

Secret 5: The Illuminating Gift of God

Chapter 1 said that an appreciative awareness of the Trinity's living in us is needed for our full cooperation with sacramental grace. Chapter 3 said that an awareness of that kind is needed for the brother/sisterly love of our fellow Christians that is the Church's life. And Chapter 4 said it is needed for the love of our non-Christian neighbors that moves us to share Jesus with them. But Chapter 2 pointed out that such an appreciative awareness is as much an unearned gift as is everything else in Christianity. So to have confidence that the practical recommendations of the book can actually work, we need to have confidence that this gift is indeed available to any one who asks for it with faith and repentance. In other words, to have confidence in the pastoral recommendations of this book, we need to know that they are based on informed theology.

Until now, we have been focusing on the subjective dispositions for cooperating with actual grace and on the pastoral ways of fostering and supporting those dispositions. This chapter mainly takes an objective theological, rather than a subjective ascetical and pastoral, point of view. The appreciative awareness of the indwelling of the Trinity that we need is in fact promised to every Christian as gift flowing from our Christian initiation. That gift is an essential aspect of what Scripture is promising us when it promises that those who repent and believe the Great News will receive the Holy Spirit. Among other things, therefore, this chapter will enable you to judge for yourself whether it is a de facto secret that the sacrament of confirmation is supposed to give us the awareness of our union with God that our full cooperation with grace requires. (As in Section 7 of Chapter 4, I am using "union with God" to express the mutual real presence of God in us and of ourselves in God.)

The perennial risk of focusing on the theological, however, is that we can jump from theological (I do not say doctrinal) truths to false pastoral conclusions. The theological order and the more important pastoral order are obviously related. But the history of the Church shows, sometimes tragically, that they are not related in the simplistic ways we can be tempted to imagine. So I have included pastoral caveats at various places.

1.

The fact that we grow in sanctifying grace does not mean that the whole of the Trinity is not dwelling in us at baptism. It means that the way the Trinity lives its life in us develops. How does it develop? One kind of development is through different ways in which God makes us aware of his indwelling. How does our awareness of divine indwelling develop? Acts of faith in God's indwelling are necessary, but they are not the only way the virtue of faith contributes to that growth. By exercising faith with hope, trusting faith, repenters can also ask for and receive whatever else that growth requires. Repentance and faith are all that is necessary to cooperate with grace in the crucial sense that by asking with faith the repentant can get everything else they need. "Ask and you shall receive . . ."

All those who repent and believe the Great News of Jesus are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. What does that gift do for us? The fourth gospel makes knowledge of the Spirit himself, as well as knowledge of God's presence in us and of our presence in God, essential features of the gift of the Spirit:

I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, . . . the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:16-20).

"In that day" (the day that Jesus "will not leave you desolate" because he "will come to you" through "another Counselor to be with you for ever"), "you will know that I am in my Father" (know that the person now speaking to you is a divine, uncreated participant of the life of God), "and you in me" (that you are united to my divine person as its extended human body), "and I in you" (that I am really present in you and also, since I am in my Father, that my Father is really present in you).

"Receiving the Holy Spirit," however, can mean two things. To be in sanctifying grace

is to have the Spirit dwelling in us.¹ This way of receiving the Spirit is associated with the sacrament of baptism. But “receiving the Holy Spirit” also has the more specific meaning we associate with the sacrament of confirmation, the mission-empowering reception of the Spirit by those already baptized with water. In promising that the Counselor will make the apostles aware of their union with God, Jesus was predicting something that would happen to them in the future. Yet, the apostles were already in the state of grace. Jesus acknowledged this when he said, “He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not all of you” (Jn 13:10). Nor could the apostles have partaken of Holy Communion that night if they were not in the state of grace. So the awareness of our union with God that Jesus promises here comes from something different from our initial reception of sanctifying grace; being “baptized in the Holy Spirit” means something other than being baptized with water. Although they can occur at the same time, they can also occur apart. And the awareness of the mutual indwelling of God and man that John 14 promises comes with the second, the mission-empowering, way of receiving the Spirit.

We can obviously have the Trinity dwelling within us without being aware of it; just think of baptized babies. And there are different ways of being aware of it. Faith, of course, is a kind of awareness, and by causing peace and joy the intellectual certitude that comes with the virtue of faith can give us an appreciative awareness of what Christianity is. The virtue of faith is also a necessary condition for the consciousness of what Christianity is that Jesus promises us from the Counselor. But the latter consciousness involves more than faith, since those who have been baptized with water have the gift of faith but may not have received the Spirit in the mission-empowering sense. Nor is faith alone the same as the consciousness needed for fully cooperating with actual grace that we discussed in Chapter 1. As we will see shortly, when St. Paul relied on Christians’ awareness of the real presence of the Trinity to motivate them to Christian behavior, he was relying on an awareness that came from more than being baptized with water. He was relying on the kind of awareness

caused by the mission-empowering reception of the Spirit.

What is the difference between the ways we “receive the Holy Spirit” in baptism and confirmation? After baptism, the Trinity is really present in us through sanctifying grace. Since Jesus says that the second way of receiving the Spirit will make us conscious of our union with God, an important dimension of the second way of receiving the Spirit is a way of being conscious of what has already happened to us in the first way of receiving the Spirit. And since we can be conscious of our union with God through faith, an important dimension of the second way of receiving of the Spirit is a *new* way of being consciousness of what has already happened to us.

Before enquiring into the nature of this new consciousness, a look at the Synoptics and Paul will reinforce the teaching of John 14 that an appreciative awareness of our union with God is an essential element of the “power from on high” (Lk 24:49) that being baptized in the Spirit gives us. It is currently fashionable to speak of the different “theologies” found in the diverse New Testament authors. There need be absolutely nothing wrong with using this literary form, and there is much to recommend it. But in the present discussion what is relevant is to emphasize the sameness of the New Testament teachings regarding how central a new way of being conscious of our union with God is to the mission-empowering gift of the Spirit. Seeing how unanimous the authors are is one way of seeing how confident we should be that the sacrament of confirmation will give us the appreciative awareness of his presence that we need.

2.

In the gospels of Mark and Luke the descent of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism is immediately followed by Jesus becoming conscious of his divine sonship and his Father’s love in a new way. “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.’” (Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22). Note that Mark and Luke present the Father as addressing Jesus not the bystanders. Jesus is the one who is directly made conscious of his sonship and the Father’s love for him. Mark and Luke do not tell us whether others heard the Father

speaking, but if they did, they learned about Jesus' relation to the Father by listening in on what the Father said to Jesus. As a good Jew, however, Jesus would have already had an awareness of God's fatherhood through faith, as Luke explicitly tells us (Lk 2:49). So at the time of the descent of the Spirit, Jesus became conscious of God's fatherhood in a new way. To be the child is to have the same kind of life the parent has. As in John 14, therefore, this new way of Jesus' being aware of his divine sonship would include an awareness of the presence of divine life in him, at least the presence by sanctifying grace that he will share with us (and perhaps the presence constituted by the hypostatic union).

In Matthew, the Father addresses his listeners in the third person rather than speaking directly to Jesus, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased" (3:17). But Jesus would have also heard the voice. So while Matthew, for whatever reason, did not take the opportunity to explicitly show Jesus becoming aware of his sonship in a new way, we cannot conclude that Matthew meant to exclude that from Jesus' baptism. This is especially true because Matthew follows Mark (1:10) in only mentioning Jesus, not the bystanders, as seeing the Holy Spirit: "After Jesus was baptized, he came directly out of the water. Suddenly the sky opened and he saw the Spirit of God descend on him like a dove and hover over him" (Mt 3:16). Since the Spirit had not appeared to Jesus this way before in Matthew and Mark, they are showing Jesus becoming aware of the Spirit in a new way. And in each of the Synoptics the awareness of the Spirit was of him as (1) distinct from Jesus and the Father, (2) importantly associated with Jesus' sonship and the Father's love for him, and (3) a third role player importantly associated with the work the Father has for him, a role player side-by-side with the Father and himself. But just as Jesus had previously known God as his father, he already had the Spirit within him through sanctifying grace.

John the Baptist is the only person the gospel of John mentions as seeing the Spirit descend on Jesus. (Luke says the Spirit descended in bodily, and so visible, form but does not specify who saw him; 3:22) But whatever the fourth gospel's reason was for neglecting to tell us whether Jesus saw the Spirit, it had nothing to do with its having a different theol-

ogy of what the second way of receiving the Spirit does from Mark and Luke. In all three gospels the Spirit is linked with a new consciousness of God's indwelling that is Trinitarian, and so is familial, in general, and filial in particular.

Also, in all the Synoptics the descent of the Spirit on Jesus was a mission-empowering event. It made the difference between the Jesus who did and the Jesus who did not undertake his public ministry. The three Synoptics describe his actions immediately following the baptism as being led (Mt 4:1; Lk 4:1), even "driven" (Mk 1:12; "spirit" can also mean wind, a mighty wind [Ac 2:2]), by the Spirit. And Luke continues by making the action of the Spirit behind Jesus' new public ministry a theme (see Section 6). Jesus was now being led by the Spirit in a way in which he was not led before, or at least in a way which he had not yet displayed.

In John, the reception of the awareness-giving Counselor first occurs on Easter, where it is clearly an event empowering the apostles' presbyterial mission:

"As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he has said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:21-23).²

But the change caused in Jesus at the baptism went beyond his undertaking a new vocation. His behavior changed so dramatically after the descent of the Spirit that his family and friends at Nazareth thought he was out of his mind (Mk 3:21). The descent of the Spirit was a before/after event for Jesus that was surpassed only by his death and resurrection.

The descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism is a more important event than another event that seems to have led to a change in Jesus' behavior, the Transfiguration. Not until after the Transfiguration did Jesus begin to teach about his passion. At the Transfiguration, however, only the Father and the Son are mentioned as appearing, while all three persons of the Trinity appear at the baptism; also, the Father's words at the Transfiguration are addressed to the apostles, not to Jesus. In fact the theophany at the baptism is the only

place in the whole of Scripture where all the members of the Trinity appear at the same time as distinct from one another. The Synoptics' authors were obviously trying to call attention to the importance of the change that took place in Jesus' life at his baptism.

And they must have known that their readers would understand what they were calling attention to. The authors of all the gospels link the Spirit's descent on Jesus with their readers' empowering reception of the Spirit through the prophecy that Jesus "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mt 3:1; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). And Acts explicitly links the prophecy of the baptism in the Holy Spirit to the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost.

As I (Peter) began to speak (to the Roman centurion's household), the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Ac 11:15-16).

At Pentecost there was clearly a change in the disciple's consciousness, as there was at other descents of the Spirit recorded in Acts (2:12-18; 8:18-19; 10:44-47; 19:6). The Spirit's descent at Pentecost was a before/after event in the lives of the disciples equally as dramatic as the descent on Jesus. As with Jesus, it made the difference between apostles who did and did not undertake their ministry publicly. And where the change in Jesus' behavior made family and friends think he was out of his mind (Mk 3:21), the change in the apostles made people think they were drunk (Ac 2:15). Since all the evangelists link the Spirit's consciousness-changing descent on Jesus to his baptizing us with the Spirit, Acts must be saying that the change in the apostle's consciousness at Pentecost was the same as the change in consciousness of divine sonship and the Father's love that happened to Jesus at his baptism. (Awareness of union with God is, ipso facto, awareness of his unfathomable love for us.)

And all the evangelists must be assuming that their readers, who had themselves had the empowering reception of the Spirit, would understand what that change was: a consciousness of God as a Trinitarian family and a consciousness that we are truly partici-

pating in that family's life as sons and daughters. Both Johanine theology and the theology of the three Synoptics associate the empowering reception of the Spirit with that Trinitarian awareness of God dwelling in us. The discourse at the last supper told us that the Counselor would make us aware of himself, of Jesus' union with the Father, and of our sharing in that union through the mutual indwelling of Jesus in us and we in Jesus. In the Synoptics Jesus' baptism results in an awareness of the Father and Spirit as distinct from each other and of his status as the Father's beloved Son. The early Christians, the readers for which the gospels were intended, must have known that the event they had experienced and called "receiving the Holy Spirit" included a Trinitarian familial and filial change in their consciousness. If not, the evangelists would have had to expect their readers to ask, bewilderedly, "What in heaven's name are you talking about" or "Why didn't anything like that happen to us when we were prayed with to receive the Spirit?"

What about Paul? He also refers to receiving the Spirit as a conscious event when he argues against the circumcision faction in Galatia; if it was not a conscious event, the point of his argument would have been lost on the Galatians.

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? . . . Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? . . . Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:2-5).

And the consciousness Paul associates with the empowering reception of the Spirit is Trinitarian and filial, just as it is in the gospels:

Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!" (read: "Daddy!"; Gal 4:6).

You have received the Spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our Spirit that we are children of God (Rm 8:15-16).

In the last two texts, Paul is again arguing from his readers' consciousness of their

sonship; otherwise, he could not expect them to understand what he was talking about. Paul's readers were conscious of having received the Spirit, and receiving the Spirit made them conscious of God's fatherhood and their sonship. So it made them aware of the existence of the Trinity and their participation in the Trinity's life. Consciousness of being God's child is consciousness of sharing his life; so it is also consciousness of God's living in us. Thus in Galatians it is the Spirit who cries "Daddy!"; in Romans it is we who cry it. The Trinity's life is our life. (Note that theologically what is expressed by Paul's "Daddy!" is the same thing expressed by Mark and Luke's "You are my beloved Son . . ."; for the Father and Son share the one divine relation, spirating-the-Spirit, that originates the one Sigh of divine love. In itself the Holy Sigh of love contains the divine nature WORD-lessly [Rm 8:26], but our created participation in the spirating/Spirit co-relations requires both Paul's and the Synoptic's forms of expression. We need both to *hear* the divine Sigh breathed by the Father as an expression of his love for us and to *ex-spire* the divine Sigh as an expression of his son' and daughters love for him.)

The consciousness Paul appeals in Galatians went beyond faith, since he tells the Galatians that we acquire it only through faith, which must therefore exist already. If the empowering reception of the Spirit did not include a consciousness that went beyond faith, Paul could not have also expected his readers to understand him when he called the Spirit a "pledge" (also translated "deposit," "down payment," and "guarantee") "of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Eph 1:14; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5). The word translated "pledge" does not mean a merely verbal promise but something concrete of physical value given as proof of the intention to pay fully later. Giving a deposit for something is precisely the opposite of asking the receiver to rely solely on faith in your promise to pay. If Paul was asking his readers just to make an act of faith that they had received the Spirit, there would be no point in calling the Spirit a pledge. That would be like the buyer of a house or car telling the seller "You don't have to ask me for a partial payment first because you can have faith in me when I say I intend to pay fully; isn't my promise to pay fully as good as a down pay-

ment?" (Paul is probably also referring to the consciousness-changing aspect of receiving the Spirit when he says the pledge has been "put in our hearts" [2 Cor 1:22; Rm 5:5].)

3.

The promised mission-empowering reception of the Spirit, then, includes as an essential element a conscious illumination concerning the nature of the grace already received at baptism, an illumination concerning what Christianity is. In all cases in Acts the illumination causes overflowing joy; so it is an illumination that brings an appreciation of what we are newly conscious of. It was also an appreciative awareness in Jesus, as Section 6 will show. The virtue of faith gives a certitude that can cause us to have peace and joy (for example, the joy of Christians who had not yet received the Spirit in Acts 8:8 and 8:39, or the joy of the apostles on Easter in Jn 20:20, before Jesus breathed the Spirit on them). But we can make acts of faith without having peace or joy. In contrast, the new awareness of God's indwelling at Pentecost necessarily caused peace and joy. Compare reading essays on art and humor to experiencing a great work of art or getting a funny joke. We can understand and agree with everything said in those essays without having the pleasure the topics of those essays give us. But seeing or hearing a great work of art cannot fail to please us when we are properly disposed; nor can getting a good joke fail to move us toward some physical expression like smiling or laughing. We may be able to choose not to express our pleasure physically, but we cannot choose not to be pleased if, when properly disposed, we see a great work of art or get a good joke. Similarly, the awareness of God's presence that being baptized in the Spirit gave the first Christians could not fail to produce peace and joy, because it was an awareness of the cause of the peace and joy.

Now compare the joy that being baptized in the Spirit gave the disciples in Acts with the joy that Paul commands us to have. "Rejoice always, . . . give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Th 5:16-18). "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice" (Phil 4:4). Paul is telling us to make an act of choice to be joyful, for example, to choose to thank God in all circumstances no matter what they may be. But we cannot produce the kind of joy the Spirit

gave the disciples by choice. It would even be superfluous to try. Imagine someone needing to tell those who received the Spirit in the various accounts in Acts "Come on, you guys, be more joyful!"

When Paul made those exhortations to be joyful, he knew he was speaking to people who had the joy-causing awareness of the Spirit in the past. So he was saying, in effect, "Because you know from past experience just how great this gift you have received, union with God, is you should now exercise the life you have been given by making a choice to be joyful. That's one thing the joy-producing awareness of this life was for, to make you more able to choose to be joyful now. Your choices are what count in the last analysis. All other gifts, great as they may be, are just aids to living the life of sanctifying grace by making loving choices. So intend to rejoice (that is, repent of not rejoicing) and, through faith in God's presence confirmed by a past joy-causing awareness that went beyond faith, choose to rejoice now. You know through faith confirmed that when you do so, God will be causing the choice in you. So if you think you can't make that choice, ask God for the grace to do it, and then make the choice, no matter how unjoyful you may feel right now, knowing by confirmed faith (1) that the choice to be joyful is compatible with having opposite feelings and (2) that God will answer our prayer by creating a choice to rejoice in us, if we just let him."

If we make that prayer in faith and repentance, we have already chosen to rejoice, no matter how we feel, because we have already received God's actual grace for wanting to rejoice and, by choosing to make that prayer, allowed the grace to do its work in us. (See Section 4 of Chapter 2.)

Priests or deacons need to know that their joy should fundamentally come, not from the graces specific to ordination, but from the graces of confirmation that they share with all Christians. Luke clearly implies this. In Luke, the apostles were made sacramental ministers before Pentecost, when Jesus said "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). So the overflowing joy they displayed at Pentecost came not from ordination but from the descent of the Spirit that they shared with the other disciples in the upper room. No doubt the call to, and recep-

tion of, ordination should be a cause of additional joy, great additional joy. But as Jesus told the rejoicing disciples when they returned from their first mission, "Do not rejoice so much in the fact that the devils are subject to you as that your names are inscribed in heaven" (Lk 10:20; NAB).

The presbyterial empowering by the Holy Spirit in the fourth gospel is consistent with Luke. Jn 20:20-23 does not specifically associate joy with that event; rather it says the apostles rejoiced prior to that event, when they saw the risen Jesus. On the other hand, the fourth gospel's discourse at the last supper strongly implies that the coming of the Paraclete will cause joy, so much so that

"It is much better for you that I go. If I fail to go, the Paraclete will never come to you, whereas if I go, I will send him to you." (Jn 16:7)

So the fourth gospel does not contradict Luke's implication that the basic cause of joy is the grace of confirmation rather than of ordination.

4.

Since confirmation is the continuation of the empowering reception of the Holy Spirit, an appreciative awareness of the gift of God that we already have is meant to be an essential element of what confirmation gives us. I believe, therefore, that the main purpose of this chapter has been accomplished, namely, to show that we can count on the collateral gift of an appreciative awareness of the gift of God being obtainable by asking for it with faith and repentance.

But the objective theological point of view is never as simple as that uncomplicated non-analytic appreciative awareness is itself. Again,

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.³ (Mt 11:25-26; Lk 10:21-24)

Noticing the consciousness-changing aspect of the Spirit's work raises several questions:

After baptism makes the Trinity fully present within us, why is a further way of receiving the

Spirit needed? Was the overflowing joy caused by the empowering reception of the Spirit in Acts only something meant for the early Church, because the Church needed it to get started? If not, why is that kind of joy not more common today? Etc. Having gone this far, I can hardly ignore questions like that. So, many readers may not find most of the following sections of this chapter relevant (but those not convinced that ordained ministers' joy should mainly come from confirmation should read all the remaining sections). For those readers who are not interested in further theological analysis, however, let me first try to forestall some possible pastoral misunderstandings of what I have said about confirmation so far.

First, there need be no conscious effects at the time of the administering of confirmation, or any of the sacraments; the conscious effects that come from a sacrament can occur at any time. And if Aquinas is right, as I believe he is, the effects of a sacrament can even occur before the sacrament is administered. He tells us that the baptized can obtain the graces of confirmation and the Eucharist by desire before receiving the actual sacraments, just as non-Christians can obtain the graces of baptism by desire. (The permanent character that is a grace of some sacraments may be an exception requiring the administering of the sacrament.) He also tells us that those who are baptized are given the grace they need to desire the further graces of confirmation and the Eucharist.⁴ So all that those who have not yet been confirmed need to do to receive its graces is to cooperate with other graces they have already received through baptism.

Second, and more importantly, the fact that God will provide an appreciative awareness of his indwelling through confirmation does not obviate the need to frequently proclaim the glory of God's gift to both the confirmed and the not yet confirmed. Sacramental grace is meant to bear fruit through our on-going interactions between the brothers and sisters (Heb 10:24-25), especially interactions with other brothers and sisters, clergy and lay, who have pastoral ministries (Eph 4:11-12, 16). In order for an appreciative awareness of the Trinity's presence to develop, we normally first have to hear that presence proclaimed

clearly and believe it. But even clarity is not enough in the case of God's indwelling. We need to hear our glorious union with God proclaimed frequently, since it is much easier to focus on the visible than the invisible aspects of Christianity. The conversion of Pat, whom we discussed in Chapter 4, can also teach us about the importance of proclaiming the greatness of God's gift to those who have not experienced it. Pat testifies that while on that retreat he became directly aware of God really dwelling within him. "No one had to tell me; I knew it for myself." He had an interior experience. But would he have correctly understood what that experience was if he had not previously been told what Christianity is? I doubt it. The awareness that the gospels and Paul promise us from empowerment by the Spirit does not replace faith; it builds on faith. And faith comes through hearing (Rm 10:17).

And Catholics have to be reminded of the glory we received at baptism even after we have been confirmed. To achieve the fruits of the sacraments, the pastoral work of the Church cannot stop after the preparation for and administering of a sacrament. In dealing with the Corinthians Paul found out that their previous empowering reception of the Spirit did not prevent them from backsliding. The new consciousness of union with God they had received was a necessary condition for full cooperation with grace, but not a sufficient condition without continuing repentance. Still, that fact did not stop Paul from invoking their union with God, confirmed by their past empowering reception of the Spirit, as the main motivation for them to reform. The pastoral lesson we should learn from Paul is that even those blessed in the past with the confirming awareness of the Trinity's indwelling need to be frequently reminded of the glorious nature of what Christianity is.

In Chapter 3, I cited most of the places where our first pastors reminded us to love, not just all human beings, but our fellow Christians. I cited so many places to indicate how seriously those pastors took their obligation to fulfill Jesus' pastoral commandment, the New Law for Christians to unite in love with their fellow Christians. I would not even try to cite most of the places where those men made the pastoral judgment to remind their readers, in different ways, of the glory of God's gift, divinizing grace. The authors of the epistles did

that so frequently and in so many ways that there are too many places to cite. (Although our first pastors had many ways of expressing the glory of being Christian, not all of those ways are equally clear in today's culture, as we have already seen.) Yet those authors were assuming their readers had already received a confirming consciousness of that glory at their empowering reception of the Spirit.

If those Christians needed to be reminded of what the gift of God is, so do we, no matter what our stage of growth. Don't all Christians need to be reminded frequently of the need to love their brother and sister Christians as Jesus loves them? Then they need to be reminded at least as frequently of the reason that love is deserved: the union of each Christian with the infinitely glorious Trinity. Don't all Christians need to be reminded frequently of the need to love all human beings enough to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice" (Rm 12:1) for your neighbor's salvation? Then they need to be reminded at least as frequently of the dignity that is the reason all human beings deserve that love: the fact that we are all created for the glorious purpose of being people in whom the Trinity lives its infinite life.

I give some final practical recommendations in Section 11. Now back to theological analysis.

5.

The reason we need any sacraments after baptism is that the way the Trinity lives its life in us develops, and if it doesn't develop as it should, we can lose the Trinity's life. Grace presupposes and perfects nature. The way the Trinity lives its life in us must be consistent with the kind of nature they chose to give us, a nature that requires us to continually undergo change. So one reason we need sacraments after baptism is to restore us to the Trinity's life if we have lost it, or at least to heal the wounds our failure to live that life as we should may have left. But there are other reasons the development of baptismal grace requires additional sacraments.

The entire purpose of grace in us, and so of the development of grace, is to enable us to make and carry out choices to do God's will. That applies to both sanctifying and actual

grace and was true of Jesus as well as us. The sacraments after baptism relate to our choices to do God's will in a number of ways. One way is by affecting the manner in which we choose to do God's will, that is, the quality of our response to him. All the sacraments strengthen or remove obstacles to the desire to obey God; they enable us to make and carry out choices to obey him with more readiness, ease, courage and joy. Another way that some sacraments affect our obedience to God is by empowering us to make and carry out specific kinds of choices, like the choices to be spouses, deacons, presbyters and bishops.⁵

As a continuation of the changes that occurred in Jesus at his baptism and in the disciples at Pentecost, the graces of confirmation affect choices in both of these ways. First, the change in consciousness caused in Jesus at his baptism and in the disciples at Pentecost was a grace that affected their manner of doing God's will, enabling them to do it not out of compulsion or fear but freely and joyfully, in other words, out of love. That is what the devout (Ac 2:5) Jewish audience that heard Peter's first proclamation of the Great News would have understood when he said:

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." (Ac: 2:16-17; Jl 3:1-5)

And when he said:

. . . and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Ac 2:38)

For they would have understood Joel's and Peter's references to the Holy Spirit in the light of Ezekiel's prophecies:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. (36:26-27)

Behold, they say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost" . . . Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves . . . And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live. (37:11-14)

And they would have understood Ezekiel's identification of receiving the Spirit with getting a new heart of flesh, by which God will cause them to obey his ordinances, in the light of Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant in which God's law will be their own interior law, since he will write his law on their hearts and everyone will know the Lord personally, that is, with a kind of knowledge that does not come just from the teaching of others:

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel . . . not like the covenant which I made with their fathers. . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts No longer will each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. (Jr 31:31-34)

Peter, by saying that the disciples had received the Holy Spirit and telling devout Jews that they could receive him, was telling them that, if they repented and believed the Great News about Jesus, these well known prophecies would at last be fulfilled in their lives. (Luke knew how devout Jews would interpret Peter's words because he is the only Evangelist who specifically refers [20:22] to Jeremiah's prophecy and is the synoptic author who most emphasizes the fulfillment of Ezekiel's. Notice that Joel's "young, old, masters, servants, sons and daughters" [3:1] echoes Jeremiah's "from the least of them to the greatest.") So these prophecies tell us a lot about what the graces of the sacrament of confirmation are.

The conversion of Pat illustrates how confirmation fulfills these prophecies. Again, he testifies that while on that retreat he became directly and personally aware of God really dwelling within him. "No one had to tell me; I knew it for myself." Yet he has no recollection of having heard of Jeremiah's prophecy, "No longer will each man teach his brother . . . saying 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me" (31:34). Pat says he was also directly aware, no one had to tell him, that the graces he was experiencing were what the Baltimore Catechism had promised him he would receive from his confirmation, which happened 10 years earlier with no conscious effects. There was now, however, a difference in the way he interpreted what that catechism was saying.

The catechism said confirmation would make him a "soldier of Christ." There is nothing wrong with using military metaphors for aspects of Christianity; Scripture does. But unless we know that confirmation does more than make us "soldiers of Christ," we have a truncated idea of what the descent of the Holy Spirit did in Jesus and in the early Christians. The majority of the Pentecost homilies I have heard described what happened to the disciples as a change from fear to courage. That may be the source of the military metaphor for confirmation. And a change from fear to courage may indeed have been an aspect of what happened to them, even an important aspect. But nowhere in Scripture is the reason for the disciple's previous lack of evangelizing explained as fear; rather Luke explains it as obedience to Jesus' order to wait for "the promise of my Father" (Lk 24:29; Ac 1:4. Notice that Jesus' calling the Spirit "the promise of my Father" may be an echo of Jesus' baptism where his new awareness of God as his Father was accompanied by a new awareness of the Spirit as a role player distinct from but side-by-side with the Father and himself in the work of our deification.)

More importantly, at none of the other baptisms in the Spirit described in Acts is a change from fear to courage even relevant (8:15-19; 10:44-47; 11:15-17; 19:2-16); yet Acts tells us the same blessing had occurred at Pentecost. Nor would a change from fear to courage been relevant to what happened to Jesus at his baptism. But the New Testament authors who speak of receiving the Spirit expected their readers to believe that what happened to them when they received the Spirit is what happened to Jesus.

If making us soldiers of Christ does not express the core of what confirmation does for us, what does? I suggest that Pat's experience is good illustration of what the change at Pentecost principally was. He had not been turned off by the military character of the catechism's metaphor. But though he now had a great desire to share divine life with others, he knew that the nature of that desire was love, not militancy. That was part of his awareness of the Trinity living its life in him: God had given him divine life; divine life is love; divine life is love seeking nothing but the salvation of all human beings; and divine life is mutual

love between the human beings who already have the Trinity's life. He knew that the desire to share Jesus that he was interiorly experiencing was the life of God that he was interiorly experiencing, love. In being directly aware that he was experiencing the graces of confirmation, Pat now realized that confirmation empowered him for Christian mission by freeing him to love.

There appear to be two distinct aspects to the New Covenant Jeremiah promised, the promise Ezekiel said would be accomplished by God putting his own Spirit within us. One aspect is that God's law will be so interiorized in us that we will obey it because of inner desire rather than because of outer compulsion: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts." In other words, we will obey God out of love, which is what the law written on our hearts commands. The other aspect is that each of us will have a personal knowledge of God: "No longer will each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me." The link between these aspects of the New Covenant is anything but accidental. Free choices must be based on knowledge of what we are doing; to the extent that we are inculpably unaware of what is at stake in a choice, we are not morally responsible. Since love comes through knowledge of the object of love, for a choice made out of love to be free and responsible, a certain degree of knowledge of the loved object is presupposed.

We have seen that the gospel writers and Paul testify that the descent of the Spirit brought a change in Jesus' and the early Christians' awareness of the Trinity's indwelling. It brought an interior awareness of the Trinity within them, and so a personal awareness. Why couldn't it be the apostle's awareness of God's love dwelling within them that moved them and freed them on Pentecost, as it moved and freed Pat on his retreat, to let the rest of us know about what Jesus did for us? The virtue the apostles were most exercising was love. The empowering reception of the Holy Spirit caused them to have the kind of love for the rest of us that can only come from knowing the glory all of us are made to attain. Isn't love of country the main motivation to volunteer for military service in war? Don't we admire

those who volunteer in war, not just for courage in general, but for having a love of country strong enough to overcome the fear of death or injury?

Wasn't the core virtue motivating Jesus' decision to undertake his public ministry love? All the Trinity's love was present in Jesus before his baptism, but at his baptism the Trinity began living their life in Jesus' humanity in a new way. They were newly manifesting the divine life, love, already completely present in Jesus, as it is already completely present in us at baptism. The verb, "manifesting," does not imply that the change in the way the Trinity lived its life in Jesus only had the appearance of being important; for Jesus' humanity this new way of living the Trinity's life must have been as profound a change as occurred to the disciples at Pentecost.

In other words,

the graces of confirmation give us a sufficient awareness of God's goodness to follow him out of love and not just out of fear of punishment or desire for reward (although neither of those motives are wrong in themselves).

We know God's goodness by knowing his love for us. We know God's love for us to whatever extent, imperfect as it must be, that we know the greatness of the gift of God. The graces of confirmation must include a sufficient awareness of how great his inexpressible gift is that we can act out of love for God alone. In this way confirmation fulfills the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Joel.

6.

Still, there must be more to be said about confirmation to understand why we need it after being baptized (by water or desire). Since baptism gives us the gift of the divine life, we don't need confirmation to have the virtues of faith and love; so without confirmation we are capable of having a salvific awareness that Trinity is present in us and of doing things out of love of God for his own sake.

Scripture teaches that Jesus' baptism at the Jordan gave him a new awareness of the Father and Spirit and his relations to them. It also teaches that what happened to Jesus at

the Jordan is what happened to Christians who had already received divinizing grace, like the disciples at Pentecost and the baptized converts in Samaria, and so already had the virtues of faith and love. And the Church teaches that confirmation is the continuation of what that new way of receiving the Spirit did in Jesus' and the early Christians' human natures. Since love comes from knowledge, whatever the differences were between the manners in which Jesus and the early Christians made acts of love (with more ease, joy, readiness, courage and so on) before and after the descent of the Spirit, those differences presupposed a way of being aware of the Trinity's indwelling that was new and so went beyond the awareness the virtue of faith gave.

How can we understand the difference between the disciples' ways of being aware of the gift of God before and after Pentecost? Since the baptized can obtain the graces of confirmation by desire before receiving the actual sacrament, we should not expect to find empirical evidence of that difference in the behavior of the baptized who have not yet been confirmed and those who have. Instead, we have to look at the empirical evidence about what Scripture and tradition intend to tell us about confirmation.

Again, the entire purpose of the development of grace in us, and so of the sacraments after baptism, is to cause us to make and carry out choices to do God's will. Affecting the manner in which we make those choices is only one of the things sacramental grace does. Some sacraments do this by empowering choices of specific kinds, like marrying and accepting a holy order. The sacraments of marriage and the holy orders empower first a unique lifetime choice and then the later choices needed to fulfill the initial choice. Like marriage and the holy orders confirmation is conferred only once. Are the graces of confirmation associated with the making and carrying out of a specific kind of choice, as are graces of marriage and ordination? In fact there is evidence in Scripture and tradition that supports this view. And the way confirmation is related to a specific kind of choice can explain the difference between the ways we are able to be aware of the gift of God before and after confirmation. What kind of choice made by Jesus at his baptism and by the disciples at

Pentecost would confirmation be meant to bring about in us?

Fortunately, Luke has Jesus give us a personal description of what happened when John baptized him. It appears in the following narrative where Luke is telling us what occurred immediately after the baptism. Note that the narrative is obviously intended to be unified by the theme of attributing Jesus' actions to the Spirit that descended on him at the same time the Father gave Jesus a new awareness that "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:22).

And Jesus, full of the Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness. . . . And he returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. . . . And he came to Nazareth . . . He went to the synagogue . . . There was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it is written,

(Now note that Luke could hardly fail to be aware that the first words of Jesus' public ministry that he chooses to quote continue the theme of what descent of the Spirit did in Jesus.)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

 (Is 61:1-2)

And he closed the book He began to say to them:

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk 4:1-21)

Here, Luke has Jesus explain what happened at his baptism to family and friends who could see but not accept (4:23-30) or understand (Mk 3:21) the before/after change that had taken place in him. Jesus is newly conscious (conscious for the first time or at least in a dramatic new way) the he is the one who fulfills this prophecy. The fact that Luke shows Jesus addressing neighbors and relatives when he says "Today this scripture has

been fulfilled," is significant. Given Luke's theme of what the newly descended Spirit was now doing in Jesus, wouldn't Luke expect his readers to understand that Jesus' family and friends would interpret his words this way:

Today, that is, now that I have returned from my trip to find John the Baptist, this prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled. The last time I saw you before I left on my trip, it was not fulfilled (or at least I was not aware of its fulfillment in the way that I am now); now it is fulfilled due to what happened to me after I left you. What happened made me certain that the Spirit of the Lord was upon me and moving me to start actively fulfilling this prophecy."

What Jesus was newly conscious of includes being given a mission: "He (the Lord and/or the Spirit of the Lord) has sent me to . . ." It includes being given power for the mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to . . ." And obviously it includes being conscious that the source of that power is "the Spirit of the Lord" acting on and through him. Since what happened in Jesus at his baptism predicts what happened in the disciples at Pentecost, the disciples' consciousness would have changed in the same ways. In Jesus' case what happened included an awareness that he was to proclaim the imminent coming of the Kingdom, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." In the apostles case it included an awareness that they were proclaiming that the acceptable year of the Lord had already come and the Kingdom had begun.

In a necessarily true sense, Jesus received the whole of his mission at conception, just as the whole of the Trinity's life entered his human nature then. Likewise, the disciples already had the whole of the Trinity's life through sanctifying grace prior to Pentecost. Still, a created event first occurred in Jesus' human nature at the Jordan that also occurred to the disciples on Pentecost. Before the descent of the Holy Spirit on him, Jesus did not pursue his ministry; neither did the apostles. In both cases, the pursuit of their ministries is a direct result of the descent of the spirit.

Jesus' mission was to give divine life to other human beings. The mission the disci-

ples received at Pentecost was a participation in Jesus' mission of giving divine life to human beings. But what the disciples were aware of at Pentecost was more than that they were completing Jesus' mission; they also knew, at least in a new way, that they were Jesus continuing his work of salvation by being through them really present, bodily, in the world.

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me ?

"Who are you, Lord?"

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." (Ac 9:4-5)

Luke wanted us to know that the very first thing revealed to Saul/Paul, after the revelation that Jesus was indeed alive, was that Jesus was really present in his disciples, and they really present in him, so truly that in persecuting them he was persecuting Jesus himself. Just as Jesus of Nazareth began his public ministry on becoming newly aware of the union of his humanity with the Trinity, the apostles began theirs on becoming newly aware of their union with the Trinity through their union with the humanity of Jesus.

The graces of all the sacraments are for the sake of causing (Ez 36:27) choices to do God's will. Confirmation does this by continuing what happened at the descent of the Holy Spirit at the Jordan and on Pentecost. The Spirit gave Jesus and the disciples the grace to make and carry out a specific kind of choice, the choice to accept a specific mission, a mission that is incomparably glorious and necessary, the only one that really needs to be done in the last analysis: the sharing of divine life with humankind. It was also a choice to fulfill this mission not just by human power but by letting the divine power do its work.

7.

But there is more. In making the choice to accept this mission Jesus and the disciples would have known that they were not just choosing to perform a few temporary tasks. They would have knowingly been making a choice of a lifetime mission, just as spouses and ordained ministers knowingly make a unique choice to accept lifetime vocations. And while each of the disciples could also choose other lifetime missions — for example, all the apostles except Paul were married (1 Co 9:5) — they would have known that the mission of

sharing divine life with humankind was incomparably more important and more exalted than any other mission they could have. In knowingly accepting this mission they would have been making a definitive choice of sharing the Kingdom with others as their incomparably most important lifetime mission.

In effect, then, Luke 4 has Jesus explain the change in him at his baptism this way, "I now know in a definitive way that I have been sent to be the Messiah. I know that being the Messiah is the very meaning of my human existence. I know that only I can do the work without which nothing else can ever matter, the work of saving my people. I know that I have been fully empowered to do everything needed to accomplish this work. I know this because of the new way both the Father and the Holy Spirit have made me conscious of my relations to them and theirs to me."

What the Spirit newly did in Jesus' and the disciples' human natures, then, was to move them to make a definitive lifetime choice of bringing divine life to others, along with supplying their human natures with the power to successfully fulfill that choice. Moving Jesus to make and carry out that choice meant giving him new graces, not in the sense that he did not already possess all grace, but in the sense that the Trinity, already whole and entire within his human nature, willed that the way it lived its life in him would undergo a development. That development is the grace that is distinctive to the sacrament of confirmation, namely, the moving of our will (1) to accept the lifetime mission to bring the divine life that we have already received in baptism to others, and (2) to accept and fulfill it joyfully and freely because we want to do it out of God's love, as promised by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

To describe the choice that confirmation calls us to a definitive lifetime choice does not mean that we are never able to go back on the choice once made, anymore than failing to live up to the obligations of marriage or ordination would mean that our original acceptance of these lifetime vocations was not a definitive choice. What matters is whether the choice, if made with a sufficiently mature awareness of what is at stake, was for a lifetime in

intention. That is probably what the fathers and Aquinas mean when they say that confirmation is the sacrament of "perfection" or of "the fullness of grace." They, of course, cannot mean that a confirmed person is made perfect in sanctity or will never receive further grace. But confirmation enables us to have the sincere and maturely conscious intention to be perfect and to cooperate with all future grace. In the case of marriage and ordination, if the choice is not for a lifetime in intention, there is not a valid sacrament to begin with. In the case of a choice following a valid confirmation, if the choice were not for a lifetime in intention, there would not yet be full cooperation with confirmation's graces. But as repentance illustrates, good intentions are not enough. After our acceptance of the initial grace of marriage, ordination or confirmation, we continue to rely on the grace of the sacrament to make the choices needed to fulfill our chosen missions.

Love presupposes knowledge, and for someone to make any definitive lifetime choice to love with sufficient knowledge of what they are doing a certain degree of maturity is required. We would not hold a 10-year old to a commitment to marriage or the religious life, no matter how sincerely and consciously it was made at the time. Since children are capable of exercising the gift of faith, the loving choice confirmation enables requires an awareness of God's goodness, and so of what God's gift is, that goes beyond what faith alone provides. As part of its promise of the Holy Spirit, Scripture promises those who already have the virtue of faith a new and deeper awareness of our union with God. The sacrament of confirmation is meant to give that deeper awareness for the sake of our making a specific kind of mature choice.

What are the differences between the ways we are able to be aware of the Trinity's indwelling before and after confirmation? Whatever else we can say, I believe the crucial difference is this:

Unlike the awareness of the goodness of God and his gift that comes just from faith, the awareness confirmation gives is sufficient for a mature definitive choice of the lifetime mission to share God's gift with others, a choice made out of love, rather

than fear of punishment or desire for reward.

Someone with faith can certainly make choices out of love of God for his own sake. But the awareness of the gift of God, and so of how good God is, that faith gives is also compatible with choosing out of fear or self-interest. The awareness of God's indwelling that confirmation gives for the sake of enabling us to choose our mission is in no way compatible with choosing it merely out of fear or self-interest. It is possible for someone with faith to choose God's will out of fear or self-interest. It is not possible to make the choice that the grace specific to confirmation calls us to that way. When we make that choice because we are permitting the grace of confirmation to cause it in us (Ez 36:27), we are choosing because we are letting God give us a new heart (Ez 36:26) with his law of love written on it (Jr 31:33), that is, we are permitting him to make his love our love. Causally prior to that choice is a personal awareness of God's goodness (Jr 31:34) sufficient for the kind of consciously definitive loving choice that "drove" (Mk 1:12) Jesus' and the apostles' lifetime mission.

Again, let me try to forestall some misunderstandings that could have adverse pastoral consequences. For one thing, that the grace of confirmation is not compatible with a choice made out of fear or self-interest alone does not mean that we cannot make a definitive life's choice with those motives only. It just means that if we do so, we have not responded to the grace specific to confirmation. We might be making the specific kind of choice confirmation calls us to but not in the specific manner that confirmation enables us to make it. And even if we fully cooperate with confirmation's graces when we first make our unique choice of lifetime mission, we may not fully cooperate with its graces every time we make a later choice needed to fulfill that mission.

For another thing, our initial choice of lifetime mission need not be as dramatic as it was in Jesus and in the apostles. Not being in any way as dramatic may even be normal for that choice. Consider a confirmed adult who is asked to pray for a spiritual intention like the conversion of Uncle Al. She may have prayed for conversions many times before. But now for the first time, while she is aware of performing this concrete act of prayer, she is simul-

taneously aware that this act is an instance of the most important kind of thing she can do with her life other than achieving personal sanctity. So she consciously chooses the act as an instance of the most important mission she now wants her life to fulfill, helping other people get to heaven. For the first time her choice to pray amounts to a definitive lifetime choice because the Lord makes her sufficiently aware of what the gift of God she is praying for really is, and/or of the fact that her having the gift of God gives her the power to give it to others, and/or of the fact that helping others live divine life is the most important mission she can have in life. When she prayed for conversions before, she may have been aware of one or more of these things, but not sufficiently aware of all to make a definitive lifetime choice. Perhaps only one element necessary for the choice to amount to a definitive acceptance of a lifetime mission was missing. So the element God now adds to the awareness her motivation is based on might seem just a natural outgrowth of what she already knows, not something dramatically new but just the next logical step. God, however, has now made her sufficiently aware of all these things that her present choice to pray for Uncle Al's conversion de facto becomes a mature decision — a decision "only" implicit in her explicit decision concerning Al but one sufficiently conscious to be definitive — about what she most wants to do for the rest of her life.

And when she makes that de facto definitive decision, some or all the elements that maturely motivate it may not even be in the foreground of her mind. What is in the foreground might still be the specific conversion she is praying for, as she has prayed for conversions in the past. But now for the first time her conscious intention includes a sufficient background awareness of what is at stake that her decision amounts to a definitive "Yes" to the call to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice" (Rm 12:1). So the difference between this choice to pray for conversion and previous ones may not be dramatic at all.

Other kinds of choices can illustrate the same point. A person may begin choosing to avoid a particular sin out of fear of punishment. At some later time he may begin choosing to avoid it out of the virtue of hope for eternal reward. Finally, he may begin choosing to

avoid it mainly out of love for God for his sake. Such changes might be dramatic in an experiential sense, but they might not be. At each earlier stage, some of the conditions necessary for the next kind of choice may be present but not all. The final step, when all the conditions for choosing out of love are present, may be experienced just as a normal development of what has gone before. Or look back on some of your own acts of kindness that you can be reasonably sure you were not doing out of fear or hope for a reward. Was what held the foreground in your mind always that in so acting you were loving God by serving his images and likenesses, or was the content of the specific act, like the particular need and/or person you were helping or the importance of the cause you were donating money to, etc., in the foreground? Or consider the brain surgeon who has just fallen madly in love but is now performing the most dangerous surgery. If she is conscientious, the delicate hand movements needed for the surgery will be in the foreground of her mind, but that may not prevent the person she loves from being in the background of her mind the whole time.

It may be objected that in human experience successfully making and carrying out the most important decisions, and the decision we are talking about is surely among those, often require keeping the motivation for the decision in the front of our mind, especially initially, and an initial decision is what we are talking about here. When we are beginning difficult efforts to overcome a habit or acquire a new one, it is normal to have to keep reminding ourselves of all the reasons for doing so, and only after our efforts become successful do we have to re-mind ourselves of our motivations less often. Yes, but this objection actually proves my point. It is speaking of dispositions to be acquired or lost by efforts based on our own human strength. When we are talking about cooperating with grace, we are talking about dispositions and strength infused by God, not acquired by our efforts. If we need to work at a habit for the sake of our spiritual life, we acquire the strength and motivation to do it only by repenting and asking for them with faith in what Jesus did and will do for us. A better example would be the contrast between spouses who, to make their marriage work, have to keep re-minding themselves of the seriousness of their marriage vows

and those who do not have to: Having to is a sign of a troubled marriage, not a good one. The grace of confirmation is a marriage literally made in heaven.

8.

There is, however, another possible way of describing the kind of choice Jesus and the disciples were enabled to make by the empowering reception of the Spirit. Since repentance concerns sincere intentions, not the carrying out of the intentions, I used "repentance" in Chapter 2, not just for the intention to avoid sin, but for "advanced repentance" up to and including the intention to do God's will in all things. That can be called the intention of "full discipleship." It is possible to achieve salvation by avoiding mortal sin, and anyone in the state of grace deserves to be called a disciple of Christ. But if you have repented only of mortal sins, you are not a disciple in the sense of

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. . . . Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Lk 14:26-32)

A lifelong sinner who made a good confession on his death bed but repented only of mortal sin was hardly a disciple in that sense, but he is enjoying the same eternal happiness that the laborers in the vineyard who started early in the morning, and were praying for the laborers who would come later, receive. (Whatever Jesus meant by "hate" in that passage, he explicitly says it doesn't mean something that we should apply to others but not to ourselves. We are not expected to "hate" our mothers or children in any way we do not "hate" ourselves. And the commandment to love others as we love ourselves remains in effect because it remains the second greatest commandment.) What is the relation of full discipleship to the definitive choice of lifetime mission?

One way to look at it is this. Full discipleship includes the mission of helping others get to heaven, something God wants all of us to do even if failing to do it is not sinful. So making a mature lifetime choice of doing all things out of love of God, a choice of full disci-

pleshship, would amount to the kind of choice specific to the graces of confirmation that I have described. Even if we can choose lifetime discipleship without yet knowing that God has given us the power and mission to share his life with others, the graces of confirmation rather than baptism would be necessary for the choice. It is possible for someone with the baptismal virtue of faith to choose to obey God out of fear or desire for reward alone. You cannot make the choice that Jeremiah's promised personal knowledge of God, a grace of confirmation, asks of us out of fear or self-interest alone. People who are only seeking an infinite reward could think they are choosing to put God's will first in all things, but they would have to leave one thing out: loving God for his own sake, which is part of God's will for us, to say the least. Whatever Jesus meant by a true disciple having to "hate . . . even his own life," someone who is obeying God only out of a desire for a reward does not fit that category.

Of course, someone can make a choice out of love for God above all based on the awareness of God's goodness given by faith alone. And all of the choices Jesus made after the age of reason but before his baptism must have been of that kind. But even they would not be the kind of definitive choice of discipleship we are talking about. We have all been touched by stories of childhood sweethearts who grow up to be life-long spouses. While still children, though past the age of reason, they could have made many choices motivated by love without a trace of self-interest. They might have even promised everlasting love to each other. But no one would hold them morally responsible for a commitment made at that stage of maturity, no matter how sincerely and selflessly they made it. They would not yet be mature enough to have the kind of awareness of what is at stake in that choice for anyone to hold them to it. I suggest that Jesus' humanity did not always have that kind of maturity either, even after he reached the age of reason. That would not make any of his choices at that stage less out of love for God alone. It would just mean that his humanity had not reached the level of maturity needed for him to be morally responsible for choices like getting married or becoming a ministerial priest, definitive lifetime choices. Nor, there-

fore, would his humanity then be capable of the mature awareness of what is at stake that a definitive choice of lifetime full discipleship requires. So he would not yet be ready to cooperate with the graces that come from the empowering reception of the Spirit. Still, he would have had all grace within him from conception, just as those baptized and confirmed in infancy have the grace of those sacraments even though they are not ready to use them.

So the graces promised by Ezekiel and Jeremiah are necessary for a choice to be truly one of full discipleship. Those are the graces of confirmation rather than baptism. For the choice of lifetime discipleship to be definitive, it must be based on a mature awareness of what is at stake, an awareness beyond that given by the gift of faith alone. In particular, it must be based on the personal awareness of the goodness of God, and so of the inexpressible greatness of the gift of God, Jeremiah promised as part of the New Covenant.

Another way to look at it is this. The definitively conscious choice of lifetime mission that the disciples were empowered to make at Pentecost would also have been a lifetime choice of full discipleship. Since it was a lifetime choice made out of love for God for his own sake, it had to also be a choice made because they knew they should spend their lives doing God's will in all things. So anyway we look at it, the graces of confirmation as described above must be for a choice of lifetime mission that is also a choice of full discipleship, or for a choice of full discipleship that is also a choice of lifetime mission. The choice cannot be one without being the other. But describing the specific kind of choice that confirmation supports as a choice of full discipleship is probably preferable because it is more inclusive; so I believe the following revised statement of the grace specific to confirmation best captures the essence of the distinction between baptism and confirmation.

Unlike the awareness of the goodness of God and his gift that comes just from faith, the awareness confirmation gives is sufficient for a mature definitive lifetime choice of full discipleship, a choice that ipso facto is both made out of love, rather than fear of punishment or self-interest and includes, at least implicitly, the lifetime mission of helping others get to heaven.

It is theoretically possible for someone to definitively choose a lifetime of discipleship without yet realizing that it must include helping others get to heaven. If so, the initial choice of that mission would be one of the later choices caused by the grace of confirmation in order to fulfill the initial choice of discipleship.

(Before jumping from this theological analysis to the incorrect pastoral conclusion that we should tell teenage confirmation candidates they will have to spend their whole lives helping others get to heaven, please see the final practical recommendations in Section 11.)

But when the ones giving this kind of instruction are priests or deacons, to do it effectively, they need to be aware that their own joy should fundamentally come, not from the graces specific to ordination, but from the graces of confirmation that they share with all Christians. Luke makes this clear. The apostles were made Eucharistic ministers before Pentecost, when Jesus said "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). So the overflowing joy they displayed at Pentecost came not from ordination but from the descent of the Spirit that they shared with the other disciples in the upper room and continued to share with other Christians throughout Acts. The call to, and reception of, ordination should certainly be a cause of additional joy. But as Jesus told the rejoicing disciples when they completed their first mission, "Do not rejoice so much in the fact that the devils are subject to you as that your names are inscribed in heaven" (Lk 10:20; NAB).

The presbyterial empowering by the Holy Spirit in the fourth gospel is consistent with Luke. Jn 20:21-23 does not specifically associate joy with that event; rather Jn 20:20 says the apostles rejoiced prior to the event, at seeing the risen Jesus. On the other hand, the fourth gospel's discourse at the last supper strongly implies that the coming of the Paraclete will cause joy, so much so that

"It is much better for you that I go. If I fail to go, the Paraclete will never come to you, whereas if I go, I will send him to you." (Jn 16:7)

So the fourth gospel does not contradict Luke's implication that the basic cause of joy is the grace of confirmation, not ordination.

9.

The action of the Spirit that makes us aware of his interior presence is itself interior to us and is recognized as such. God's Spirit and the human spirit are parts of God's and our respective interior lives:

The Spirit scrutinizes all matters, even the deep things of God. Who, for example, knows a man's innermost self but the man's own spirit within him? Similarly, no one knows what lies at the depths of God but the Spirit of God. (1 Cor 2:10-11; NAB)

And "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rm 8:15-16). So unlike seeing a sunset, for example, this consciousness of God's presence is a consciousness of something interior. In that respect, the new awareness of God's presence is more like our awareness of an act of imagining a sunset than seeing a sunset. When we are aware that we are imagining, we are aware of something going on entirely inside us, and when we are aware of God's life being present, we are aware of it as something going on inside us. But seeing includes an awareness of something going on outside us, the action of light.

So the awareness caused by the Spirit combines characteristics found in no other awareness. It is an awareness of an activity going on within us, an activity we know we are not causing and cannot cause. Unlike awareness of a sunset, it is an awareness of something coming from within ourselves. But unlike imagining a sunset, which does come from within ourselves, it includes an awareness of our being passive with respect to the action, even though the action comes from within ourselves. Could anyone but the maker of our being produce in us something that we recognize as an intimately interior action at the same time that we recognize it as something we passively receive from an agent other than ourselves? Still, we do not know that what we are aware of must be God's presence by deductive reasoning from this unique combination of characteristics. Rather, the faith that our maker is already dwelling within us in a personal way allows us to understand what this new awareness is.

We produce an act of faith by actively choosing it. God is the cause of our making an act of faith, but he causes it by moving our will to choose to make it. The disciples, however, could not choose to have the kind of awareness of God's indwelling they had at Pentecost. Although awareness is always something active, the disciples were passive with respect to their Pentecostal awareness in the sense that they could not produce it by making a choice. God produced their new awareness of his indwelling without causing a new choice from which that awareness resulted. The new awareness presupposes that we have made the choice to repent and believe the Great News, but it adds to the kind of awareness that faith consists of without causing an additional choice on our part.

I agree those who think it probable that the joy-giving illumination of God's indwelling that occurred throughout Acts was at least the early stages of what theology later calls "infused contemplation."⁶ If the mission-empowering reception of the Spirit included more than infused contemplation, infused contemplation certainly seems to be part of the new awareness the empowering reception of the Spirit gives. If not, it would appear that the later Church lost something very important that it once had, and not just in New Testament times; the sacrament of confirmation may have been associated with an appreciative awareness of union with God for at least the first eight centuries.⁷ Infused contemplation appears to be the only later candidate for being the same new consciousness of God's presence that Jesus and the early Christians received when the Spirit descended on them.

"Contemplation," of course, designates a kind of consciousness, a consciousness that peacefully gazes on an object rather than moving from one object to another. We know that this consciousness is infused because we know that we "passively" receive it as a free gift. It is an activity but we are aware that we are not the ones causing it; we know it is not an achievement, an accomplishment, on our part. (From the scientific perspective of systematic theology infused contemplation is the highest kind of activity, since all consciousness is by nature active. But from the practical perspective of ascetical theology, both individual and pastoral, the perspective of how we cooperate with grace by the acts of choice we allow God

to create in us, infused contemplation is an activity God creates in us directly, that is, not by means of any choices on our part, although our choices to repent and believe are presupposed.)

Some common misunderstandings of infused contemplation need to be corrected in order to recognize its connection with the empowering descent of the Spirit in Scripture. Reading some authors, you might get the impression that infused contemplation is a relatively rare occurrence that only comes at a mature stage of our spiritual development. On the contrary, "Such an experience is the normal flowering of the life of grace, a fulfillment of our status as sons of God; it is called for by the very nature of grace."⁸ And it can occur at any time.

This development (the beginning of infused contemplation) follows quite diverse patterns in different people. In some it occurs early, in others late; in some it is abrupt, in others more gradual.⁹

Teresa of Avila is reputed to have received the gift of infused contemplation only after more than 18 years of lukewarmness in the convent. In fact, she tells us she was first given it, briefly, very early in religious life while she was still habituated to venial sin.¹⁰

Occasionally writers on infused contemplation can give the impression that the beginning of our contemplative awareness of some aspect of God's presence is also the beginning of the presence of that aspect in us. On the contrary, what infused contemplation usually does is make us aware of something that has already been going on within us but that we were not conscious of in this way before. For example, St. John of the Cross reports that at a very high stage of infused contemplation, he became aware that the Trinity was allowing him to participate in the very "breathing" by which the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son.¹¹ No doubt this kind of awareness of a divine operation like spiration of the Holy Spirit is an intensification of our human manner of participating in the operation, and sometimes even a kind of "perfect" or "final" intensification of it. But since the life of the Trinity is in us from baptism, the operations of the Trinity, including the spiration of the Spirit, are

going on in us from baptism.

Also, in identifying it with an awareness of our union with God, I don't mean to reduce infused contemplation to one of its dimensions: the "unitive way." Nor in speaking of being baptized in the Spirit as including an illumination of our union with God do I mean to reduce infused contemplation to the "illuminative way." It may be, though, that at some times infused contemplation makes us more conscious of God's dwelling in us, and at other times more conscious of our dwelling in God.

The misconceptions about the frequency of infused contemplation and the maturity required for it may be related to another. Spiritual authors often describe infused contemplation as taking place after an extended period of asceticism. Reliable authors will insist that we do not earn infused contemplation by ascetical practices; we merely dispose ourselves for it. Still, we can sometimes get the impression that it is necessary to dispose ourselves for the gift of contemplation by lengthy asceticism. We can even get the impression that a consecrated life as a religious or an ordained minister is normally a part of the asceticism by which we dispose ourselves; infused contemplation among the laity though possible should not be frequently expected. But if infused contemplation is part of the empowering reception of the Spirit, the only dispositions necessary for it are those the apostles asked of the first Christians, repentance and belief in the Great News about Jesus.

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." When they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Ac 2:36-38)

If, as is probable, infused contemplation was included in what happened at Pentecost, it was a normal part of Christian initiation in the primitive Church. But whether or not infused contemplation was included, an appreciative awareness of union with God appears

to have been a normal result of the sacrament of confirmation for several centuries. And diverse New Testament authors are consistent in promising that receiving the Spirit in the empowering way will give a new consciousness of our union with God.

10.

Infused contemplation is also an experiential awareness, like seeing a sunset rather than imagining one. Can we expect an experiential appreciative awareness of what Christianity is to be normal today?

Once one has taken full cognizance of the New Testament teaching on being born again in the Holy Spirit, and on being the temple in which he dwells, it is not the experience of this great mystery of faith that requires explanation, but the fact that so many Christians seem to lack this experience. . . such an experience may not be as rare as is sometimes assumed.¹²

Still, our most respected authorities on infused contemplation, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, say that not everyone in their contemplative communities had that experience. And they encouraged those who did not by telling them that what matters are not the experiences we have but doing the will of God. In discussing infused contemplation, a lifelong Catholic then in his sixties, who is very well read in the Catholic tradition and holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from a European Dominican University, told me he has never had any religious experience. Yet he seems to be a person of virtue by any acceptable standard and is a daily communicant. And how many millions of Catholics are there like him?

In relation to what is essential to salvation, doing God's will, absolutely everything else is an aid, a means to that end. Since different people receive different kinds of aids, we know that not all people require the same kinds of aids. At least some virtuous people who have not had any religious experience might even be more virtuous than those who have; for they do God's will without receiving as much help as others. And at least some virtuous people who have had religious experience might need more help to do God's will; they might receive the gift of religious experience precisely because without it they would be less

likely to do God's will than those who do not receive it.

So it appears that we should not promise all Christians an experiential awareness of their union with God. Scripture certainly promises that those who already have the gift of faith will receive a new and deeper awareness of God's indwelling from being baptized in the Spirit. But the history of infused contemplation seems to indicate that not all who are confirmed eventually have an experiential awareness of God. (When I read Lk 11:5-13, I wonder if early Christians sometimes had to wait for the experience of God's presence even after they had been prayed with to be baptized in the Spirit. The parable about a man's midnight request for help from the sleeping householder who "though he does not take care of the man because of friendship, will do so because of his persistence" might be meant to apply to the promise in the immediately following parable that "the Holy Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.")

On the other hand, an eventual experiential awareness of God's presence might be the intended norm, one of the normal lived, ex opere operantis, effects, in those who have received the sacrament of confirmation. It seems to have been the norm in the early Church for many centuries after. And those who did not enjoy infused contemplation in the communities of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila seem to have been the exception. If it is the norm, the way Christian brother/sisterhood is intended to be a normal lived effect of the Eucharist, we have been doing something wrong, again probably by way of omission rather than commission.

What should we conclude? That an appreciative awareness of union with God is not necessary for full cooperation with grace, despite Paul's relying on it to motivate the Corinthians? Or should we conclude that the needed awareness can be other than experiential? Or should we at least apply to experiential awareness in general what was said above about the beginning of infused contemplation:

This development follows quite diverse patterns in different people. In some it occurs early, in others late; in some it is abrupt, in others more gradual.¹³

However we answer those questions, when Paul invoked the Corinthians' awareness of union with God to motivate them, he could rely on more than their doctrinal faith. He relied on the empowering reception of the Spirit having caused a new joy- and peace-giving experience of their union with God; for that was the norm in the early Church. If we cannot rely on Catholics having had that kind of experience today, are this book's pastoral recommendations irrelevant because they are predicated on conditions that we cannot expect to exist?

No, Chapter 2's recommendation for making repentance and faith in Jesus' Great News the basis of our pastoring does not presuppose that an appreciative awareness of our union with God already exists. On the contrary, repentance and faith are the dispositions necessary (and sufficient, when properly understood) for getting all the other dispositions required for our full cooperation with grace. There are many different ways of being aware with our union with God. Whatever way of being aware, experiential or not, is appropriate in our case can only come through our repenting and believing the Great News of what Jesus has done for us. In the normal psychological course of events, because human nature makes it easier to focus on the visible aspects of Christianity rather than the invisible, we need to hear and believe that Christianity is the Trinity living its life within us before we acquire whatever further awareness of that truth is the kind appropriate for each of us.

Catholics should also hear about the need to appreciate the greatness of what Jesus has done for us. If the preceding analysis of the distinction between baptism and confirmation is correct, there is at least one thing we can safely say to everyone about the kind of awareness that confirmation will give us:

It is an awareness of the goodness of God and of his gift sufficient for us to make a definitive lifetime choice of full discipleship because we sincerely love God above all, and so not just because we want to avoid punishment or gain a reward.

And that is probably all we need to say when we promise Catholics the gift of an appreciation of what Christianity is.

But it is much more important to preach the objective truth about the glorious nature

of Christianity than about the need to have a subjective appreciation of that glory. God knows the kind of appreciative awareness that is appropriate for different people. But for all of us, that gift comes through faith and repentance. Faith and repentance are also subjective dispositions, but they are acquired — and nourished — through hearing objective presentations of who Jesus is, what he did for us, and the glorious gift he gives us. Faith is a subjective response to the proclamation of objective truth.

11.

Now that we have looked at the theological basis for the pastoral approach of this book, let me offer some further advice for implementing this approach.

We shouldn't frighten teens by saying that confirmation will require them to spend their whole lives helping others find sanctity. What a drag that would sound like to most of them. Since confirmation fulfills the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Joel, we have ways of presenting confirmation that are both appealing and theologically adequate. We should say confirmation will give them the ability to do God's will freely and joyfully because they will want to do God's will. Helping others, in whatever way God wants us to, will be their own desire because confirmation will let them love others with God's own love. God's love will be their love. They won't have to feel that Christianity forces them to do things they do not want to do. This fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Spirit is a theologically adequate description of what confirmation does because the concepts of lifetime full discipleship and apostolic mission are implicit in it, as we have seen. But we should not say that people will know this new freedom as soon as they are confirmed. They should know that God will be giving them the graces they need in preparation for the times when they will need them.

Also, since God intends a new and deeper appreciative awareness — whether experiential or not — of his presence to be an effect of confirmation, we should pray for Catholics, before, during and after their confirmation, with an expectant faith of their receiving it. Jesus constantly repeats, at least 13 times in Matthew alone, that faith is the key to an-

swered prayer. Again, he is not just about talking about faith as assent to doctrines, but faith that includes the virtue of hope, faith that expects a positive answer to prayers of intercession. He could hardly make it any clearer that not praying with an expectation of a positive answer is one way — along with the little matter of failing to forgive others (Mk 12:24-25) — to prevent prayer from being answered. Of course, we constantly ask, with all good intentions, for things that turn out not to be God's will. But when our prayer is a genuine cooperation with grace, we are making the prayer only because God chose to create it in us; we are just allowing him to do that. In those cases, if what we request is not his will, he must still answer positively but with something better, in fact with something that is the best possible in the circumstance. Since he has promised to answer prayers properly made, he cannot choose to give us the grace to make those prayers without meaning to answer them in the best way possible.

And when we are praying for things that are the normal intended effects of the sacraments, do we need to add "if it is your will"? Calling them "normal" implies that there can be cases in which they do not occur, even if the necessary conditions seem to have been fulfilled. Those cases might even occur more frequently than the effects intended to be "normal" in the sense, not of frequency, but of being according to a norm, of measuring up to a standard, or at least those cases might seem to occur more frequently. Christian brother/sisterhood, for example, is intended as a fruit of the Eucharist, but in the history of the Church, at least since Constantine, it has certainly resulted less often than the Eucharist has been received. This may be because other required pastoral conditions, like that of Eucharistic ministers knowing that Christian brother/sisterhood is an essential goal of their ministry, have not been fulfilled. (And perhaps the Church's history since Constantine will turn out to be just a small fraction of its complete history.) While adding "if it is your will" to a prayer is never wrong, I doubt that it is necessary when we are praying for something intended to be a normal part of the Christian life. But a more pertinent question might be in what sense we should pray with expectation, if we know that a normal result, as I and oth-

ers believe infused contemplation to be, may not always occur?

I suggest that, as a general rule, our problem is not that we expect too much from prayer but too little. At my otherwise doctrinally sound Jesuit high school in the 1950s, we were even taught not to expect miracles — a good way to prevent their occurrence, according to Jesus. Perhaps that was one fruit of our post-Vatican I hyper-rationalism; not expecting miracles was the “enlightened” position. If by “miracles” my teachers meant theological proof events like those that pass Lourdes’ tests or count toward canonization, they may have been right. But would Jesus have repeatedly exhorted us to pray with expectant faith, if he only had in mind prayer for proof events? If so and if we are not supposed to expect proof events, he was urging us to pray with faith only for the sake of disappointing our faith. A charism mentioned in 1 Co 12:9 is a type of faith that seems not to be given to all Christians, at least not in an abiding way like the theological virtue of faith; this could very well be the same as the wonder-working faith Paul mentions in 1 Co 13:2. But if that was the kind of faith Jesus had in mind in exhorting us to pray with faith, we still have a problem; for his exhortations seem to be meant for all Christians, while the charism of wonder-working faith may not be.

By telling us to pray with faith, I believe Jesus wasn’t telling us how to bring about proof events; he was telling us how Christians are supposed to get things done: not principally by their own power but by praying with expectation of the best possible result. I know of many remarkable answered prayers for healing that might not pass Lourdes’ tests. But those suffering people weren’t praying for proof events; they were praying to get better. And would they have gotten better if they had been taught not to pray with expectant faith?

Still, most prayers for healing are not answered in ways that anyone would find out of the ordinary, and how many sincere prayers do we offer for things that turn out not to be God’s will? So if having faith when we pray does not mean expecting proof events, does it mean just trusting in the sense that we are resigned to accept God’s will in the matter whatever that may be? Perhaps that is all Jesus meant, and acceptance of God’s will as what is

best is certainly one of the conditions for answered prayer. But do the contexts of Jesus' repeated "You of little faith" (Mt 14:31; 16:8; 17:17, 20) indicate that he is just saying "You of little willingness to accept not getting what you want from prayer"? As Peter was sinking in the lake, for instance, was Jesus saying "The reason you are sinking is that you were not willing beforehand to accept sinking, if that is God's will for you"? Or was Jesus saying "The reason you are sinking is that you did not trust my ability and my willingness to grant your request to walk on water"?

If expectation of theological proof events, on one hand, and "infinite resignation" to God's will, on the other, are extreme opposite interpretations of the faith Jesus promises to reward when we pray, I would like to suggest a middle ground between them: Using "normal" in the sense of according to the intended standard, I believe it normal that the majority of Christians can expect to see God sometimes working in ways that reveal his hand directly and let us know from experience that he is personally involved with each of our lives. And it does not take science-transcending events for him to do that for us.

A Life in the Spirit Seminar team was unable to come to agreement, no matter how much they tried, on this question: Should those taking the seminar be allowed to miss a talk without making it up; or should they be required to listen to a tape recording of the talk? The leader finally said, "We're going to ask Jesus to give us his answer. Then we're going to expect to get his answer by opening the Bible and putting a finger on a passage randomly." This is the text they got:

You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Co 3:2-3)

Would the appropriateness of this text, out of all the verses of Scripture, to a question about substituting twentieth-century electronic recordings for person-to-person communication pass Lourdes-type tests for supernatural origin? Probably not. But why should

someone who already has a personal faith relation to Jesus, and who knows that Jesus said he would give us what we ask for with expectant faith, not believe that this was a case where God chose to show his direct, personal involvement in our lives? We know that if it was God's supernatural grace causing their request, then he must have chosen to cause that precise prayer because he intended to answer it in precisely that way. If not, there would have been no reason for him to cause that prayer when and how did. But can we be sure he caused it supernaturally rather than through the normal course of providence as he causes most human decisions, at least decisions made by those not in the state of grace? We can't be sure in the way we can about doctrinal truth. But there are two indicators that those who already have faith in Jesus and know what his promises are cannot ignore.

First, the prayer was preceded by the leader's discernment that Jesus was specifically intending to solve their problem in that way at that time. That discernment did not have the guarantee of infallibility, but was it incorrect? Nothing subsequent was evidence that it was incorrect. On the contrary, the high improbability of this discernment's fulfillment gives those who already know that Jesus sometimes works through such discernment reason to take seriously that this might be one of those cases. Second and more importantly, upon hearing that text those team members who a moment before were vehemently in favor of using tape recordings not only changed their minds immediately but did so with the kind of peace and joy that is a strong sign of God's presence. They showed themselves to be people who ultimately wanted God's will done, not their own, but did not yet know that their will was not God's. In this context, the fact that they swiftly, peacefully and joyfully changed their minds is a sign that they were allowing supernatural grace to work.

A person who is still looking at this as a burden of "proof" situation and puts that burden on the believer is not someone who already knows Jesus or knows that he has promised to sometimes work this way. For a Christian it is the doubter who would have to justify his position; if there is no evidence to the contrary, why would the Christian have any reason to doubt in such a case?¹⁴ After all, the team's only alternatives were to accept this text

as the Lord's answer, to continue arguing, or to flip a coin. But flipping a coin would give each answer a fifty/fifty chance, not the minuscule chance they had of getting such an appropriate text. They could have also sought additional direct supernatural confirmation from God, but at what point would it be something like "spiritual gluttony" or presumption to keep asking the Lord for more supernatural confirmation of what his will is?

(Note also that the team did not seek a supernatural answer from the Lord until the natural means, discussion, of settling the question had proven futile. And note that they were praying for communal direction, not direction for their individual lives. When praying for individual direction about an important matter, a member of their community asked for a text and randomly opened to one whose astounding appropriateness to his situation was at least as improbable as the team's text. But after further prayer and counseling, he decided for a number of reasons having to do with his circumstances not to treat that text as direction from the Lord. It turned out that had he taken it as God's direction, he would have gotten into a situation that was spiritually disastrous for everyone involved.)

In any case, we do not have to tell Christians exactly what kind of awareness of God's presence to expect as an eventual fruit of their confirmation. And while we should motivate them by appealing to that awareness and tell them that they should pray with expectation of the best, the main focus of our teaching should be on the glorious objective truths to which peaceful expectant faith and joyful appreciation are subjective responses.

Notes

1. See for example, Stephen B. Clark, Catholics and the Eucharist: A Scriptural Introduction (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 2000) 161-167.
2. Perhaps putting the first sending of the Spirit on Easter supported the teaching that only the ordained, among human beings, can give the Spirit to others in the empowering way; for unlike on Pentecost, only the apostles were present. If so, the author would not be implying that the ministerial priesthood is the only kind of mission that the Spirit empowers.
3. Perfectly valid and necessary theological distinctions can create another psychological

obstacle to appreciating the glory of the Trinity's real presence in us. We are told, correctly, that this means the persons of the Trinity are present in us "as object," that is, as being objects of our knowledge and love. At that, we are tempted to say "Whew! I thought you were asking me to believe another 'hard saying,' like believing that Jesus' body and blood can be true food and drink (Jn 6:55, 60). Thank God all you mean is that the Trinity is 'in' us in the quasi-metaphorical, or indirect, or at least minimal, sense in which things we know and love are present in our mind and heart." But relations between a knower and lover and the object of the knowledge and love are all the infinite life of the Trinity is, not just in us, but in itself. Only because God's existence is identical both with his knowledge and love and with the object of his knowledge and love is God a family of persons. By knowing himself, God is a Father who generates the Word in which he contemplates the object of his knowledge, his own divine nature, and expresses that knowledge to himself. God is the Holy Spirit only because, by mutually sharing the love that is identical with the divine nature and so by loving each other for having the divine nature, the Father and the Word breathe the divine Sigh or Moan (Rm 8:6; "spirit" means breath) of love that "WORD"-lessly (Rm 8:26; that is, affectively in contrast to "conceptually") expresses and contains the love that is identical with the divine nature as perfectly as the Word expresses and contains the knowledge that is identical with it. There is nothing metaphorical, indirect or minimal about saying that sharing the Trinitarian relations proceeding from God's being the object of his knowledge and love makes the Trinity really present in us and really makes its infinite life our life. That is what the real presence of the Trinity is — even in God. There is no other way the Trinity and its life can be really present in us; for there no other way it can be really present in God. Each of the divine persons is the relative term of an opposite cognitional and/or affective relation. If they were not present in us as terms of relations proceeding from God's being the object of his own knowledge and love, what was present could not be what the Trinity is in itself.

4. ST III, q.72 a. 6 ad 1 and 3; q. 73 a. 3.

5. The greatest sacrament, the Eucharist, relates to choices in both ways. Most people know that the Eucharist is meant to affect our manner of making choices by strengthening our Christianity. But perhaps not as many people know that the Eucharist also has the specific purpose of perfecting a certain kind of choice, our choices to obey Jesus' command to love our brother and sister Christians as he and the Father love one another. Jesus linked the command for mutual love between Christians to the Eucharist by waiting until the first Eucharist to give it, by first giving it only to his future Eucharistic ministers, and by giving it to them in his teaching at the first Eucharist. Paul reminds us of that link in 1 Co 10:16-17.

The anointing of the sick also relates to choices in both ways. It affects our manner of making choices by, at least, giving us spiritual strength we wouldn't need if we were physically well. And we can assume that the sacrament is enhancing our ability to make and carry out the specific choice to unite our sufferings with Jesus' for the salvation of the world, both the suffering we experience before receiving the sacrament and, when we are not physically healed, those we continue to have.

6. See Edward D. O'Connor, C.S.C., The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1971) especially 204-206, 216-217, 267-279.

7. See the references in n. 3.

8. *ibid.*, 216.

9. *ibid.*, 206.

10. The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila, trans. E. Allison Peers (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960) 80-81.

11. Refer Maritain, p. 375 ff.

12. O'Connor, The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church, 216.

13. *Ibid.*, 206.

14. This distinction between the attitudes toward "miracles" of those who already have faith and those who do not echoes distinct connections between faith and miracles found in Scripture. Miracles are intended to motivate faith in those who do not yet have it, but they do not

occur unless those who already have faith exercise it. If this creates a chicken/egg problem with faith, the fourth gospel solves it by making Jesus' first miracle both a response to Mary's pre-existing faith and a cause of the disciple's subsequent faith (Jn 2:1-11).