and made ready for eternal life.

References

↑1 Michaele Nicolau SJ, *Sacrae Theologiae Summa IA*, Trans. Kenneth Baker SJ, p12.

↑2 Michaele Nicolau S.J., p33