

Chapter Two

The Second Secret: The Free Gift of God

The Church has the responsibility of helping us cooperate personally with grace. Having begun to offer evidence, some of it anecdotal, that the Church is not adequately doing that, I will now resume the positive presentation of the dispositions needed to cooperate with grace, according to the best theology and Scripture scholarship. On the basis of this direct, non-anecdotal, evidence, readers can draw their own conclusions about whether our current pastoring has, in effect, made those dispositions well kept secrets.

As St. Paul indicates, one necessary disposition for responding personally to actual grace is an appreciation of what sanctifying grace is, the infinitely glorious life of the Trinity. How does the Church help us get that appreciation? Of course, pastoring must explain what sanctifying grace is. And it must do so repeatedly. Human nature makes it easier to be aware of the visible aspects of Christianity, the institutional structure and sacramental system, than the invisible. Unless we are frequently reminded of Christianity's interior essence, we can tend to focus on Christianity's visible features to the neglect of the invisible.

But is teaching about the nature of sanctifying grace sufficient to dispose us to properly respond to grace? In the late 1960s, the goal at which spiritual formation often aimed was fostering love of neighbor. The main method for doing this was preaching love of neighbor. We learned from that experiment that preaching love does not produce love. We thought love is the answer. In reality, love is the problem. That is, how to achieve love as the fruit of our pastoring is the problem. And preaching love is not the answer to it. Preaching love is something necessary for getting love, but it is far from sufficient.

Our experience with love shows that teaching about the divine life within us is not enough to dispose us to respond personally to grace. Teaching is certainly required, but more than that is necessary to unleash the power of sacramental grace. Our appreciation of divine life in us is as much a gift from God as that life itself is. So we cannot get that appreciation just by choosing to have it; nor can we expect others to get it by telling them to

choose to have it. God of course is the active cause of grace. Our question is what do we do to cooperate with God's action on the personal level; how do we personally appropriate his grace? Since an appreciation of divine life is a gift from God, the disposition of appreciating that life must result from cooperating with actual grace received prior to that appreciation. So there must be dispositions for cooperating with actual grace that are more basic than our appreciation of sanctifying grace. In making the Corinthian's awareness of the divine life within them the motivation for their future cooperation with actual grace, Paul was assuming that past cooperation with it should have already given them that disposition.

How do we first cooperate with actual grace in order to be gifted with an appreciation sanctifying grace? What are the fundamental dispositions, from the subjective point of view, necessary for acquiring whatever further dispositions we need for our future cooperation with actual grace? Here, "subjective point of view" does not have any pejorative connotation. It asks a pastoral question of a psychological and moral kind, rather than a theological question of the scientific kind, about what we do to cooperate with grace. Theologically, the relations between actual grace and free will are often called mysterious, although modern theological developments have taken away much of that mystery. But no amount of mystery at the theoretical level can justify Catholics not understanding at the practical level what we must do to cooperate with actual grace. Chapter 1 dealt with our inadequate appreciation of the nature of sanctifying grace; this chapter will deal with our inadequate practical understanding of how to cooperate with actual grace.

The answer to this pastoral question, however, will call for some enhancement to our usual theological response to the error of salvation by faith "alone." So this chapter will sometimes be more theological and exegetical than other chapters. But the change in style will be only occasional and temporary. In fact, the result of focusing on the faith/good works question too much from a solely theological point of view is that we don't know how simple the dispositions for cooperating with actual grace really are at the practical level. In effect, we make them much more complicated than they are. To understand how good what Jesus

did for us really is, we have to understand how simple are his instructions for taking personal advantage of what he did for us. For he made them as simple as possible.

1.

All Catholics need to know the truth that we acquire sanctifying grace principally through the sacraments. But a truth that has a much higher priority in the Church's hierarchy of truths is that we obtain divine life through the work of Jesus of Nazareth. It is only because of what Jesus did for us that divine life is available to us through the sacraments.

Jesus, as he is God's greatest gift to men, holds first place, and . . . from him the other truths of Catholic teaching derive their order and hierarchy from the educational point of view (General Catechetical Directory, 16).

Sacramental grace is a gift given us by another person. That gift is something infinitely beyond our own abilities; we receive it only because another person made it available to us. And responding to that gift is primarily responding to the person who gives it. The life of the Trinity consists of relationships between persons. The gift that Jesus gives us is entry into those relationships, and to personally appropriate that gift we must enter into a personal relationship with the one who gives it. Jesus of Nazareth obtained divine life for us because of who he is as a person, a member of the Trinity, and Jesus gives us our personal relationships to the Father and the Spirit through our personal relationship with him.

The crucified and risen Christ leads men to the Father by sending the Holy Spirit upon the People of God. For this reason the structure of the whole content of catechesis must be theocentric and Trinitarian: through Christ, to the Father, in the Spirit (*ibid.*, 41).

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity (John Paul II, On Catechesis in Our Time, 5).

Responding to sacramental grace is responding to a person. The gift that person gives is

membership in a set of personal relationships; our response to that gift must be to enter into the correct personal relationship with the giver.

The relation with Jesus necessary for living the life of the Trinity is a relation with him as the person who did certain things for us. He took away the guilt of our sins and put it on himself. He saved us from eternal punishment by undergoing punishment himself. Then he rose from the dead in order to give us divine life. Jesus was "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rm 4:25). From the subjective point of view, what is the nature of the relationship with the crucified, risen and reigning Jesus from which the lived effects of grace will result; how do we make personal contact with him so that his divine grace in us will bear fruit? Answering that question will tell us the most basic and important dispositions for responding to sacramental grace.

Since we are talking about a gift given by another person, one way to look at it is this. A normal part of the relation we enter with a giver is to ask him for the gift. "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (Jn 4:10). Asking acknowledges the nature of the personal relation between the receiver and the giver: I express the fact that the giver surpasses me to the extent that we are in this relationship; the gift belongs to him, not to me; my having it depends on his free will; when I receive it I become a debtor and he the creditor. But asking in a way that establishes the proper relation to Jesus depends on certain conditions; if we ask with the wrong dispositions, we contradict the nature of the relation we are trying to enter.

One condition for being in the right relationship with Jesus is to sincerely want that relationship. Gerry, a Catholic campus evangelist, told me the following story. While he was trying to lead someone, call him Bill, to the Lord, Bill said that he would really like to be Christian, but he can't because he knows he would have to give up his sexual relationship with his girl friend. There is a sense in which Bill would have sincerely liked to be Christian, but he did not sincerely want to be Christian in the sense necessary for having a salvific

relation to Jesus. He only wanted parts of the life that Jesus was offering, the parts that pleased him, and not any other part. To sincerely want to live the life of the Trinity is to be open to the whole of that life. Therefore, one condition for entering the necessary relationship with Jesus is to sincerely want to do God's will and cease doing things opposed to his will. To sincerely want to cease sinning and do God's will is to repent of sin, at least of the serious sins that prevent our having sanctifying grace. So one disposition required for cooperating with grace is to repent of sin.

Another condition for getting the benefit of what Jesus has done for us is that we believe what he has done. When we do not believe in the giver or the gift, we do not ask the giver for it. We must believe that Jesus took our sins away and gained divine life for us. Jesus' death and resurrection were visible. But he deliberately hid the resurrection from those were not open to having faith, and his resurrected body is not visible to us now. We must believe in something that we do not directly see but have been told about. So another condition for the relationship with Jesus through which we cooperate with grace is to believe the Great News about what Jesus did for us. The fundamental dispositions we need to respond to grace are to repent and believe the Great News.

Repentance and belief, however, take different forms. Consider recent convert Pete who has repented of grave sin, believed in the teaching and governing authority of the Catholic Church, and been baptized, so that he is now in the state of grace. As such he is participating in the personal relations of the Trinity. But he might have only the dimmest consciousness of what it means to be in sanctifying grace. He might have learned nothing more, for example, than that sanctifying grace is something necessary for salvation and is obtained by baptism.

To the extent that he is still capable of sinning, however, he must possess all the dispositions enabling him to cooperate with actual grace to the extent of avoiding sin, grave sin at least; for you cannot be subjectively responsible for sin unless you have the ability to avoid it. So he has dispositions needed to cooperate with actual grace to a certain extent

but does not have an awareness of what sanctifying grace really is. Does it follow, then, that Paul was wrong to rely on consciousness of what sanctifying grace is as the disposition that would motivate the Corinthians to Christian behavior?

No, from the beginning I have been speaking of the dispositions we need to cooperate “properly” and “fully” with grace. Perhaps through no fault of his own, Pete has not yet received sufficient help to be so disposed. He has repented and believed to a degree adequate for his salvation though he does not have a consciousness of his relationship with the Trinity. You might think that the only dispositions he lacks are those needed for perfecting the life of sanctifying grace. But he does not even have the dispositions necessary (in normal circumstances) for persevering in the state of grace, since perseverance normally requires the sacerdotal sacraments, confirmation and the Eucharist at least. So let us assume that Pete has received all the sacraments of initiation but that his acts of repentance and faith have not yet advanced beyond his first. In one sense he has the dispositions necessary for cooperating fully with grace; for he has the ability to do the things that can lead to his perseverance and perfection in grace. But if he has not yet done those things, he still must do so to be disposed to cooperate fully with grace. What more must he do?

To have a conscious relation to the Trinity we must have a conscious personal relation to Jesus, since we participate in the Trinity’s personal relations through our relation to Jesus. What kind of conscious relation to Jesus do we need? In the hierarchy of truths, the fact that Jesus redeemed us is more fundamental than the fact that he is present in the world through his Church, which carries on his work, and that fact is more fundamental than the fact that Jesus is present in the Eucharist. The work of Jesus is more fundamental since it is the source of these presences. The conscious relationship we need is not primarily to Jesus as founder of the Church, or to his modes of presence in the Church and the Eucharist. It is to the Jesus who became incarnate in Nazareth, died on Calvary, rose from the dead in Jerusalem, sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven and “fills the universe in all its parts” (Eph 1:23, NAB).

This is one thing it means for the disposition we need to cooperate with further grace to be a PERSONAL relation to Jesus: It is a primarily a relation to a person who is a specific historical human being, rather than primarily being a relation to the modes of presence that are that are the continuation and extension of that person's human Incarnation. No matter how truly those continuations are the real presence of Jesus, their objective efficacy depends entirely on what Jesus of Nazareth did, and so their subjective efficacy for us depends on our relation to the Nazarene and what he did for us. If not, either the hierarchy of truths is inaccurate or the life that Jesus gives us is not a participation in personal relationships. But that is not all it means for the disposition we need to be a "personal" relation to Jesus.

To have the conscious relation to Jesus that allows us to fully cooperate with sacramental grace, we need a particular kind of repentance and faith. Repentance, the desire to be freed from sin, must include the recognition of our personal need to be redeemed from sin by God. Sin breaks our relationship with an infinite good; we cannot restore a relationship with an infinite good by ourselves. Unless we understand that, we will not be properly disposed for the relationship with Jesus that we need. Complementing repentance's recognition of our need for redemption is faith's recognition that each of us has indeed been redeemed from our sins. Because of what Jesus did, absolutely nothing stands in the way of having the relation to Jesus through which we live divine life. Our sins no longer stand in the way, but not because of anything we did, not even because of our repentance. They no longer stand in the way because of what Jesus did. So we must believe that the gift of God is an entirely free gift we do not have to earn.

Even more specifically, since we are talking about our personal cooperation with grace, each of us must believe the Great News about what Jesus did for me. Jesus did not just take away our sins and gain divine life for us. Jesus would have taken away the sins of, and gained eternal life for, each of us even if we were the only person in the world. That is how personally he loves us, and we need to believe how personally he loves us. In other words, the faith we need to get the benefit of what Jesus did for us is the faith that Jesus is

our personal Savior, just as our repentance must recognize our personal need to be redeemed from sin. Our conscious relation to Jesus must be personal "at both ends": It must include a consciousness of our need for salvation as individuals and a consciousness of Jesus Nazareth as the person whose actions have and will provide all that each of us personally need for salvation.

We are inquiring about the lived effects of grace in each person. The fruits of grace depend on each person having an understanding, no matter how imperfect, of God's love for them. From this ex opere operantis point of view the truth that Jesus would have saved us from our sins even if we were the only person in the world is more fundamental in the hierarchy of truths than truths about the Church and the sacraments. If we each were the only person in the world, there would not have been a need for a Church and a sacramental system, but Jesus still would have redeemed us. On our personal relationship to the Jesus who would have died for us if we were the only person in the world depends the quality of our response to the Jesus who is present in ourselves and in other Christians by sanctifying grace, present in his whole body, the Church, and present as food and drink in the Eucharist. For these presences of Jesus are all based on what he did out of love for each of us.

Compare Amy, who has never heard of Jesus, with Ed, who believes in Jesus. To whom does it mean more if we tell them that the Church is the extension of Jesus in the world and the Eucharist is Jesus' body and blood? Obviously, Ed; it cannot mean anything to a person who has never heard of Jesus. Now compare believer Carol, who has not yet recognized that Jesus would have saved her if she were the only person in the world, with believer Dick, who has recognized that. To whom does it mean more to believe that the Church is Jesus' extension in the world and the Eucharist is his body and blood? Other things being equal, believing those truths must mean more on the lived, ex opere operantis, level to Dick, precisely because Jesus must mean more to those who recognize his personal love for them (Lk 7:41-48).

As Avery Dulles said:

Catholic spirituality at its best has always promoted a deep personal relationship with Christ. In evangelizing we are required to raise our eyes to him and to transcend all ecclesiocentrism. The Church is of crucial importance, but it is not self-enclosed. It is a means of drawing the whole world into union with God through Jesus Christ. Too many Catholics of our day seem never to have encountered Christ. They know a certain amount about him from the teaching of the Church, but they lack direct personal familiarity. . . . The first and highest priority is for the Church to proclaim the good news concerning Jesus Christ as a joyful message to all the world. Only if the Church is faithful to its evangelical mission can it hope to make its distinctive contribution in the social, political, and cultural spheres (emphasis supplied).¹

Another way to describe how we cooperate with grace is that we ask Jesus to come into our life as our personal Lord and Savior. Having Jesus as our Lord implies repentance, since it means we are intending to do his will. Having Jesus as our Savior implies faith, since it means believing Jesus has indeed redeemed us from our sins. The word "personal" qualifying Lord and Savior indicates that we acknowledge our personal need for salvation due to our sins and believe that Jesus died and rose for the sake of each of us, that is, would have taken away our personal guilt and merited divine life for us if we were the only person in the world.

I have used the model of asking a giver for a gift to describe the personal response to Jesus through which we cooperate with grace. Although asking for the gift is often a part of the personal relation we enter with the giver, it does not have to be. Frequently, we offer people gifts without first being asked. This is especially true of "the gift of God." If we have the faith necessary for a proper response to grace, we know that Jesus offers us his gift before we even ask him for it; what we have to do is accept his offer. So instead of speaking of asking Jesus to be our personal Lord and Savior, we can speak of accepting him as our personal Lord and Savior, giving him permission to be our personal Lord and Savior, surren-

dering to his desire that he be our personal Lord and Savior, inviting him to dwell in us as our personal Lord and Savior, etc., as long relating to him as Lord implies repentance and relating to him as Savior implies belief in the Great News of what he has done for us. Assuming that the dispositions of faith and repentance are understood, we can also speak of permitting Jesus to be in control in our lives, inviting him to take charge of our lives, surrendering to his will and power in us, etc., since dispositions like these presuppose both our desire and our belief in his desire for him to be in our lives in this way. These are all ways of expressing the same things: the two most fundamental dispositions we need for the effectiveness of sacramental grace.

Our de facto pastoral strategy, however, amounts to trying to overcome the influence of pagan environments without first bringing Catholics to a personal relation to Jesus in which we surrender to his will (repent) and to his power in us (believe the Great News).

2.

There is another dimension of repentance and belief in the Great News that is necessary for being disposed to cooperate personally with actual grace. Repentance, meta-noia, is change (meta) of mind (noia), that is, change of intentions. To sincerely want Jesus' gift is to sincerely desire to lead a different kind of life, specifically, to cease sinning and instead do God's will. The terms change of "mind," "intention," or "desire," however, distinguish repentance from change of behavior, by which I mean the works that carry out our intentions. In fact, we cannot understand what the Great News is if we confuse change of intention with change of behavior. To reform our intentions is to want to behave differently. But we are not the ones who accomplish our reformed intentions by causing ourselves to behave differently. Jesus living in us causes us to behave differently. That is an essential part of faith in the Great News.

It is no longer I who live (act), but Christ who lives (acts) in me (Gal 2:20).

I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me (1 Cor 15, 10).

For God is the one producing in you both the to will (to choose to do something) and the to do (to carry out the choice) (Phil 2:13; literal translation).

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph 2:8-10).

I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances (Ez 36:27).

Christ living in us will accomplish the change of behavior that we cannot accomplish for ourselves. Grace causes the change of behavior, and grace is itself a free, unmerited gift God gives us as long as we genuinely want it, which includes recognizing that we need it and believe in it. But wanting it and believing in it do not earn it; Jesus is the only human being who can earn it. And that is exactly what Jesus has done in order that we might receive it as a free gift.

Together with faith in the Great News, repentance is deciding, not just wishing, to behave differently. But the repenter needs to know that she is deciding to give Jesus permission to be in charge of her life and create good behavior in her. She neither decides nor accomplishes what she decides to do by her own power, as opposed to power caused in her by God. When the Church calls us to repent, we must know that we are not being called to self-improvement. Deciding for Christian behavior is not deciding for self-improvement; it is God, not ourselves, who makes us better. Our job is to give him permission to do it, to let him be in control, by changing our intentions and believing that, because of what Jesus has done, God living in us will accomplish our reformed intentions for us.

To appreciate the Great News, we must understand what makes it great. We might think that the glory of sharing the Trinity's life is all that makes the Great News great. But there is even more to it. The Great News is also great because divine life is an entirely free, unearned gift. We do not have to earn it by works. Nor do our past bad works stand in the

way, if we repent and believe. Nothing we can do could merit the taking away of our sins or our receiving divine life. But we do not have to merit anything. The Great News tells us that Jesus merited everything we need for us, so that we would not have to do what we could not possibly do.

In the sense in which we are speaking of it, faith involves more than intellectual assent to doctrine. It includes the virtue of hope, trust, the expectation of a positive response to our request for Jesus to be Lord of our lives. Since this expectation is based on belief in sound doctrine, we know that the hypothetical, "if it is your will," is irrelevant to it. The faith that completes repentance is the expectant, trusting belief that it is already God's will to offer salvation as a free gift to everyone.

Listening to some evangelical Protestant preachers, however, you could get the impression that having faith is almost an athletic effort; you have to strain to have enough faith. Jesus has already settled that question. The faith we need is only the size of a mustard seed (Mt 17:20). Faith is precisely the opposite of something we have to strain at. That would defeat the purpose of faith. Faith is meant to deprive us of the need to achieve something we are unable to achieve on our own efforts. Faith does grow in strength, but the very purpose of what is growing, faith, is to take away the need for efforts based on our own strength rather than God's.

As some Evangelical preachers make faith an athletic feat, some Catholic preachers make repentance an emotional feat. Repentance no more means straining to have sad emotions than faith means straining to believe. Repentance and faith are acts of the will, and Christian acts of will are based on God's strength, not ours.

Instead of the combination, faith and repentance, as the fundamental dispositions necessary for the effectiveness of grace, what has been referred to much more often in Catholic discourse is the combination, faith and good works, as necessary for salvation. But we cannot appreciate what faith combined with repentance means in this context unless we distinguish repentance from good works. It is a theological truth that good works are neces-

sary for attaining beatitude. But the context here is not the theological question of the conditions for beatitude. Our context is the psychological and moral one of the conditions for actually getting good works. The 1960's showed that, although love is "the answer" in a theological sense, love is "the problem" in the pastoral sense; that is, how to get love is the pastoral problem. Likewise, while good works, works of love, are an answer to a theological question about salvation, good works, or rather how to get them, are the problem in the pastoral sense. The answer to that pastoral question is that we get good works (or get love) not, circularly, by good works (or love) but by repenting and believing, by sincerely intending to perform works of love and asking God to cause us to do them believing that he will.

Of course, repenting and believing are themselves good "works." But in the unbaptized adult they precede love, in the sense of the supernatural virtue of love that accompanies sanctifying grace. And in the person already in sanctifying grace, they precede works derived from that love. Out of fear of heresy, spiritual formation has so emphasized the theological truth that we are not justified by faith alone that it has neglected the ascetical truth that we do not justify ourselves by acts of love but are justified as a gift by receiving Christ's life of love through faith and repentance. From the point of view of the psychological dynamics by which our salvific acts of love come into existence, we are not justified by faith and works, but neither are we justified by faith alone. We are justified by faith and repentance, acts of love being the consequence of faith and repentance. And although repenting and believing are themselves works, they are not works by which we earn divine life. They are works by which we receive divine life as a free gift earned for us by Jesus.

When spiritual formation tries to simplify the response to sacramental grace by telling us to love, since love sums up the moral law, the de facto answer to the question how do we respond to grace is that we respond primarily by performing works of love, love of God and neighbor. But without the prior response of on-going personal acceptance of Jesus as our Lord and Savior — without our prior response to the fact that God first loves us, not we God — we leave out the crucial link between sacramental grace received from God and

acts of love produced in us. Preaching love in that way, instead of proclaiming justification by faith and repentance, merely replaces justification by one form of law, the moral code, with justification by another form of law, the law of love. (For more on faith and works, see The Appendix to this chapter.)

Since repentance and belief in the Great News are the basic dispositions for responding to grace, what the efficacy of the sacraments needs most today is the personal evangelization of already catecheticized (in the cognitive sense) and sacramentalized Catholics. Our failure to evangelize in the sense of bringing Catholics to a relationship to Jesus of Nazareth as their personal Lord and Savior, to personal repentance and belief in the Great News of what Jesus did and will do for them, is our most basic pastoral problem.

3.

Accepting Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior is not something that happens just once. Repentance and belief in the Great News must be on-going and growing. As Pope Pius VI stated in On Evangelization in the Modern World: the Church “has a constant need of being evangelized, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigor and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel” (15). The United States’ bishop’s document on evangelization adds:

[We] must be converted - and we must continue to be converted! . . . And we must be open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit who will continue to convert us as we follow Christ. If our faith is alive, it will be aroused again and again as we mature as disciples.” (NCCB, Go and Make Disciples, p. 2)

But how do we know that repentance and belief in the Great News are, exclusively, “the most fundamental dispositions” for cooperating with grace, as I have described them? Because properly understood, on-going repentance and belief are all we need to cooperate with grace. Once we have been freed from sin and given divine life, is it then up to us to make something of ourselves by using the gift we have been given? Yes, but only if that means it is up to us to permit, by repenting and believing the Great News, Jesus dwelling in us to make something of us. God is not in us as something static. He is in us as something

living, acting, accomplishing. Without him we can do nothing, but with him we can do everything, not by our own power, but by his power producing good works in us.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us (2 Co 4:7).

For this I toil, striving with all the energy that he mightily inspires within me (Col 1:29).

I can do all things in him who strengthens me (Phil 4:13).

To him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:20-21).

In one way, this is not Christian revelation but everyday metaphysics (yes, there is such a thing). When a hair on our head grows, it is merely obeying God's command that the action of a hair's growing should exist. But a hair does not have freedom of choice. Because we have free choice God cannot create a morally good work in us without our permission, and we can freely withhold our permission. But when we freely do good, we have by our own action added nothing to what God creates in us — since nothing can exist that God does not create; all we do is not refrain from allowing God to create a morally good act in us.

Permitting God to create our choice of doing good or avoiding evil is the same thing as making the choice. God creates choices just as he creates the growth of a hair. But unlike the hair, which must obey God's command that it grow, we can freely refrain from making the right choice, which would be the same as withholding permission for God to create it. Not using our freedom to refrain from making a choice to do good or avoid evil, and so not refraining from permitting God to create the choice in us, is what it means, theologically, to "cooperate" with grace. So pastorally and ascetically, cooperating with grace principally means choosing to repent and believe the Great News, since it is by not withholding permission for God to create those choices in us that we permit God to create the rest of our Chris-

tian life.

Whether we cooperate with God or not, however, we “add nothing” to what God creates, since no creature can do anything unless God creates its action. But “adding nothing” means something different when we cooperate from what it means when we do not. If we refrain from making a choice of doing good or avoiding evil, something will be missing from our subsequent choice and/or chosen behavior that ought to be there.¹ The fact that we have added nothing then means that we, not God, are responsible for a lack, an absence, the nonbeing of something that should have been there. If we do not refrain from making a good choice, on the other hand, everything that God wants to create will be there. The fact that we have added nothing then means that everything is there without our having added anything to it that God himself did not cause. But we share responsibility with God for everything that is there, because we could have refrained from permitting him to create it by refraining from making the good choice.

When we get to heaven, we will indeed have merited, earned, our reward. But we will have done it simply by not refraining from permitting God to act, and so by adding nothing to what God’s grace does. Amazingly, this means that in heaven we will be able to claim something even God cannot claim: we will have eternal happiness because we earned it by our choices; God cannot earn it, since he has it necessarily. But even this breath-taking fact will be completely a free gift of God to which we have added nothing that he did not give us. We will spend eternity praising God for being so great that he can, and so loving that he does, give creatures a gift that even he does not have.

Our response to grace is not passivity; grace requires us to make efforts. When Scripture refers to an action as our own action, for example, when it says “He who humbles himself will be exalted,” it means what it says: we are responsible for actively humbling ourselves. But when we have succeeded in humbling ourselves both interiorly, for example, by admitting some guilt to ourselves, and exteriorly, for example, by asking someone else’s forgiveness, we have added nothing to the working of grace other than to allow it to cause

us to make these efforts when we could have freely refrained from allowing it to do so.

When preaching the Great News, we are usually speaking on the psychological and moral, not the metaphysical, level, and that is as it should be. But sometimes we need a little common sense metaphysics to avoid misunderstandings; let me stay at that level long enough to avoid one more. Saying that repentance and faith are dispositions we must have in order for grace to work might make it seem that repentance and faith must precede grace. They precede sanctifying grace in the adult convert or the Christian who has fallen out of sanctifying grace, but when we repent and believe the Great News, we are only responding to actual grace already present, and our response amounts to allowing that grace to produce acts of repentance and faith in us. (So even though repenting and believing are “works,” they are works that are created in us entirely by God’s unmerited, freely given actual grace.) We do not first love God; God first loves us.

God has promised that all we have to do to be saved is to permit him, by on-going faith and repentance, to save us:

I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6).

(Jesus) will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord (1 Co 1:8).

May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1 Thes 5:23-24)

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me (Ps 138:8).

Trust in this promise, along with knowing the nature of sanctifying grace, is the reason for our Christian joy. Paul could not repeatedly command us to be joyful (1 Thes 5:16; Ph 4:4) if we were not hoping for a salvation that so depends on God, not on us, that all we have to do is to let him do it.

Overflowing joy is compatible with the healthy fear that I might not always give Jesus permission to save me. But the fear that arises from knowing that I can withhold that

permission is the opposite of the unhealthy fear that arises from thinking that I might not have enough strength, virtue or faithfulness to my good intentions to be saved. In fact, I do not have enough, but the strength, virtue and faithfulness that I need to rely on are Jesus', not my own. ". . . that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law, but that which is through faith in Christ" (Phil 3:8-9). Jesus' strength and virtue are more than enough for me, as long as I permit them to work. We cannot be in the personal relation with Jesus necessary for grace to bear fruit unless we can say with Paul, "I will all the more gladly boast of my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong," since Jesus had told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Co 12:9-10).

The fact that Christianity is something that God does in us by his power not ours has to be at the foundation of the attitude of mind by which we respond to God's call. That attitude preserves us from pride in whatever success we have in living the Christian life. We are totally dependent on God's grace, not our own power and virtue, and when we succeed in living the Christian life, we have added nothing to what God does but to allow him to work. On the other hand, the same attitude preserves us from discouragement in our failures. God knows our helplessness and dependence on him, and he has freely willed to save us by his power; all we have to do is let him.

Everything this book has said so far can be summed up this way. To be disposed to cooperate fully with grace, we need to know how great the Great News really is, how good Christianity really is. How good is it? It is literally good beyond our wildest dreams and beyond anything our intellect's could think up on their own. The goodness of Christianity is so great that it is "unbelievable," if "belief" is understood in an exclusively human sense. And if we don't know that Christianity is good beyond our wildest dreams, we are not disposed to cooperate fully with grace; for if we don't know that Christianity is good beyond our wildest dreams, we have not been properly instructed in what the Great News is. Why is Christianity so good? Both because of what it is, having God's infinite life, and because it is

an entirely free gift that God has made as simple as possible for us to get. All we have to do is give him permission, and all we have to do to give him permission is to repent and believe. If we don't know how simple God has made it for us to cooperate with grace, we don't know how great the Great News is. If we don't know how great the Great News is, we cannot fully respond to sacramental grace.

4.

Even after these explanations, however, you may still think that calling faith and repentance "all we need to cooperate with grace" makes things too simple. That can sound like saying that Christians only have to sit back and watch God work. If so, I am offering a recipe for sure spiritual death.

For example, almost all Christians have at least one "predominant fault," like a propensity to unjust anger, that we have not yet overcome even with the help of grace. To overcome such a fault, we cannot just sit back and watch God work. We are obligated to seize the initiative and make all the efforts necessary for overcoming faults, frequenting the sacraments, regular prayer, Christian fellowship, avoiding the near occasions of sin, repairing our wrongdoing, asking for forgiveness and giving it, charitable works, penance, seeking counsel, spiritual reading, etc.

Yes, but in actively making these decisions and carrying them out, we need to know that the only thing we have added to what God does in us is to not withhold our permission for him to do it. For we need to know that all it takes for God to overcome sin in us, including causing us to make whatever efforts are necessary to overcome sin, is for us to let him do it.

The person who is failing to avoid sin even though she seems to be trying may not have truly repented. For example, she may have desire to avoid a sin that is sincere by some standard definition of "sincere" but may not desire to avoid a certain near occasion of sin. If so, her desire to avoid sin is not sincere in a sense sufficient for true repentance. She would like to avoid sin X but only if she does not have to avoid circumstance Y.

People who have been trying but failing to overcome a fault may wonder whether they are truly able to repent of the fault, although they may have tried to many times. And if they cannot repent, how can they cooperate with grace? When we are in doubt whether we are able to repent, all we can do — and all we have to do — is ask Jesus for the grace to repent, believing that he will give it. We have no secrets from God; he knows whether we have not yet repented of something. And he knows that none of us are able to repent without his grace. Our job is to believe that he knows and wants to help us, so that all that we have to do is turn to him admitting, to ourselves and to him, that we have a problem we cannot solve on our own and asking for the grace to sincerely intend to do his will.

To return to the metaphysical point of view for a moment, if we make this request for repentance sincerely, we have ipso facto already repented and so have already received the grace of repentance and permitted it to work. But there can be times when we doubt that we really want to overcome a sin, since we keep committing it despite apparently sincere attempts to stop. At times like that, the place to start, from the psychological and moral point of view, is to ask for the grace of sincere repentance. That is the psychological place, in other words, to start our cooperation with the grace that already exists metaphysically. Again, we do not first love God; God first loves us.

Consider a Christian who understands that when we make an act of will, that act exists because God causes it in us. If that person also has the sincere intention of performing a meritorious act, of spending some time in prayer, of being kind to someone, of asking someone's forgiveness, or whatever, what more must he do to fulfill his intention than ask God, with faith, to do it? From the metaphysical point of view, what more could he even possibly need to do? For by hypothesis he knows that in intending to perform a meritorious act, he is intending to permit God to create that act in him, and he knows that his permission will add nothing to what God causes. It will only amount to his letting God work by not refraining from an act God wants to create in him. If he does not know these things, he does not really know who God is and what creatures are. Given that he sincerely intends to per-

form a meritorious act, if he then needed to do something more than ask God to fulfill that intention sincerely believing that God will do it, God is not God.

The reason that we have not yet overcome a fault despite trying might well be that we have not truly repented of it. But it also may be that Jesus is strengthening our faith by having us practice perseverance in asking with faith, despite the temptation to discouragement in the results that we have seen so far. For example, it might be that there is a blockage stemming from a non-moral psychological, or just physical, problem that Jesus will heal when perseverance has allowed our faith to grow sufficiently. People have seen an apparently moral problem eliminated or alleviated by a supportive environment, good advice, a psycho-pharmacological drug, or just physical exercise. There is such a thing as compulsive, not fully voluntary, behavior. I know someone whose compulsive swearing stopped after he began taking Prozac. But he must have sincerely wanted to stop swearing; otherwise, he could have kept it up despite the Prozac.

Or it might be that there is a deeper spiritual problem, perhaps a failure to forgive someone, we have not recognized as such that needs to be dealt with first, one that Jesus plans to deal with at the right time, when our faith has grown sufficiently.

Cleanse me from my unknown faults (Ps 19:13, NAB).

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps 139:23-24).

As these prayers imply, however, our faith is always that God will do these things for us at the proper time if we do not withhold permission.

How can a person discern that a continued failure to overcome a fault is not due to a lack of repentance? In a serious matter, he should consult a qualified confessor rather than be his own "physician." If the matter is serious and he does not consult a confessor, either he has not truly repented or has not been properly instructed in what we need to do in such cases.

And can we rule out the possibility that the failure to overcome faults may also be

due to the inadequate formation the Church is providing at a particular time and place? If inadequate formation cannot have a harmful effect on our Christian life and witness, why did John XXIII go to the trouble of convening a pastoral council? Since grace cooperates with nature and we are naturally social beings, sacramental grace normally achieves its goals by empowering the Church's pastoral life.

Cooperation with grace certainly requires us to know more than that all we have to do is to allow God to work by repenting and believing. Our cooperation with grace depends on theological and moral catechesis because the acts of choice God will create in us are not mechanical acts but conscious acts done voluntarily. Although completely caused by God, those choices are our personal, free acts, because we could always have refrained from them. To be personal and free, they must be based on knowledge of what we are doing or refraining from doing and what is at stake; they cannot be voluntary and meritorious unless we know what we are doing and why. So catechesis and training in the spiritual life will never be out of business. In particular, the roles of the Church and the sacraments need to be continually called to Catholics' attention. But catechesis and spiritual training will be without power, if they are not based on evangelism calling us to on-going personal faith and repentance. If knowing what practices Christians need to perform was sufficient for actually getting Christian behavior, we would not be saved by free gift.

For those still not convinced that cooperating with grace is not as simple as giving God permission to create good works in us by repenting and believing, let me stress that simple does not mean "easy." In a crucial sense, Jesus' "yoke is easy" and his "burden light" (Mt 11:30), and we need to know that. But we also need to know that Jesus will perfect his life in us by giving us trials; sufferings are absolutely part of the covenant he offers us. Obviously, turning from sin and/or turning toward fuller commitment and more good works are not always easy; nor is having faith while we are suffering. But if our trials are not teaching us our weakness and dependence on God's grace, and so making us more aware of our need for repentance and faith, what point is there in God's sending them? The difficul-

ties in living the Christian life do not disprove the simplicity of what we must do to cooperate with grace. They show that repenting and believing are all we can do, in the last analysis, and so all we need to do. (For more on the ignored place of suffering in our formation, see Chapter 4.)

5.

Since repentance and belief in the Great News must always be growing, the need to accept Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior must be continuously reinforced in us. The personal evangelization of sacramentalized and catecheticized Catholics must be on-going. We need to repeatedly hear the Great News proclaimed.

Prior to the resurrection Jesus taught many things. But as both modern Scripture scholarship and the earliest gospel, Mark's, tell us, his main message and the foundation of everything else he taught boiled down to something very simple: Repent and believe in the Great News (Mk 1:15). Jesus was preparing Israel for the kingdom. But God's thoughts about how to prepare them are not the thoughts we would have had. If we had the job of preparing them, we would have probably taught them details about the Church, its structure, its prerogatives, its rules, its powers, its sacraments, its theology, etc. Jesus, on the contrary, said in effect, "Don't worry about the details of the kingdom. If you are correctly disposed when the kingdom comes, you will be able to accept and handle the details at the right time. If you are not correctly disposed, knowledge of the details will not help you. The correct dispositions are to believe me when I tell you that the kingdom is at hand (faith) and so turn your intentions away from sin and toward the will of God" (repentance).

To appreciate the foundational importance of "Repent and believe," consider this. The average Israelite would have heard that message from Jesus' lips at most a few times, the times when Jesus came to their town. But the disciples, those Jesus chose to carry on his work, heard that message over and over. They heard it almost every day they traveled with Jesus, because they heard it every time Jesus taught in a different town.

Now consider that fact in relation to another. As the evangelists tell us, Jesus gave

the disciples much teaching that he did not give others. He did that to prepare them for their task of continuing his work. Much of that teaching can be understood as expansion on the themes of faith and repentance. But whatever those other teachings were, Jesus chose to give it to the disciples only against the background of the constant repetition of "Repent and believe" that the disciples would have heard as they traveled from town to town with him. The other teaching was meant to bear its fruit only on the foundation of an absolutely firm grasp of the need for on-going repentance and belief in the Great News, a grasp that required constant reinforcement.

The most important part of the disciples' preparation for ministry was not the teaching meant specifically for their ministry but the teaching meant for everyone. The most important part was teaching about the foundations that were the sine qua non of whatever else Jesus taught, foundations that could not just be laid once and then taken for granted, if the disciples' ministry was to succeed. For the rest of the teaching the disciples received to bear fruit, the disciples' response to it had to be firmly grounded in their on-going appropriation of that foundational teaching.

The way we prepare people for ministry appears to be the opposite of Jesus'. The kind of statements about the Eucharist and the presbyterate quoted in the first chapter show that those who make them do not have a sufficiently clear idea, from the pastoral point of view, of what the Great News is; so their training must not have given that to them. And instead of getting a clear idea of the Great News, which was once but is no longer distinctively Catholic, those who make that kind of statement must have gotten training that focused their attention on the distinctively and quasi-distinctively Catholic, especially on what is distinctive to their ministry. As result, they tend to view the life of the Church from the viewpoint of what is specific to their ministry, the sacerdotal sacraments in particular, rather than vice versa. When the Church's leaders view it that way, the Church tends to become a delivery system for religious goods and services. Again, I am not talking about the training where the teaching is heterodox or where doctrine is watered down. Most of the

people who make the kinds of statements quoted in the first chapter could certainly pass a quiz on The Catechism. But that does not mean that their training gave them a grasp of the hierarchy of truths, and especially of what the Great News principally is, sufficiently clear for them to teach us how to respond to sacramental grace.

A caller to a Catholic talk show, call her Mary, admitted to worrying about whether all her sins had been forgiven even though she thought she had sincerely confessed them in the sacrament of reconciliation. Perhaps she was a victim of a psychological problem. The fine priest who answered her spoke in a way consistent with dealing with that type of problem. But the first thing that should have been noticed is that Mary appeared to be someone who did not know Jesus Christ as her personal Savior. Perhaps she did, but her psychological problem obscured it. The fact remains that no one who really does know Jesus as her personal Savior should have any doubts whether her sins have been forgiven. Jesus forgave all our sins, even those we have yet to commit, 2,000 years ago. That is done; that is over with.

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them (2 Co 5:19).

You who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has reconciled in his body of flesh by his death (Col 1:21-22).

(Christ) cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross (Col 2:14).

For if, while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Rm 5:10).

Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed (Is 53:5).

In order to receive the forgiveness that Christ has already accomplished, we need to receive the sacrament of reconciliation, if we have not made a perfect act of contrition, and we must intend to receive the sacrament for an act of contrition to be perfect. But the issue is never whether our sins have been forgiven. The issue is only what Jesus wants us to do to

receive his forgiveness and have it applied in our lives. Anyone who knows Jesus as her personal Savior believes that. For if our contrition (repentance) is perfect, the only other condition for receiving Jesus' forgiveness is to have faith in it (believe the Great News). And unless we believe that in dying Jesus took the guilt of our sins on himself, the sacrament of reconciliation cannot be fully effective, since we are not adequately disposed to respond to its grace. The sacrament of reconciliation, or even a perfect act of contrition, is meaningless unless by his sacrifice Christ took away our sins and put them on himself.

Whether or not Mary had accepted Jesus as her personal Lord and Savior, how many other Catholics do not know that God has already forgiven every sin they ever have or ever will commit? How many Catholics think forgiveness does not take place until they make a perfect act of contrition or go to the sacrament of reconciliation? If they have not been taught to believe that Christ already took away their sins, they are not disposed to respond properly to sacramental grace, including the sacrament of reconciliation. For if they do not believe that Jesus already took away all their sins, past, present and future, they do not know Jesus as their personal Savior. They may even implicitly believe they are earning justification by receiving the sacrament.

And what about priests and deacons' Christian lives? If their formation does not teach them the simple dispositions that constitute the fundamental ways we cooperate with grace, their spirituality can only suffer. We will not know, before we get to heaven, how many of the recent clergy scandals could have been prevented by better priestly spiritual formation.

6.

A bumper sticker used by some evangelical Protestants reads, "Had enough of religion? Try Jesus!" What they mean by "religion" are human beings' efforts to get into the right relationship with God, while Christianity is God's effort to put human beings into the right relationship with him. In that sense religion is what human beings do to try to lift themselves up toward God, while Christianity is what God does to raise human beings up to himself. Religion is human beings reaching up to God; Christianity is God reaching down to us.

Religion is human beings working for salvation; Christianity is God giving us salvation as a free gift.² In another sense, of course, Christianity is a religion similar to other religions, a set of practices based on belief in doctrines. But what is based on Christianity's doctrines is not primarily a set of practices. What is based on our doctrines is primarily a personal relationship to Jesus as our Lord and Savior; secondarily, Christianity is a set of practices that, while certainly necessary, are only consequences of allowing Jesus to live and act in us.

A strategy often used in the Church to make grace effective is to teach and exhort us to Christian behavior, good works. Without personal faith in God's indwelling, however, hearing behavior preached can make it seem that the Christian life is principally a matter of our actions and that repentance is principally a matter of deciding to do better by our own ability. The Christian life is principally God's action in us; we allow Him to act. But instead of being called to faith and repentance, we usually seem called to make ourselves better, to try harder to lift ourselves up. If people who knew nothing about Christianity had heard all of the doctrinally sound homilies in my parish for the past year, they would not have a firm grasp that the Christian life is more up to God than it is to us. They would think that Christianity was basically a matter of our doing this and that. They would have heard us being encouraged, for example, to pray more and then given advice on how to pray better. They would have learned about the need to love our neighbors in various important ways. They would have learned about the importance of various things quasi-distinctive to the Catholic religion such as the sacraments and the liturgical seasons. That is all to the good — or can be.

But would they know that Christianity is not primarily a set of practices but a personal relationship with Jesus? Would they know that our fundamental relation to God was not that of performing this kind of good work or that kind and this kind of religious activity or that kind? Would they know that Christianity is a matter of having been saved by no amount of work, no merit, of our own? Would they know that Jesus merited eternal life for us and that our principal response is not to perform meritorious acts on our own but to change our intentions and allow Jesus to perform those acts in us by accepting his indwelling as a free gift?

Unfortunately, if people who had never heard anything about Christianity had heard the homilies in my doctrinally sound parish for the last year they could only have learned those things by reading between the lines.

Likewise, for people who are already Christian the pastoral effectiveness of those homilies depends upon their ability to read between the lines. Even the homilies that were not only doctrinally correct but spiritually deep would be misleading to anyone who was not firmly grounded in the idea that we are saved by accepting Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior, that is, through repenting and believing that Jesus, not our reformed intentions, will produce the necessary works in us. Like the teachings of Jesus that were only meant for the disciples, those homilies would really be appropriate only for people who already had this kind of personal relationship to the Lord and were in environments that continually reminded them of it and called them to renew it.

From a theological point of view, cooperation with grace requires more dispositions than repentance and faith, of course. So we need pastoral exhortations to, for example, "be more committed," to "internalize our faith," to "take our baptismal vows seriously," to "have more attentive minds and hearts when we are at Mass," etc. But how do we accomplish these things; where do we get those other dispositions? Exhortations like these amount to calls to advanced repentance, to wanting to do God's will fully, not just wanting to avoid sin. But without equally prominent proclamations that it is Jesus who will do these things in us, if we ask him with faith and repentance, such exhortations unintentionally make repentance a decision for self-improvement, for making ourselves better by our own efforts. Then we wonder why those exhortations do not bear more fruit.

Earlier I said that properly understood, on-going repentance and belief in the Great News are all we need to cooperate with grace. "Properly understood" means that for us to grow in the life of grace, our repentance has to grow beyond the minimum of turning from serious sin, and even from less serious sin, to wanting to do God's will in all things. So to fulfill its responsibility to help us grow in grace, the Church must call us to advanced repen-

tance, to discipleship in the full sense of the word; it must challenge us to full discipleship without sugar-coating what that means: dying unto ourselves. But discipleship of that kind is something we cannot possibly achieve by our own power. If the Church presents discipleship as it truly is but we hear that call with merely human ears, the result can only be discouragement. A strong call to discipleship must be accompanied by an equally strong proclamation of faith, not that we can do it, but that Jesus will do it for us, a proclamation of Jesus' complete victory over everything that holds us back and his gift of that victory to us. "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

If your experience of the Church's spiritual formation is anything like mine, however, you know many more priests and deacons doing an excellent job calling us to various aspects of discipleship than proclaiming the faith that alone frees us to be disciples in the fullest sense, assuming we sincerely want to be. Most of the doctrinally sound and pastorally well intentioned homilies I hear at Mass have the effect of placing a burden on the hearers, the burden of making themselves better. But the core meaning of the rest of the Mass is that Jesus has taken our burdens from us and put them on himself. Unless we know that the burden is now his, not ours, we cannot respond successfully to calls that will make us better. Doing the things that make us better requires nothing more on our part than cooperating with grace, and we cannot properly cooperate with grace unless we know that our job is just to want and permit Jesus to give us the free victory he has already won for us.

Continuously repeated pleas of "Try harder!" are certainly necessary. I am just trying to help those pleas actually succeed, actually bear fruit. They can only succeed if they are made on the continuously reinforced foundation of the reasons why the Great News is great enough to be worth our trying harder. Pastoral leaders do not have to repeat those reasons every time they call people to try harder. But they must repeat them sufficiently for us never to forget just how good Christianity really is.

but in bringing us to the sacraments, the principal source of the grace by which we lead good lives. And the Church must ensure that we are always reminded of our need for the sacraments. The connection between our on-going need for the sacraments (and for teaching, prayer, penance, good works, Christian companionship, etc.) and allowing Jesus to save us by believing and repenting is this: Permitting Christ to save us means taking advantage of all the help he offers, especially through prayer and the sacraments, and most especially through the Eucharist. We cannot persevere and grow in the life of sanctifying grace without taking advantage of that help. If we don't permit Jesus to save us by taking advantage of the help he offers us through the sacraments, either we don't really want his help (our repentance is insincere), or don't believe that he will give us the help we need (we are not really using the gift of faith).

In default, however, of laying the foundation of faith and repentance as the key dispositions for responding to sacramental grace, we are in effect (and unintentionally) using the sacraments to accomplish things that they are not meant to accomplish. Paul, who calls his ministry "priestly" (Romans 15:16), said, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Great News" (1 Cor 1:17). Read: "Christ did not tell me to make the act of celebrating the sacraments ('to baptize') the main pastoral instrument of my priestly ministry. He told me that the power that comes from the sacraments is always there; it takes care of itself. He told me to focus my efforts on what does not take care of itself, the effects that sacramental grace is intended for. He told me to aim at creating the context of faith in His freely given personal indwelling ('to preach the Great News') that is required for the effectiveness of the sacraments, required because their purpose is to produce, and work through, that faith."

Some Protestants make a distinction between evangelical churches, like the Baptists and Assemblies of God, and sacramental churches, like the Anglicans and Lutherans. Roughly speaking (which is the only way to speak here, since there are so many variations), evangelical churches may have sacramental services but they emphasize the role of repentance and belief in the Great News as means of salvation; sacramental churches recognize the need for

repentance and faith but emphasize the role of the sacraments as means of salvation.

Those who use that distinction classify the Catholic Church as sacramental. But should we be? Shouldn't we be the church that transcends that distinction by being both evangelistic and sacramental? To conform to our theological essence, we should be both. As The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

The sacred liturgy (here, the Church's public worship in general, not just the Mass) does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church: it must be preceded by evangelization, faith, and conversion (that is, by evangelization that produces both faith in the Great News and repentance) (1072).

But at the level of pastoral practice, there is good reason for others to classify us as sacramental rather than evangelical. That is why our pastoral life, the fruit of sacramental grace, is so weak. The power of the sacraments cannot be fully released until we become as evangelistic as we are sacramental. Speaking pastorally, not theologically, evangelical Christians often understand the ex opere operantis but not the ex opere operato; they understand how we are supposed to respond to grace but not how the sacraments are channels of grace. On the other hand, we understand the ex opere operato but not the (pastoral) ex opere operantis. Let us hope that Avery Dulles was right in saying, "Today we seem to be witnessing the birth of a new Catholicism that, without loss of its institutional, sacramental, and social dimensions is authentically evangelical."³

Despite our theological essence, however, we will be "sacramental" as opposed to "evangelical" in practice as long as Church leaders view the life of the Church in terms of what is distinctive to the ordained ministry rather than to the royal priesthood. Personal evangelization concerns what the General Directory for Catechesis⁴ calls "the pre-catechumenate," and "pre-catechesis" (62), "the primary proclamation of the Gospel" (61), and the "first proclamation, calling to conversion" (48). This normally comes before what is distinctive to the presbyter's ministry, because the sacerdotal sacraments presuppose baptism. Also, learning about the personal evangelism that lays the foundations for cooperating

with grace by calling us to faith and repentance has not had to be a high priority in seminary training for centuries. The Church trained priests to minister in environments where pre-catechesis has already taken place in the family, and where society as a whole supported the foundational beliefs at the top of the hierarchy of truths.

Around the world, evangelical churches are taking communicants from us because they know how to bring people to a conscious relation to Jesus, not as founder of the Church, head of his body or spiritual food and drink, but as our personal Lord and Savior. Lacking valid sacerdotal sacraments and integral doctrine, those churches cannot adequately build on the Christian foundation they lay, as sincere and salvific as it is. But their trained ministers learn how to lay that foundation, how to evangelize personally, better than ours do. They teach how to lay the foundation of the building but not how to put up the walls and the roof. We teach how to put up the walls and the roof but not how to lay the foundation.

We can naively idealize evangelical preaching, however. Their foundational teaching sometimes hides serious doctrinal errors about otherwise true principles. Sometimes their preaching about accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior is equivalent to preaching faith and repentance, and is consistent with the need for faith and repentance to be ongoing and grow; sometimes it is not. But rather than go into further theological issues at this point, I would repeat the warning against imitating those evangelicals who would make faith, including the faith to ask for the grace of repentance, something we have to strain for. Again, we only need faith the size of a mustard seed (Mt 17:20).

And that fact means that we do not have faith in our own faith; we have faith in Jesus. Christian preaching should not make people look inside themselves to see if they have enough faith. Doing so would mean they were placing faith in their own faith, not in Jesus. By comparing the amount of faith we need to a mustard seed, Jesus was saying that our job is not to wonder whether we have enough faith but to use whatever faith we have, no matter how little we think it might be, to ask him for help. Jesus complained about those of little faith. But he did not do so to get us to focus downward on ourselves rather than outward on

him.

When we are undergoing trials, trusting faith God can seem extremely difficult. At times like that we can be tempted (1) to think that we must expend a great amount of spiritual energy in order to have sufficient trust in God and (2) to look inside ourselves and not find enough spiritual energy to make a good act of faith. Those temptations, of course, make our trials even more difficult to bear. It is then that we need the message of mustard-seed faith most. We only need enough spiritual energy to have faith the size of a mustard seed, and that is so small that anyone can have it even if our inner eyes are not sharp enough to find it, as they may well not be when trials blur them.

The common problem with the inner-search and the bench-press approaches to faith is that they amount to thinking that we have to earn grace by faith, that faith is something by which we merit grace. That view treats faith itself as if it was a work of the law, a work of law by which we justify ourselves, rather than an unmerited gift that justifies us apart from works of the law.

8.

Some Catholic evangelists find a danger in emphasizing Jesus as each one's personal savior. It is true that if we were the only person in the world, (1) Jesus still would have died for us, and (2) there would have been no need for a Church and a sacramental system. But cannot an unbalanced emphasis on that truth produce a lopsided "Jesus and me" attitude that sees no need for the Church?

Yes, but can critics have it both ways: Can they can lay the blame for the ineffectiveness of sacramental grace entirely on each one's failure to make the proper personal response, rather than on ineffective formation, and at the same time expect our response to be what it should be if we do not know that Jesus is our personal Savior — that he loves us so much that he would have offered his life for our sins even if we were the only person in the world? Or does Jesus not want us to know that he loves us that much?

I am mainly concerned about the response to grace of already catecheticized and

sacramentalized Catholics, since it is among these that the Church's spiritual formation has proven so ineffective. Modifications of the pastoral approach explained here can be made for dealing with prospective converts or Catholics whose doctrinal or moral background is deficient. Any modifications, however, should not alter the basic principles of this approach, since they are based on the hierarchy of truths. "On all levels catechesis should take account of this hierarchy of the truths of faith" (General Catechetical Directory, 43; emphasis supplied).

When we are teaching catecheticized and sacramentalized Catholics about how to cooperate with grace already received, we can carefully remind them (or explain for the first time, if necessary) that they need the Church and the sacraments because Jesus distributes all his grace through them. Then, without fear of privatizing Christianity, we can point out that the question of how we personally cooperate with grace (our question) is still unanswered.

We must certainly teach potential converts and Catholics whose understanding of the Church's mission is deficient the truth that Jesus distributes all his grace through the Church and the sacraments. But for that truth to bear its full fruit, we must teach it according to its place in the hierarchy of truths. "A catechesis that neglects this interrelation and harmony of its content can become entirely useless for achieving its proper end" (ibid., 39). The most fundamental reason for the Church is not to distribute grace. The most fundamental reason is that, since the Trinity is a family of persons, the Trinity cannot give us its life without making itself into an extended family of which we are members. Therefore, we cannot receive sanctifying grace without being united to one another in that family; Jesus' salvation necessarily makes Christians members of a community, the Church. (Chapter three reflects further on the Church from this point of view.)

Still, from a pastoral perspective, the truth that Jesus founded a community to which grace unites you is lower in the hierarchy of truths than the fact that Jesus would have saved you if you were the only person in the world, since you would still have joined the Trinity's

extended family even if there were no Church. And the further truth that Jesus' community carries on his work by distributing all his grace is subordinate in the hierarchy to the truths (1) that Jesus merited divine life out of personal love for each of us and (2) he founded a community to which grace unites us. The truth of (3) that the Church carries on Jesus' work of distributing grace depends on the truth of (2), and the truth of (2) depends on the truth of (1). Nor can we understand (3) unless we first understand (1) and then (2).

And the yet further truths that Jesus' Church has a leadership structure and sacramental system are subordinate in the hierarchy to the truths (2) that Jesus founded a community to which grace unites us and (3) that this community carries on Jesus' work by distributing all his grace. If the Trinity were not a family to which grace unites us, Jesus could not have founded the community he did. If he had not founded that community, he could not have given it the mission of distributing all his grace. And if he had not given some community that mission, the community's leadership structure, if any, would not have the purpose it now has, and there would have been no need for a sacramental system. So in the hierarchy of truths the places of the Church, its leadership structure, and the sacraments are lower than the place of the redemption, since the purpose and power of everything else derives from the redemption. And being disposed to cooperate with grace depends on our personal response to those truths in the hierarchy that illuminate the others because the others are based on them.

What Jesus did came from his personal love for each of us, and the power of the sacraments comes from what Jesus did. If our response to sacramental grace is not primarily a response to the realities expressed by those truths, in that order, grace cannot fully bear fruit. From the point of view of the independent, ex opere operato, effects of grace, our personal relation to Jesus comes through the Church and the sacraments, no question about it. But from the point of view of the lived, ex opere operantis, effects of grace, our relating properly to the Church and the sacraments comes through our personal relation to Jesus who would have saved us if we were the only person in the world. The quality of our belief in the

Church, our perseverance in and obedience to it, our dispositions in receiving its sacraments all depend on the quality of our personal relation to Jesus.

Can I fully cooperate with grace if I am not disposed to unite with my fellow Christians in Jesus' community and profit from its ministries? Absolutely not. But if I am not so disposed, what can I do about it? By my own virtue, nothing. All I can do — and so all I have to do — is to sincerely want to do Jesus' will and, with faith in Jesus' answer, ask him to cause me to do it. And if I'm not sure I want to do Jesus' will in this regard, all I can do — and so all that I have to do — is ask him, with faith that he will do it for me, to give me the desire to do his will. Therefore, our ability to relate properly to the Church depends on our relation to Jesus as our personal Lord (repentance) and Savior (belief in the Great News).

We are looking at the hierarchy of truths from a pastoral perspective, to find the truths on which the Christian's personal response to sacramental grace should be based. Without even adverting to the purely hypothetical truth that if we were the only person in the world, the Church and the sacramental system would not be necessary, if we look at that hierarchy of truths logically, we can see that cooperating with grace primarily means having a relation to Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior rather than to the Church. The truth that Jesus saved us from our sins is logically (and metaphysically) prior to the truth that he chose to distribute his salvation by establishing a saving community, and the latter truth is prior to truths about his community's leadership structure and sacramental system. What Jesus did for us has a "higher priority" than truths about the mission he gave the Church and the sacraments because truths about the mission of the Church and the sacraments are "based on" it "and are illumined by" (*ibid.*, 43) it rather than vice versa.

And we can teach the truth that Jesus would have died for any of us if we were the only person in the world without mentioning the conclusion that, in this purely hypothetical circumstance, the Church would not have been needed. If we are worried about someone's drawing that conclusion and misunderstanding it, we can mention it and carefully explain it. Still, knowing that hypothetical conclusion is not necessary for anyone's salvation. Knowing it

is necessary, however, for our pastoral leaders. If they do not know that if they were the only person in the world, Jesus would have saved them and the Church would not be necessary, they cannot understand the place of the Church and the sacraments in the hierarchy of truths from the perspective of the dispositions needed for cooperating with grace.

What Avery Dulles said bears repeating:

Catholic spirituality at its best has always promoted a deep personal relationship with Christ. In evangelizing we are required to raise our eyes to him and to transcend all ecclesiocentrism. The Church is of crucial importance, but it is not self-enclosed. It is a means of drawing the whole world into union with God through Jesus Christ. Too many Catholics of our day seem never to have encountered Christ. They know a certain amount about him from the teaching of the Church, but they lack direct personal familiarity. . . . The first and highest priority is for the Church to proclaim the good news concerning Jesus Christ as a joyful message to all the world. Only if the Church is faithful to its evangelical mission can it hope to make its distinctive contribution in the social, political, and cultural spheres (emphasis supplied).⁵

9.

How can priests, deacons and lay people learn to evangelize in this foundational, personal way? Before answering that question, let me ask those readers who are priests and deacons another: What did your training on evangelistic tools and methods teach you about, for example, "the four spiritual laws," "the four basic truths" or "the sinner's prayer"? The answer to the second question should probably be "What training on evangelistic tools and methods?" But the examples just mentioned are evangelistic tools that Protestant groups have successfully used to bring people to an acceptance of Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. And the point of the second question is that to learn the answer to the first question, how to evangelize in a personal way, we should look for methods that God is actually blessing.

Looking for methods God is blessing, however, assumes that we have the right ends

by which to evaluate the possible means, and their formation seems to have failed our dedicated ordained ministers by not providing them with the right pastoral goals. ("On all levels", seminary education therefore included, "catechesis should take account of this hierarchy of the truths of faith" [General Catechetical Directory, 43]). We have many successful methods of personal evangelization, the Neo-Catechumenal Way, the Cursillo, the charismatic renewal, the Antioch Weekend, Teen Encounter Christ, the Life in the Spirit Seminar, etc. But Church leaders often fail to take advantage of these movements, as if what they do is not relevant to the leaders' pastoral vision. And priests who do become involved in these movements often use them for pastoral agendas other than that of fostering the most important dispositions for responding to sacramental grace. For example, such programs often became venues for celebrating the liturgy with the enthusiasm that it deserves, rather than means of making the liturgies we have already participated in effective in our lives.

For ordained ministers and other leaders who are open to revising their pastoral vision and who therefore can learn from the methods God is using to show us how to evangelize at the personal level, I will offer some recommendations. Later chapters will include more recommendations.

One caution, however. A method of evangelizing God is blessing today he may not still be blessing tomorrow. An essential part of being open to revising our pastoral agenda is the ability to grasp that pastoral methods, even those we dearly love, are not working anymore. For example, I have been using the terminology "Accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior" since God has so often blessed its use in contemporary evangelization. Without checking, however, I feel safe in saying that terminology was probably not in use 250 years ago, and it certainly was not in use 1000 years ago. Will it still be used successfully ten years from now? Who can say? The spiritual principles it expresses are essential to the Christian life, and it will always be necessary to communicate them. But we must be open to allowing God to teach us new ways to communicate these principles in the future. More than just being open, we must always be watchful for the new ways in which God is acting.

On the other hand, the terminology "Repent and believe the Great News" has been and will always be part of the Christian proclamation, since it is in Scripture (although the translation "great" is an innovation on my part that, while theologically fully justified, may or may not bear pastoral fruit). But the fact that words are scriptural does not mean they can be immediately understood in every cultural context. How well is justification by faith and repentance understood today? That is why we will always need new evangelistic tools such as today's "Accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior." Also, we must realize that there always have been and always will be people who come into the right kind of personal relation to Jesus without the use of the words that we think are the "correct" or most pastorally effective words.

In light of the hierarchy of truths, we can state a few principles that summarize the permanent content of personal evangelization in a way that has been effective today:

1. God loves us and created us to share his own glorious life.
2. Sin has separated the human race from God's life, and we cannot restore our relation to God by our own power and virtue.
3. God has remedied our problem by sending his only natural Son to become one of us, to take away the guilt of each one's sins by putting it on himself, and to earn divine life for us by offering his human life to the Father.
4. Our primary response to what Jesus did is to ask him to come into our lives as our personal Lord and Savior, recognizing that we need God's salvation from sin (repenting) and that Jesus offers it as a free, unmerited gift (believing the Great News).
5. To persevere and grow in Jesus' life, we must let him unite us with other Christians in his community, the Church, through which he distributes all his grace and allows us to bring it to others. To unite in love with other Christians is his command to us.

Although we could continue to add principles from the hierarchy of truths, I have chosen to stop the numerical list at five for three reasons. First, these principles are suggestions for "the primary proclamation of the Gospel" (General Directory for Catechesis, 61), the

“first proclamation, calling to conversion” (ibid., 48). Numbering other truths consecutively to these might make it appear that the others belong to the primary proclamation. Second, although we are mainly discussing how to teach the sacramentalized and catecheticized how to respond to grace already received, I intend these principles, or something in their spirit, to be suitable for the evangelization of new converts as well. When we are using principles of this kind to bring non-Christians to initial conversion, it would not be good psychology to go beyond five, thereby burdening the converts with too much to digest at one time. The most important thing is to bring the converts into the Church, so that they can gradually learn more through the Church’s ministry. Third, it would probably be impossible to put the whole hierarchy of truths in an exact numerical order, even when we are just looking at the hierarchy from a pastoral, not theological, viewpoint.

These principles, properly understood and presented, are the basis of our response to the Jesus who is present in the Church and the sacraments. At least they are the basis if we are looking at spiritual formation from the perspective of the hierarchy of truths, and at the hierarchy of truths from the perspective of formation. Once more:

The various aspects of the mystery are to be explained in such a way that the central fact, Jesus, as he is God’s greatest gift to men, holds first place, and that from him the other truths of Catholic teaching derive their order and hierarchy from the educational point of view (General Catechetical Directory, 16).

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity (On Catechesis in Our Time, 5).

I have said that the nature of sanctifying grace is not quite at the top of the hierarchy of truths. In preaching the Great News to Catholics, however, we are usually addressing people who already have an at least partial understanding of the truths that are at the top, truths about Jesus and the Trinity. And we are preaching to those who are either in the state of sanctifying grace now or have been in the past. So a good place to start preaching the

Great News to them would be to explain what this glorious gift really is (principle 1). That would be to explain the first reason mentioned above why the Great News is great.

The second reason the Great News is great is that it is a free, unmerited gift to which our sins are no obstacle. To explain the second reason is to explain what it means to repent and believe the Great News (principles 2, 3 and 4). In explaining repentance and faith, however, we have to keep in mind the needs of different kinds of people. Sinners who are sincerely trying to change their ways but are discouraged need to know that the repentance required for salvation is change of intention, not change of behavior, if we have faith that God himself will correct our behavior. Sinners who are not trying to change need to know that salvation requires a sincere, true intention to allow Jesus to change their behavior.

Some Catholics feel and act as if they are still "under the law." Out of fear of an unhealthy kind, they are in effect trying to save themselves by their own efforts. They need to know that if we sincerely want divine life, all we have to do is to let God give it to us as a free gift. For some practicing Catholics, Christianity may not yet be great news. While intellectually believing Christianity is true, they may resent the "restrictions" it places on them, although they try to obey out of fear. These people are also still "under the law." They need to know how glorious the Great News is. Still under the law in another way are the modern pharisees who rather than resenting Christian restrictions make their efforts at keeping them a matter of pride. They need to know that we have no righteousness of our own.

We must also keep in mind the many Catholics who are good and virtuous but do not have an experiential personal relation to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They need to know how much more Jesus has for them if they just accept with faith and joy the free gift he has already given them, by asking Jesus already dwelling in them to be their personal Lord and Savior and by asking him to give them the knowledge of his indwelling that Scripture promises (Jn 14:20).

With the exception of sinners who do not repent, Catholics of the kinds just described can gain eternal salvation even without an experiential personal relation to Jesus (and those

with such a relation can lose eternal salvation). But in addition to personal salvation, Catholics are called to advance the salvation of all human beings. If they knew how glorious the Great News is and that to cooperate with grace all they have to do is give Jesus permission to do his will in them, how much more could those who are already good practicing Catholics contribute to the salvation of others?

In preaching the Great News to good and virtuous Catholics, we should tell them that Jesus always has much more for them but should not imply that the reason they do not yet have it is their fault, for example, that the inhibitions many good Catholics feel about singing at Mass are their fault. We should not give them the impression that they have been doing something wrong.

Likewise, we should not frighten Catholics away by a presentation of the Great News that is overenthusiastic in an emotional sense. Priests and deacons should not rush into a Sunday mass and expect to make the parishioners feel as enthusiastic about the Great News as they may feel. The Great News must be shouted from the roof tops. It must be presented with the joy and enthusiasm of which it is worthy. The spiritual power of someone's preaching, however, will not come from his psychic energy but from the Great News itself, which "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rm 1:16). If we have faith in the power of the Great News, our presentation of it can be as calm and confident as it is joyful and enthusiastic. We can express how awesome the Great News is without getting emotionally ahead of those we are addressing. Grace rather than emotion will reveal how great the Great News is.

Preachers should not assume that Catholics will jump at the chance to be personally evangelized. They may get opposition from some, even many, parishioners. For example, some Catholics might accuse statements like principle 4 above of stealth Protestantism. Opposition can be a sign that the way we have presented the Great News was not appropriate, but it can also be a good sign. Any powerful work of the Holy Spirit will provoke opposition, and not just opposition from the side of evil. St. Theresa of Avila found that what St.

Peter of Alcantra had told her was true: The opposition of people whom she knew to be good Catholics would be one of her greatest crosses. In this, she was only following Jesus. He was opposed not just by the pharisees but by his own disciples.

When we are opposed by people we know to be good Christians, we must treat them with the love and patience that is their due because they are temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ's body. Faith in the Great News does not do away with the need for patience; it calls for patience. If we have presented the Great News properly, however, we need not fear that we have gotten spiritually too far ahead of faithful Christians who may oppose us. What we are talking about belongs to "the pre-catechumenate," and "pre-catechesis" (General Directory for Catechesis, 62).

In situations where those who do not know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior are the exceptions, there will still be a need to continuously reinforce the foundational message of the Great News. (Once more, "On all levels catechesis should take account of this hierarchy of the truths of faith.") Our own times have shown how easy it is to neglect pastoral basics and how much that can weaken the spiritual power of more advanced preaching. Still, we are always in need of more and repeated teaching about the Church, the sacraments and the Christian life. And it is possible to neglect that teaching by spending too much time on the basics. Unfortunately, the lack of depth of some preaching in evangelistic Protestant circles shows that (not that our preaching is always deeper than theirs).

How do we find the balance between reminding Catholics of the foundations and giving them the advanced teaching they need to grow? First, the epistles provide an excellent model of this balance for us to imitate, without imitating their literary and rhetorical structures. In using them as a model of balance between laying the foundation and putting up the walls and the roof, it is the spirit not the letter that we need to imitate. Second, for the Sunday homily the readings selected by the Church provide the guide, of course. When the readings do not offer a natural opportunity for an evangelistic proclamation of the Great News, preachers should not force that on them. But how many times do we see that kind of

opportunity missed? For years I wondered why Christmas and Easter homilies did not take advantage of the presence of so many infrequent church goers by presenting the Great News to them. Imagine my surprise when a priest told me that those homilies are designed for infrequent attendees.

When we repent and believe the Great News or when we accept Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior we are personally appropriating the grace of baptism. So instead of talking about responding to what Jesus did for us, it would be theologically correct to talk about what baptism did for us. A theologically correct way of speaking, however, need not be the most effective way pastorally. In the hierarchy of truths, the truth about what baptism did for us is subordinate to what Jesus did for us. Jesus could have saved us without giving us the sacrament of baptism, but we cannot properly respond to grace without repenting and believing the Great News about what the person, Jesus of Nazareth, did for us or, in other words, without consciously accepting Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior.

When preachers are not de facto teaching justification by our own good intentions and/or good works, they often try to make grace effective by teaching that God loves us and that the response we need to give is to trust in his love. Many priests and deacons do a good job proclaiming faith in God's fatherly love. And this, too, can be all to the good. But Christian faith is not just the trust that God loves us and will act to take care of us. It is the faith that God acts in us to do things for us that we cannot do for ourselves. More specifically, it is faith not in a vague and general love but a love that is so concrete that it has a personal name, Jesus of Nazareth. The love of God that comes to us through our relation to Jesus is not just the generic love God has for all human beings, no matter how important that is. We cannot know how much God loves us unless we know his free gift of his own son, Jesus, as our personal Lord and Savior.

Likewise, although not every person is a child of God in the sense of sharing the Trinity's life, there is an important generic sense in which every human being is a child of God (The New Testament mentions this sense, but only once, Ac 17:28-29), just as there is an

important generic sense in which God is present in every person. It follows that there is also an important generic sense in which all human beings are sisters and brothers, although the New Testament itself never uses "brothers" except for the relation of the people of God, Jews before the resurrection and Christians after, to their fellow Jews and Christians.⁶ But if we are offering Catholics nothing more than faith in God's love in a generic sense, God's indwelling in a generic sense, the fatherhood of God in a generic sense and the brother/sisterhood of human kind in a generic sense, by implication we will inevitably be offering Catholics a "religion" in which they either justify themselves by their own efforts or do not need to be justified because everyone is going to heaven whatever they do.

Finally, I again cannot stress too much that anyone who uses these ideas should not do so in any way that would diminish the importance and dignity of the sacerdotal sacraments, especially the Eucharist, or anything else distinctively or quasi-distinctively Catholic. That would just be another way of preventing the unleashing of the sacraments' power.

Appendix to Chapter 2: St. Paul on Faith and Works

Sometimes we hear it said that when Paul contrasts justification by faith to justification by works of the law, he has in mind the ritual, not the moral, laws of the Mosaic code, circumcision for example. But Paul explicitly connects the law that does not justify with sin, with moral evil not just ritual evil:

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law (1 Cor 15:55-56).

All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles . . . do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts. . . . But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law . . . while you preach against stealing do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery (Rm 2:12-15)?

No human being will be justified in his (God's) sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rm 3:20).

The law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression (Rm 4:15). Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. . . . Law came in to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rm 5:13, 20).

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under the law but under grace (Rm 6:14).

If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. . . . Apart from the law, sin lies dead (Rm 7:7, 8).

In Romans 2:25-27, Paul even contrasts being circumcised to keeping the law. In no way can the opposition between faith and works of the law in Paul be explained as only concerning the ritual, not the moral, aspects of the Mosaic law.

The fact that the law of love sums up the moral code does not give works of love the power to justify. Again, the issue here is not whether Christians need to be continually reminded that love and good works are necessary for salvation and of how to love and do good works. They surely do. If knowing those things was adequate for actually getting love and good works, however, we would not be justified by free gift but by our own merit.

The context of Paul's statements about the law in Romans shows that when he contrasts justification by faith to justification by "works of the law" (Rm 3:28), he does not mean faith apart from repentance; he means faith with repentance. So when he contrasts faith and works of the law in Romans, we should read him as contrasting faith and repentance to works of the law. Before even discussing justification by faith apart from works of the law he unequivocally proclaims the need to repent:

Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent (unrepentant) heart you are storing up wrath for yourself

. . . . For he will render to everyman according to his works. (Rm 2:4, 6)

And later when Paul is contrasting living by grace to living by law, he assumes that he is addressing people who want to obey the law, that is, who repent in the sense of sincerely intending to do good and avoid evil. "You who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart" (Rm 6:17).

He makes it clear, however, that repentance, the intention to change behavior, is insufficient to change behavior:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. . . . I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members (the flesh) (Rm 7:15-23).

The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; the two are directly

opposed. That is why you do not do what your will intends (Ga 5:17, NAB).

But if even sincere good intentions are insufficient, what is the solution? Romans continues:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rm 7:24-25).

Paul answers his question by proclaiming the Great News that Jesus will deliver him. By proclaiming the Great News here, Paul is calling on us to believe that Jesus will deliver us from the dilemma that sincerely intending to do good and avoid evil is not enough to accomplish it. In other words, he is calling on us to supplement our repentance with the faith that Jesus will accomplish in us what our repentance alone cannot.

For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us (Rm 8:3-4).

Jesus' work was a conquest (Jn 16:33), a victory over sin, Satan, the world and death. He won that victory for us, so that we could receive his victory over sin as a free gift.

How do we have access to what Jesus gained for us when we cannot merit it on our own? Knowing that his readers are aware of the need for repentance, Paul answers that we access grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not through works of the law, even the law of love:

That is why it depends on faith (as opposed to works), in order that the promise may rest on grace (a freely given gift as opposed to something we have to earn) (Rm 4:16).

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand. (Rm 5:1-2)

In the last passage quoted, some ancient authorities have "we have obtained access by faith to this grace". For our purposes, adding "by faith" is redundant (not that Paul is above redundancy). The context of Romans could not make it clearer that, assuming we have re-

pented, faith in Jesus' merits, as opposed to any merit earned by our good works, is the way we obtain access to grace.

When we obtain the free gift of sanctifying grace, we also receive the supernatural virtue of divine love; for to be justified in God's eyes, we must have love. From the love obtained by faith come works of love, since belief with repentance amounts to permission for God to create works of love in us. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). Of course, by being a desire to perform acts of love, repentance is itself a form of love. It is even a supernatural form of love, since it results from our allowing actual grace to cause repentance in us. But only when repentance is supplemented by faith is the virtue of supernatural love that comes with sanctifying grace at work in us. On the other hand, faith is all that we need in addition to repentance to fulfill our sincere desire to live sanctifying grace's life of supernatural love.

This is the meaning of justification by faith as opposed to by works of the law, whether the moral code or the law of love. Assuming we are repentant, our access to grace is through faith, not works. Those who sincerely want the gift, which includes recognizing their need for it and inability to obtain it by their own merits, obtain it by believing in the love of the giver. Theologically, we can say we are justified by faith and (works of) love. But "justified by" can mean different things. Although we are justified "by love" in the sense of being justified by having and using that virtue, we must still ask what we are "justified by" in the sense of what lets us acquire that virtue. In that sense we are justified "by faith and repentance," not by love; for we acquire love by faith and repentance.⁷

Notes

¹ Avery Dulles, S.J., "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," America, Feb. 1, 1992, 59-63.

¹ Refraining from making the right choice can result in sins of omission or commission.

Sometimes refraining from the right choice ("freedom of exercise" in technical terminology) will result in the omission of an action that should have been chosen. But it can also result

in the commission of an act from which something is missing that should have been there. For example, sometimes a decision is necessary to prevent ourselves from doing something or prevent something else from happening. If we refrain from making the necessary decision, our refraining can result in a sin of commission, since refraining from the decision can make us responsible for the occurrence of something that should not occur. Sometimes refraining from the right choice will result in our making the opposite choice ("freedom of specification"); if so, the opposite choice will lack something that should be there. It will be a choice in which everything that exists is caused by God but which is sinful because of what does not exist in it that should — an absence for which we, not God, are responsible since we refrained from first making the right choice. When the initial refraining from making the right choice is followed by another choice, the second choice may be a choice to omit an action that should happen or to commit an action that shouldn't. If the latter, everything that exists in the action is the result of God's causality, but something that should exist is lacking as the result, not of God's causality, but of our first refraining from making the right choice. (For a more detailed and technical treatment of what cooperation with grace is, see Jacques Maritain, Existence and the Existent [New York: Pantheon, 1948] 85-122, and God and the Permission of Evil [Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1966]. Maritain has been incorrectly interpreted to hold that we are not aware of the moral law when we sin. He explicitly states that we are aware of it then; see The Sin of the Angel [Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959] 14, n. 10. See also John C. Cahalan, "Making Something Out of Nihilation," in Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphysics, ed. John F. X. Knasas [Mishawaka, IN: The American Maritain Association, 1988] 191-201.)

² God is the primary cause of all religious activity, just as he is the primary cause of any created activity. In causing our "religious" acts in the sense of acts by which we try to lift ourselves up to him, he is causing acts that do not exceed the abilities of human nature, just as when he causes artistic, political and ethical activity. For he is causing acts by which

we try to lift ourselves up to him by created human power. In causing Christian acts, he is causing "supernatural" acts, as defined by their being acts that belong to the life of the Trinity. In causing these acts, he is lifting us up to himself, that is, to his own interior life. For he is causing acts that are beyond the abilities of human nature and which are acts belonging to the life of the Trinity at the same time that they are our acts.

³ Avery Dulles, S.J., "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," America, Feb. 1, 1992, 59-63.

⁴ (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998); not to be confused with the General Catechetical Directory of 1971.

⁵ Avery Dulles, S.J., "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," America, Feb. 1, 1992, 59-63.

⁶ Mt 25:40 is not an exception. In this passage Matthew presents Jesus teaching the Jews about the judgment of the "nations" (25:32), whom the Jews would have understood to be the gentiles, those outside of the people of God. So Matthew would also expect his Christian readers to understand Jesus to be teaching about the judgment of those outside the people of God, non-Christians. Jesus judges both the sheep and the goats, on the one hand, by how they treated his brethren, on the other. Matthew's readers would have understood Jesus' "brethren" to be Christians. The fact that neither the sheep nor the goats are Christians explains why they did not recognize Jesus in his brethren. If Jesus was judging Christians, those judged should have known that whatever they did to Jesus' brethren, they were doing to him. (Mt 10:40-42 is a parallel passage.) It would be reverse fundamentalism, however, to draw the conclusion that Christians are not supposed to treat all people the way the gentiles are supposed to treat Jesus' brethren. They most certainly are. But it just happens that Jesus is not dealing directly with the behavior of his disciples here; he is answering a different question.

⁷ The first sense of "justified by" concerns what constitutes justification, what it is — in technical terminology, formal causality; the second sense concerns what brings it into exis-

tence — efficient causality. The distinction of justification by faith and repentance from justification by faith and works is the amendment to the usual Catholic discussions of justification by faith “alone” that I promised at the beginning of the chapter.