

P R E F A C E

Stumbling Stones to YOUR Life Redeemed



*Where are you going? (Quo vadis?)
Have you found what you are looking for?*
Jesus to Peter the Apostle

He who made you without you, will not save you without you.
Augustine of Hippo

*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God,
when I will send a famine on the land;
not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the Lord.*
Amos 8:11

*All the evils which poison men and nations and trouble so many
hearts have a single cause and a single source:
ignorance of truth –
and at times even more than ignorance,
a contempt for truth and a reckless rejection of it.*
John XXIII

“Repent...”
Mark 1:15

Have faith and *all* will be well.¹ Faith is the secret that gives meaning to our human lives. We know that *“faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*² That’s what makes faith genuine – believing without seeing; while believing leads to seeing. The truth of faith is an experience that can transform you. Without faith, life is shallow and unfulfilled; it is inhuman. You exist to have faith, you were made to believe.

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Faith leads you to truth. Truth is living water and faith is *the food of truth*.³ You were made to be a seeker of truth.⁴ You were created to be a friend of God. Through faith, you discover that God exists and He loves you personally. Faith pleases God and brings you His blessing. Whereas, *“without faith it is impossible to please God.”*⁵ By faith you will receive God’s blessings and know personally that He loves you.

God made you because He loves you. He loves you as if *you* were the only person in the world. He has carved you in the palm of His Hand; He knows how many hairs are on your head; He knows when you sit and when you stand. All God wants is your good. He wills your true good for you more than you do for yourself. And as our loving Father, He *only* gets upset with you in so far as you act against your own good.

God is love and He loves each one of us. This is truth. But, today more than ever, we can find it difficult to recognize God’s love for us because of the many obstacles and challenges to faith in our lives and in the world around us. Unfortunately, in areas of faith and culture today there are various *stumbling stones* that make it more difficult than ever for us to discover the truth of God. These obstacles prevent us from seeing truth as truth. These obstacles often affect us unconsciously or through little or no fault of our own, but they still bring great harm. Often today, the truth is not perceived as truth; or if it is, sometimes, it is turned away from and rejected due to various obstacles to faith. We live in times prophesied in the Bible: *“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.”*⁶ Is this who you are, or how you have become? If so, do not give up. Trust that God can restore you to faith and to life.

This book is a book of truth, hope, and new beginnings. It marks the fruit of the life and witness of believers and the breath of new life that will bring humanity to a new era of peace. While this book is for all persons and all times now and to come, its beginning and its end are especially for us in *our* time – a time of living corpses and dry bones, when humanity is suffering a spiritual Hiroshima, a universal assault against truth, the soul, and God.

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Yes, these are most difficult times. Dare we wonder how many persons today are enslaved in sin, living as spiritual corpses of such evil times? Many today ask themselves, “*What times are we living in?*” For many, this is an era of the deification of the self, where nothing seems real except the things we can see and touch. Even the things we previously relied on to keep us together, like faith and religion, have become distorted, twisted, and seemingly unreliable. “*Never has the world been so corrupt as it is now, for never has it been so cunning, so wise in its own way, and so crafty. It cleverly makes use of the truth to foster untruth, virtue to justify vice, and the very maxims of [God] to endorse its own so that even those who are wisest in the sight of God are often deceived.*”⁷ This is the dark side of today’s era and it is a reality, and it is dark. But, there is **hope**; though it is now a Good Friday for humanity, Resurrection Sunday is indeed coming. And though it often gets darkest just before dawn, many can already begin to perceive the rays of a new light of hope and peace in our world. Dear friend, know that God’s Love is so great that He will forget about your past life, your sins, all your evils; and He will bury them in the ocean of His Love and burn them all away; and He just wants you to be happy with Him. Who among us would have the heart to refuse Him and send Him away without accepting His Love? But, if you will welcome Him, He will remain with you as a loving Father in the midst of His beloved children. Then, *you* will know His Love, learn to follow His Will, and become truly and lastingly happy.

This book is about the Good News of **YOUR life redeemed**. But before *you* can experience personally this Good News anew, you must begin by recognizing what is keeping you from it. You will grow closer to the truth by uncovering and then abandoning what is false. The goal of this book’s preface is to uncover what is false, to offer a *diagnosis* of our ailments, and so as then to offer the medicine of faith, hope and love for the cure of all cures. The rest of this book will address the cure and the remedy for your spiritual health and renewal. You may begin by asking yourself, with some sense of a self-awakening, this question for our times: “*Isn’t it time that you fall on your knees and, turning once again to the only true God that you half-believe in, ask Him to make you clean from the leprosy of mind and heart?*” If you can respond to this question with a glimpse of hope,

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*“Then you may well [be part of] another era. **An era of love and of peace.**”*⁸ This era is coming soon.

Let’s begin by discussing some of these obstacles to faith plaguing society, culture, and true religion, which in some ways influence each of us today, these attitudes that often come from unreflective absorption of cultural influences that have undercut our ability to make and sustain a firm act of faith in the one true God. Let’s also begin to unmask the religious deception of our times so we can free ourselves from it, and then motivate others and ourselves toward the light of truth, with clarity and joy, to find authentic love and lasting peace.

1 Today's Crisis of Culture: The Beast like a Leopard



*As history demonstrates,
a democracy without (objective) values
easily turns into open or thinly disguised **totalitarianism**.*

John Paul II

*The beast opens his mouth to utter blasphemies against God...
his **greatest blasphemy** is that of denying the worship due to God
alone by giving it to creatures and to Satan himself.*

Marian locution to Fr. Gobbi

There exists today a split between the Good News of God and the bad news of our culture. The “*split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the drama of our time,*” analysts have concurred.⁹ In recent times, the truth has been gradually obscured by lies. Pernicious and manifold error has won the upper hand, and with it all sorts of desecrations and corruptions of truth and virtue. As our modern civilizations have advanced technologically, we have become morally infantile. And as this has happened slowly over time, most people have become desensitized and no longer even take notice.

The Greek philosophers present the scenario of a man who spends his life in a dark cave, and then he one day discovers the light

at the cave's entrance. Since he initially perceives the light to be blinding, to him light appears as darkness. He is tempted to convince himself that the light is darkness and his life in the darkness of the cave is light. Man today is in a cave of darkness, and the light that he is tempted to reject is reason and faith. This book will present the light of religious truth in a presentation based on reason. For us to move forward, we must first be willing to acknowledge our dark and deadly surroundings so that we can begin to *see* the bright light of faith and reason and the truths they reveal to us for the happiness of our lives. Here are seven *obstacles to truth in our culture today* that we need to shed light on:

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Culture Today

1. Humanism

Today, our culture seeks to live as though God did not exist. Modern culture has chosen not to seek religious truth, or has chosen to even to reject it outright. The result is **modern humanism**, which attempts to exclude any religious dimension from daily life and from the public sphere. Sometimes this thinking appears in a form of attempting to maintain Christian values but without any notion of Christian faith, by which man thinks he can be civil and good without any help (or opposition) from God. In this way, man convinces himself that he will be happy as long as he maintains a freedom from religious influence within culture and daily life.

Many 'Christianized' countries today try to exclude religion from all social and cultural affairs. Today, man "*has developed a culture that, in a way previously unknown to humanity, excludes God from the public consciousness, either by denying him altogether or by judging that his existence cannot be demonstrated, is uncertain and, therefore, somewhat irrelevant to public life...[an attempt is being made] to build the human community absolutely without God... [There is a] desire to see God banished definitively from humanity's public life, and driven into the subjective realm of residual cultures of the past.*"¹⁰ As we are all endowed with a conscience and the ability to perceive the natural law, we are thus also bound – individually, *and* as peoples and nations – to acknowledge God and to worship Him.¹¹ This

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refusal to allow God to guide our cultural affairs has led our culture to the brink of self-destruction and to the reigning of a multi-national culture of godlessness, which is exported under the label of **Americanism** – with abuses that include the endorsement of the absolutism of a secularized press and a state of affairs that has placed the state over, and sometimes against, the Church.

Our culture promotes the view that God is irrelevant to human life and happiness. This is a plague and a scourge upon our humanity, having dire consequences. But, when we lose God we lose ourselves. Freedom of religion does not mean freedom from religion; nor does it mean the forced restriction of religion within society. We are left to ask why it is that people today choose not to see the truth. Because it goes contrary to what we want to do or how we choose to live! A great loss indeed – because the whole of civilization is at stake!

Today, there is also an overemphasis on a radical, egotistical, and unrestricted **individualism**, which is expressed not just in the spirit of independence and self-reliance, but in independence from God; that man can simply get along better with himself and with others as long as God is not part of the equation. This sometimes leads to an unrestricted promotion of individual desires, self-centered demands, and self-entitled pursuits that claim “*every desire is a right*”. Invariably, in this thinking, the so-called “*rights*” of the stronger individual take precedence over the rights of the weaker and defenseless ones, as in the case of the first world over the third world. This is articulated in Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy whereby forces, specifically the ‘*Will to power*’, are more important than facts or things or other people. Some individualists, like Ayn Rand, even promote selfishness as a virtue, whereby self-happiness is the exclusive goal and purpose of life (even at the expense of others). Sacrifice for other’s good and well-being is never a consideration for such persons.

But, this is a false conception of happiness and it simply does not work. It is clear “*that modern man has lost his search for happiness, has alienated himself so profoundly from God that he has become alienated from himself, and is engaged in a sick and futile search for his own identity. What loneliness he suffers! A theme-song of desolation reverberates in his soul. He despairingly seeks guidance among those who are quite as lost as he is; and all his chosen guides lead him again to the same abyss from which there seems to be no way*

of return."¹² Individual choice is fine if you are choosing what is good according to the truth of your existence. But, when you use it to choose against the natural order set down by God, you cause the revulsion of your very own nature and the wrath of God to be brought down upon you. Instead, man today needs to seek true goodness and turn toward Heaven, and be saved. This alone leads to true happiness.

Essentially, many live today in a schizophrenic way. Unlike any time in history, today a large part of 'Christianized' peoples live as though God did not exist while promoting laws and lifestyles that are contrary to Christian values. This has led to a crisis of meaning in culture whereby the **culture of death** has subverted the culture of life. It is manifested in various ways today, including by the escape into recreational drug use, the promotion of illicit sexual activity as a form of entertainment, and the killing of the unwanted unborn. Attitudes that lead to death are becoming more and more culturally accepted and promoted. We fail to perceive or be disturbed by the darkness that has closed in around us because we are caught in a culture that fosters our blindness by "*ambiguous moral positions, the distortion of reason, and the absolutization of the subjective.*"¹³ If you drop a frog into boiling water, it will jump out, but if you heat the water slowly it will not perceive its own demise, but will even welcome it. Such is our cultural situation today.

We are called instead to cultivate the culture of truth and life and of authentic love. We must say "*no*" to the "*attack of death, which presents itself in the disguise of life,*" and instead witness to the genuine good news of the Christianized culture of life, of truth, and of love.¹⁴ This alone will bring humanity true peace.

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2. Relativism

Some hold that there should be no source of external authority over peoples and cultures – only that of the interior – "*the god within us*" or "*the Self within us*". This has led to a form of **cultural moral relativism**, which casts doubt on the possibility of a universal truth (and authority) or whether it can be known. Relativism falsely thinks that what may be "*true*" for you may not be "*true*" for me (as I see it),

and “*if you don’t like it, you can just get out.*” Thus, there is no absolute except that there is no absolute. In this thinking, nothing objective exists to distinguish one view from another except power and opinion. The problem is that if everyone with opinions is “*right,*” then no one is right, and then there is no right and wrong, nothing true and nothing false. In this thinking, truth as objective reality does not exist, and instead life is all judged based on varying opinions. Taken to its logical consequences, Leo Strauss wittingly concludes, “*If all positions are of equal intellectual merit, then cannibalism is only a matter of taste.*” Relativism has led our culture toward the denial of absolute truth, the license of moral depravity, and the rejection of the reality of sin, and even of God. But, without moral truth, what prevents the strong from oppressing the weak, the majority from oppressing the minority? The result is a loss of justice and peace: “*If there is no transcendent truth... then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people... If one does not acknowledge transcendental truth, then the force of power takes over, and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others.*”¹⁵ In this scenario, subjective and changeable opinion, motivated by one’s own selfish interest and whim, takes over. The most obvious evidence for the objective truth of good and evil and of what is right and what is wrong, though irrationally, is simply shut out.¹⁶

Today, society itself has become infected with this cancerous way of thinking. And many people have little or no choice but to accept it. According to one observer, “*We are moving towards a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as certain and which has as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires.*”¹⁷ Today, many in our democratic society no longer seek or accept the truth of God; now they seek only an enunciation of opinions and unbridled license to suit their fancy (as long as they are not hurting anyone), while being intolerant of opposing views, especially those from a religious perspective.

Today, much of the media and news sources have become openly unreliable about reporting on religion, particularly Catholic-related news and issues. Some in the media have consciously moved to ban religious groups from taking an active role in civic life, thereby imposing “*a kind of unofficial state atheism*”. It is apparent that their

goal is to force “religious faith out of a nation’s public square ... [But, this] does not serve democracy.”¹⁸ The attempt to remove religious foundations and objective virtue from society is a cause of threat to democracy itself. In fact, “as history demonstrates, a democracy without (objective) values easily turns into open or thinly disguised **totalitarianism**.”¹⁹ As Benedict XVI recently observed: “When policies do not presume or promote objective values, the resulting moral relativism, instead of leading to a society that is free, fair, just and compassionate, tends instead to produce frustration, despair, selfishness and a disregard for the life and liberty of others.”²⁰

This is a new form of **socialism**, whereby the culture (sometimes together with the state) has taken over people’s freedom, especially the formation of children. Culture is manipulated to control how children should think, what they should buy, and what they should (or should not) believe. Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World Revisited* warned that we would see the rise of a “scientific dictatorship,” one that would be less openly violent and more publicly disguised than those under Hitler and Stalin, “in which we will be painlessly regimented by a corps of highly trained social engineers,” while at the same time, “democracy and freedom will be the theme of every broadcast and editorial.” He warned that “the underlying substance will be a new kind of non-violent totalitarianism.” Josef Pieper, in his essay “*The Art of Not Yielding to Despair*,” points out that Huxley’s type of totalitarianism will be the most inhuman form of totalitarianism, and that it will be almost impossible to throw off, because it will always cite what appear to be valid arguments to prove that it is not in fact what it is. This cultural relativism and socialism exists not only through political ‘democratic’ entities, but also even more through postmodern media-dominated manipulation. Through the mass media, this thinking is imposed upon the culture, thus it is in some ways ‘forced’ upon us. Today’s global culture is leading its people, especially the young who are more susceptible, to seek exaggerated means of freedoms, which in turn has undermined their sense of the need for obedience to any just authority or for any search for truth and meaning of life. Parents have become helpless, often succumbing to the same cultural pressures as their children.

Such cultural controls have in turn led to political socialism. A debased people form a debased government, or at least beg for one.

And law and government in turn guide the people's behavior and social norms. When a people allows their corrupt and irresponsible leaders to govern and form them exteriorly, while forsaking interiorly their consciences, and thus becoming susceptible to their propaganda of ignoring the need for the pursuit of truth, they become all too quickly slaves of the state and of culture. But, *"Experience shows, even from earliest times, that cities renowned for wealth, dominion, and glory perished as a result of this single evil, namely immoderate freedom of opinion, license of free speech, and desire for novelty."*²¹ We are so bombarded by the messages of our culture, claiming that truth does not exist and we can do whatever we want, that over time we are *'forced'* to adhere to its tenants. What has caused the Western world to lose its soul is its aversion to truth and to God, to reason and to religious doctrine, which leaves it without a good ideology to oppose a bad ideology – and therefore utterly powerless to deal with the enemy who attacks from within and without. For the majority is not always right. Right is still right, even when a majority of people are led to disagree with it. To call what is wrong right is suicide. It's hopeless. Instead, we must again restore the doctrine of truth to combat the anti-doctrine of public opinion, the doctrine of theological faith to combat the anti-doctrine of despair and disbelief. Good will come out of tragedy if we allow God back into the arena, into the court, into the classroom, into the media, into our hearts.

There exists today a form of **liberalism** that claims that we have a right to live and be governed according to our own whims, and not according to God's Law and truth. It claims that there is no objective truth in religion; that one belief is as good as another. It holds that there are no objective religious truths or actual miracles. Today's liberalist declares that we should reign in the place of God. This thinking has led some to say: *"There are no 'truths.' All we find is different ways of doing things. Let everyone be happy in his own manner, whatever it is. A 'sin,' as the Scripture calls it, is not a sin but another lifestyle. We cannot 'judge' or determine the difference between one moral position and another. All views are equal. To distinguish right and wrong is to impose our own prejudices on someone else."*²² In this thinking, some have even forced the removal of the Ten Commandments from our courthouses. But, all authority comes from God.²³ This false philosophy has given rise to 'values

clarification,' which claims that we are free to change our values according to whim or situations (situation ethics) which leads some to conclude that it is good to do evil in certain circumstances; it's no longer about what is right or true but about what one thinks and wants. No wonder young people are confused, forced as they are to go to value-free schools; and why there are increasing cases of in-school violence. One sociologist described the result of the value-free culture on our young people: "*Leaving children to discover their own values is a little like putting them in a chemistry lab full of volatile substances and saying, 'Discover your own compounds, kids.' We should not be surprised when some blow themselves up and destroy those around them.*"²⁴

However, when truth is replaced by self-centered demands for freedoms, the result is not freedom at all but slavery to vice and moral decadence. Freedom is dependent upon truth and virtue. This reality is exemplified by "*the growth of prostitution and pornography in the name of adult choice, the acceptance of abortion in the name of women's rights, [and] the approval of same sex unions in the name of homosexual rights.*"²⁵ Though liberation from the divine truth initially sounds thrilling, such abused "*freedom*" can only lead to slavery and human degradation. We are truly liberal when we are free to worship God and to accept God as God, not when we are forced to strive to be free from God. Liberty is freedom *for* God, not *from* God. When God is no longer adored, man turns to adoring himself. Disobedience leads to death. When we disregard God, we then turn against our own nature and good, down the path of self-destruction. As one leading authority put it: "*'Liberal' religion creates what the Jewish scholar David Gelernter calls an 'ice-your-own-cupcake world,' because 'liberal' religion is religion-we-make-up. Revealed religion, on the other hand, is religion-into-which-we-are-incorporated... It's not something we invent. It's not something we can buy. It's something we can only receive. It's a gift, a gift that demands a response. And the name of that response, to be even more countercultural, is obedience.*"²⁶

The mind *is* capable of grasping truth as truth and of surrendering to it. This is true, and "*Men who by their wickedness suppress the truth*" are not innocent, as the apostle Paul points out when speaking to the morally decadent Romans in the first century. "*For what can be known about God is plain to them... they are without excuse... because*

they exchanged the truth about God for a lie... though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they do not only do them but approve those who practice them." Therefore, God hands them over to the lusts of their hearts, to impurity, to their dishonorable passions, to their base minds, and to their improper conduct. And *"we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things... [in God's justice] there will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil."*²⁷ Truth be told – *"It is not (relativistic) ideologies that save the world, but only a return to the living God, our Creator, the guarantor of our freedom, the guarantor of what is really good and true."*²⁸

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3. Rationalism

Today, there is also a prevailing mentality of **positivism**, which believes that the only authentic knowledge is scientific knowledge, attained through the scientific method. This, in turn, has led to **scientism**, which holds that whatever is scientifically and technically possible becomes also ethically permissible. Such thinking maintains that science, which is based on empirical data and reason, should reject or at least have primacy over religious truth, which is based on faith and reason. But, without other modes of thought – like philosophy and theology – science has no way to respond to the questions that science itself cannot answer. This is the denial of reason in the name of reason and it contradicts our human nature and the nature of God.

Today, natural religion is being replaced by *"brazen irreligion that pretends to be just as natural."*²⁹ This has led to the pursuit of, and attempts to legitimize, scientific advances such as embryonic stem cell research, atomic warfare, and human cloning. From the perspective of the pure scientist, *"science is the only religion there is. It acknowledges no place for revelation even being considered. Sometimes this position goes under the name of 'rationalism.' Here, rationalism does not mean reason open to reality whatever it is, but reason deliberately closed in on itself so that it will not admit, even for consideration, any information from outside itself. Rationalism thus is willing to close itself off from claims of intelligence that are found in*

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revelation in order, like fideism, not to have to deal with any problems outside of its definition of itself."³⁰ As one has noted, concerning the work of science attempting to play God: *"The science that alters life, the science which creates a counterfeit heaven, the science that toils with the womb and genes, the science that has filled the air with the power of the enemy...the science which seeks to create life but cannot in actuality even sustain it, the science which has denied God"* is not authentic science at all.

Then, to protect us from the truth that threatens our pursuits, there is the declaration that we are bound by nothing except the order of reason and scientific **empiricism** that we make and impose exclusively on reality. Today, the West is guilty of requiring within modernity a self-imposed version of reason that is in fact *"determined to close itself off from certain presumably unwelcome conclusions, namely, the possibility that science is not opposed to faith but aided and completed by it."*³¹ But, no matter how hard we try in this culture, it is not possible to build a world in which *God is dead* and man's freedom to do as he pleases leads to prosperity. As is seen many times in the Bible, when God's people turn their back on Him, God withdraws His Hand of protection. Failure and destruction inevitably ensues. God does this as judgment *and* mercy; to call His wayward people back. The Bible tells us God chastises those He loves. Besides, *"no one can claim to 'know,' strictly speaking, that God does not exist... and this means that the declaration of 'scientific atheism' is an absurd claim."*³² Some today try to *"reduce reason to the horizon of experimental science alone, and hence to technical and instrumental knowledge, sometimes enclosing it within a **skeptical and nihilistic vision**... [But,] these attempts to evade the issue of the deepest meaning of existence are not only futile; they can also become dangerous."*³³ Whether such persons in today's culture actually hold to such nihilistic perspectives, many often live as though they did; they not only live lives without objective meaning or purpose, while failing to personally embrace any comprehensible truths or essential values, but they often cause havoc in the lives of others around them. For them, religion and values become arbitrary, relative, and subjective; they in effect live as atheists. In this thinking, futility inevitably reigns.

On the contrary, René Girard, one of the most influential intellectuals of contemporary culture, sees a future with a more post-

postmodern hope, saying: *“Philosophies are almost dead. Ideologies are virtually deceased; political theories are almost altogether spent. Confidence in the (claimed) fact that science can replace religion has already been surmounted. There is in the world a new need for religion,”*³⁴ and a new longing for it as well. True religion conquers all; it always has and it always will. *“Christianity is not a mere subjective religious preference, which is ultimately irrational, and relegated to the private sphere. We must demonstrate that faith and reason are not irreconcilable, but that, faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth. But if your faith is linked merely to fragments of tradition, fine sentiments, or a generic religious ideology, you will certainly not be able to withstand the impact of the environment you are in.”*³⁵

Therefore, we must reverse the axiom of the Enlightenment, such that whether every individual has faith or not, we *all live as if God did exist*, which is not the same as the Enlightenment attempt to maintain universal moral norms with the claim that they would be valid even if God did not exist. The latter has led to living as though God did not exist. We must again embrace the natural law; hold ourselves accountable to the objective and consequential higher law. Any law that opposes the natural law is an unjust law, it is no law at all. God is the basis of objective truth and morality, as He testifies saying, *“Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.”*³⁶ We must rediscover that as rational creatures we *can* reason our way to acceptance of the truth of God’s revealed law. Who would be offended if we all lived this way, as if God did exist? No one. What actually offends non-Christians is the ‘Christian’ society’s attempt to build a civilization that absolutely excludes God, one that denies its own foundations, while still claiming to be Christian (superficially). Non-Christians criticize our attempts to build a culture where we claim personal liberty is the only fundamental value and criterion of everything else. Such a fallacy quickly becomes apparent with the inevitable clashes that occur between conflicting demands for amoral freedoms, such as a woman’s claimed right to abortion versus an unborn child’s inherent right to life.

Such thinking assumes that if we can do it, then let’s do it. Moral and ethical arguments are then dismissed as opinions not in conformity with culture’s dominating progressive agenda. Thus, the

perspective that nothing is good or bad in itself dominates. This leads to **consequentialism**, whereby every act is deemed good or bad depending on the foreseeable consequences of an action, and not on moral truth. In this thinking, one falsely attempts to judge the greater good in proportion to the perceived lesser evil. As long as there is more good effect than evil, it is thought to be alright to do. But good intentions and pre-measured consequences do not make all actions good. Some thoughts and actions are objectively evil, no matter what the excuses or foreseen possible consequences. And besides, there are often many consequences that are not considered when trying to determine if an action is worth doing. The problem is that the freedom to do all that one's ego desires leads to a tyranny that in reality reduces the human being to a slavery to whim and eventually to a prison of self-contempt and alienation from others. Making matters more confusing, today, this approach to life is often masked by terms like *justice, peace, welfare for all, and conservation of nature*, which are used to disguise the underlying moral deprivation behind them.

While being at times persuasive, such thinking is wrong. We cannot worship ourselves and legitimize our perverse ways without serious evil consequences. We must consider our genuine human dignity and that of others in the light of God. The truth is that we are all created by God, and we are redeemed by Him, through obedience to His commandments of love. The truth is that our only hope is the restoration of balancing reason (rational and scientific principles) with sound theological principles to society and our individual lives. Thus, to intellectuals and scientists, to culturalists and politicians, we say: *“Never perhaps, thank God, has there been so clear a possibility as today of a deep understanding between real science and real faith, mutual servants of one another in the one truth... Have confidence in faith, this great friend of intelligence. Enlighten yourselves with its light in order to take hold of the truth, the whole truth.”*³⁷

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4. Secularism

In our society today, some hold the view that there are no clear universal values, no authority, no right conclusions; only varying

viewpoints and perspectives, each equal to the other, and all to be mutually respected. This has led to the **glorification of tolerance** at all costs and compromises, especially in the political sphere. It teaches that all religions must be equally tolerated because all are merely opinions. In this thinking, only those who believe in a single religious truth, or think God and His Message have a place in human endeavors and in politics, are considered intolerable. In other ways, such thinking disregards the notion of truth and simply insists upon maintaining “tolerance” between your narrow-minded moral “values” and my opposing amoral ones. Within this policy of tolerance, nothing is forbidden *except* cultures or religions that have principles governing moral behavior. The problem with this perspective is that if man raises himself to God’s level while removing God from the political sphere, he engages in the self-idolatry that claims the right to autonomous political self-determination without any notion of natural law or the divine or of religiously-based objective truths, norms and laws.

In the United States, there is an attempt today to maintain “*separation of Church and state*,” which instead of a distinction of religion and politics often becomes politics against religion backed by an agenda to eliminate religion from affecting public policy. But, “*the legitimate separation of Church and state cannot be taken to mean that the Church must be silent.*”³⁸ The issue is that, in truth, freedom of religion is never freedom from religion, even politically. Certain attempts are today being made to limit the freedom of religion. Today, concerted efforts are being made to deny religiously-minded people of the right of conscientious objection with regard to cooperation in intrinsically evil practices. This type of **radical secularism** has caused us to lose a sense of God and of ourselves, for we can only know ourselves in relation to our Creator. Politically curtailing the proclamation of truth or seeking to promote notions of freedom detached from moral truth, “*whether constricting it within the limits of a merely scientific rationality, or suppressing it in the name of political power or majority rule, [represents] a threat not just to Christian faith, but also to humanity itself.*”³⁹ And the real tragedy is how apathetic everyone seems to be about it all. People often think that as long as they are not affected, then they do not care about how others are being mistreated. This brings to mind a quote by Martin Niemöller (1892-

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1984), an ardent nationalist and prominent Protestant pastor who emerged as an outspoken public foe of Adolf Hitler:

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out –

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out –

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak out –

Because I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.

Niemöller spent the last 7 years of Nazi rule in concentration camps. We must take seriously and respond swiftly to the grave threats being made by political and cultural opinion leaders today who are increasingly hostile to Christianity, whether such threats affect us or not, or we will soon find it *will* affect us as well, and to our own detriment.

The founding fathers of the United States in their wisdom spoke of the consequences of such a self-destructive path. Abraham Lincoln admonished us to “*recognize the sublime truth, announced in Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord;*” and George Washington guaranteed us the foundation of our hope in God’s blessings as long as we hold to true Christian principles, saying, “*reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles.*” And what if we continue to attempt to keep virtue and principle, while removing God from our society? Ronald Reagan responded, saying: “*Without God, there is no virtue, because there’s no prompting of the conscience. Without God we’re mired in the material, that flat world that tells us only what the senses perceive. Without God, there is a coarsening of the society. And without God, democracy will not and cannot long endure. If we forget that we’re one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.*” And in a prophetic language, long ago Thomas Jefferson speculated what would happen if we fail to heed these warnings, continuing instead to abandon God, asking: “*Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are a gift from God?*”

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Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever."⁴⁰

A democracy without a conscience becomes just another anti-God (anti-Christ) regime. Alternately, we must live according to right conscience and not according to propaganda, be it communist or democratic. We must stop going to the polls thinking we have the right to choose arbitrarily what is good or evil as we are told or as we wish to think. The fruit of such a perspective invariably leads, especially in times of struggle, to a frustration and dissatisfaction with everyone and everything. The truth is that in the lives of societies and individuals, "*when God disappears, man is not greater: he loses divine dignity...Man is great only if God is (rightly acknowledged as) great.*"⁴¹ The result of these attempts today has been nation after nation, and in various ways their individual citizens, now caught up in degeneration, disaster, and war; and we do not know which direction to turn or how much time is left for the turning.

The truth is that the world cannot be saved by man's own ingenuity and force; the world has been saved by the God-Man and it will triumph only by restoring His truth to the politic and His morality to the law. All man's ideas that attempt to rule the world while establishing control and a 'peace' without God have only resulted in failure and unrest, false hopes turning to despair.

These contradictions demonstrate that liberty without God and without constraints is no liberty at all. And when we accept that the rights of the weakest may be violated by the more powerful, we are moving down the path of accepting that *the law of the jungle may prevail over the rule of law*. Without God, man no longer accepts any moral authority except his own, which is dominated by that of the most powerful. In this climate, man's political power determines what he does, and so if he can build (and use) atomic bombs or engage in terrorism, while then he has the right to do so.⁴² Ultimately, **the clash of cultures** is the growing antagonism between man and his attempt to be radically emancipated from God, whereby "*the attempt, carried to extremes, to shape human affairs to the total exclusion of God leads us more and more to the brink of the abyss, toward the utter annihilation of man.*"⁴³

This is especially true in Europe today. In the post-religious European situation where a sense of “Christophobia”⁴⁴ dominates, Europe has lost its sense of self-identity and instead become intolerant of religion, especially its own. According to Italian politician, Marcello Pera, while a Christian current runs through all European civilizations, fertilizing their soil, and feeding their recognition of human rights; nevertheless, as Europe seeks today to damn up such a current, argues Pera, it is causing its civilization to collapse. Europe’s “apostasy,” as Pera unabashedly puts it, has it in “search of a god” but not “its own God.”⁴⁵ This denial of its own identity has brought Europe to a crisis and brink of collapse.

Thus, our pressing task here is to share the good news of truth. We are all called to make God credible, first with the inspiring authentic witness of faith-filled lives, and second with a clear proclamation of the saving truth of God. He is peace and love and mercy! Today we must proclaim anew: “*We want God.*” Today, these walls in the new forms of a false toleration must come down again. We must find a balance between open and tolerant reason, the foundation of freedom, and the truths of religion, that safeguard true freedom.

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Culture Today

5. Hedonism

Many in our culture suffer in what amounts to a self-indulgent, pleasure-focused, super-affluent, highly technical, individualistic, wired, and over-sexed “*slough of despond.*”⁴⁶ There is today a worldwide campaign against the virtues of chastity and purity, which has succeeded in ruining the youth. There are almost no virgin souls in the world today. During these unfortunate times evil has invaded childhood innocence.⁴⁷ Never before in history have we had so much access to excess. Against all promises to the contrary, such a lifestyle is plagued by boredom and weariness, by addiction and lack of satisfaction. People in this culture are left with an ongoing feeling of being lost and alone. When life is little more than the pursuit of fun, we quickly become enslaved by our passions. In some ways, every person in our culture suffers from various addictions, from bad habits of vice. Our culture is a culture of addicts. We are bombarded with sex and

gratuitous violence from the media, computer and video games, and internet. Our culture is one of self-entitlement, self-satisfaction, self-pleasure, self-glorification. This causes us to become incapable of being moved to show compassion and charity upon our neighbors in need; and it has caused us to become despondent of seeing and desiring the true spiritual treasures of eternal life. And such conduct makes us inhuman.

In our culture, **hedonism**, the excessive pursuit of pleasure and immediate self-gratification, dominates. Our culture teaches that happiness comes exclusively from physical pleasure or ego gratification, a message our teens experience continually, being on the front lines of attack from their pop-culture. Our culture today promotes a spirit of automatic self-entitlement, a form of **narcissism**. What is being promoted is a worship of “*the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I,*” which is producing in our youth excesses of vanity, conceit, egotism, and selfishness, often accompanied by an indifference to the plight of others.

Hedonism leads to heartlessness – instead of living for others in love, such persons live for love of themselves; or if they consider others in a humanitarian way, they simply desire to achieve the greatest amount of happiness and pleasure for the greatest number of people, as if this is the meaning of life. Instead of living from Sunday to Sunday, many people live from Friday night to Friday night.

A lot of people, especially among the young, today are looking for love and happiness in the wrong places, where they will surely not find it. But, human love for a particular person, situation or thing is an emotion, an affection, which is sometimes disordered. It does not lead beyond the temporary veil of this world. It is often self-seeking and exclusively sensual, and thus fleeting. Many today are led to shallow or false love by our culture. They are following a modern pied piper and being allured by the secular temptations of “*sex, drugs, and modern music.*”

The irony is that through such excesses of false amusements, with its excesses of lust, caffeine-highs, drunkenness, and recreational drug use, which attempt to create an amoral artificial paradise (without God), many people, and young people particularly, have lost the capacity for authentic joy. Many today fill their days with artificial noise and stimulants (or artificial depressants), while avoiding the

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peace that silence and prayer would bring them. Their spirits suffocate under the clamoring of all such obnoxious noise. And they seek in vain what is impossible to find, at least *where* they are looking. The Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, writes, in *Works of Love*, “*Is it not remarkable that in the whole New Testament there is not a single word about erotic love in the sense in which the poet celebrates it and paganism idolized it?*”

On the other hand, holy love is an affection of the spirit, a decision of the will for the genuine good of another. This type of love calls the soul to become holy and virtuous. Holy love seeks to align the affections of the heart, which need tempering, with those of the soul in union with God. Holy love is freely loving God above all else and one’s neighbor as oneself. Such a person is embraced by Love and embraces Love. The result is true peace.

In this modern-day climate, balance and moderation, with the pursuit of what is good and life-giving, seem boring and are becoming more and more trivialized. Self-focused *doing and having* dominates while self-fulfilling *being and sharing* is often simultaneously neglected or rejected. Our culture promotes becoming more connected with entertainments and things than with people, while God is being left behind altogether.

There is also a common phenomenon today of a spirit of *winning at all costs*, especially in the area of sports, which has become a new religion of our culture and an area of socially acceptable vice. But, this does not have to be! The virtue of sports is being trampled by the vice of our sports culture. But, sports *can* be both fun and character forming, a place to build virtue, because “*Sport, properly directed, develops character, makes a man courageous, a generous loser, and a gracious victor; it refines the senses, gives intellectual penetration, and steels the will to endurance... Sport, rightly understood, is an occupation of the whole man, and while perfecting the body as an instrument of the mind, it also makes the mind itself a more refined instrument for the search and communication of truth and helps man to achieve that end to which all others must be subservient, the service and praise of his Creator.*”⁴⁸ Our culture’s philosophy of sports must be reexamined!

On the other hand, studies have shown that there is no clear relationship between fleeting pleasures and the degree of one’s happi-

ness.⁴⁹ Paradoxically, results show that success and prosperity (without generosity) with the excessive pursuit of pleasure lead to greater self misery, which is manifest in increased anxiety, broken marriages, drug dependency, work-related stress, loneliness, and isolation, not to mention guilt. The result has been the mass rejection of the seeking of a holiness of life, with a coldness and lack of enthusiasm regarding the renouncing of inordinate pleasures and an accompanying lack of consideration for God. The human body is constantly focused on and the senses are constantly fed, while the soul is withering away, starved to death by neglect and moral deprivation. Such people are being distracted to death!

The truth is that these “*reasons for living*” have *never* satisfied anyone, and they never will. They cannot. In this “*culture of selfishness*,” with an over-focus on self-centeredness, that of a selfishness without limits, the world is incapable of finding meaning in its own existence and instead is running to its own imminent ruin. Self-centeredness and inordinate selfish love are the sources of all suffering and self-torment. Only God is the source of authentic joy. They on the other hand only lead to depression, anxiety, addiction and substance abuse, and other emotional and psychological disorders. Excess makes one numb, unsatisfied, and guilt-ridden. Those who live this way soon experience that “*‘something bitter arises from the depth of every pleasure and makes us anxious even in the midst of delights,’ [as] wrote the pagan poet Lucretius. Pleasure is deceitful in itself because it promises what it cannot give. Before being tasted, it seems to offer the infinite and eternity, but, once over, one is left with nothing.*”⁵⁰

We need to be mindful that there is a reality beyond the visible, and it is good and desirable; God is there; together with hope, redemption, grace, peace, love. And it is possible and even fulfilling to bring the spiritual into the material, the divine into the mortal, as God did when He became man. Life is good, but it must allow for what cannot be seen and touched, for the things that truly satisfy. The truth is that God alone satisfies the human heart’s restless quest for meaning and purpose. Truth, precisely as God reveals it, leads us to a genuine and full freedom. God calls every person *to repent* and believe in the His Good News. We will only find peace through disciplining our carnal body, tempering our selfish will, and amending our sinful life. The truth is that only God can free us from these chains of deadly sins and

from the slavery of our inordinate passions that have been seduced by the world's attractions and the devil's temptations. We can with grace conquer pride and selfishness, regain holy desire for virtue, and become capable of true concern for our neighbor.

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Culture Today

6. Materialism

Today there is a strong urge to believe that the pursuit of wealth is the ultimate meaning of life. Many today have an inordinate desire for the good things of life, for a style of life that is almost barbarous in its excessive focus on **materialism**. Some today seek the riches of this world as an end in themselves, as the ultimate fulfillment of life. For them, life consists of getting material things, without regard for the things of the soul or of religion and its invisible God. Often in this environment, people have been used for exploitation and the light of love has been extinguished in many souls. The modern culture is driven by Hollywood and advertising. Abuses reign, as is found in the greed and excesses of desires for profit at all costs within a culture based on capitalism. It is also played into by some Christian groups who claim God wants to give all His faithful material wealth as an earthly reward for their generosity, in what is sometimes called "*prosperity doctrine*".

The spirit of **consumerism** dominates our culture today. Today, we live in "*a society increasingly in danger of forgetting its spiritual roots and yielding to a purely materialistic and soulless vision of the world.*"⁵¹ If there is a devil, his greatest success today is his use of material things to attract us and turn us away from putting God in the first place in our lives. But, within such a climate, one forgets what it means to love and to cherish true values. The truth is that our world has tried every possible way to improve its life through the pursuit of money and its trappings and yet continues to experience a huge poverty on every level of existence and life. Our culture's very conceptions of happiness and comforts are a great evil and falsity, which will not go without its consequences. We must evaluate and decide: whether to be 'godly' persons – which fulfills our dignity and makes us truly happy – or follow the tide of the culture toward becom-

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ing ‘worldly’ persons – which corrupts our nature, enslaves us and destroys our true happiness. We must remember that just because our material condition has increased does not mean our spiritual condition has improved with it. We are called to be holy, not wealthy, and only holiness will make us happy. This is only possible through prayer, asking God for help, and pledging your obedience to Him.

Today, God asks us, “*What good is it to gain the whole world, only to lose your soul?*” The wealthy, those who have everything but God, those who have an unlimited ambition for power, riches, and dominion, are actually in many cases the poorest. Many who have the financial means to help the Church or those in need fail to do so. Because their wealth has caused them to have an uncaring attitude toward God and His Church, they allow evil to seemingly triumph. Despite material prosperity, the world leaves such people feeling unloved and in darkness. Bertrand Russell states: “*It is preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else, that prevents men from living freely and nobly.*”⁵² The prevailing thought that “*he who dies with the most wins*” causes us to forget that if we win in this way we will in the end discover that we have lost. If only we understood that we are in imminent danger of losing our souls for all eternity if we remain obstinate in selfishness and sin!

It is a most difficult task to change the mind of those persons who have everything, or who have made material things the focus of their lives. They often live convinced that they have no need for anything else. But, when people place too much emphasis on material things, they end up enslaved by false illusions and passing fads, which leave behind a tragic spiritual vacuum, where all meaning and purpose fade into superficiality. This approach to life also begets a kind of guilt of selfishness which does not allow these individuals to be at peace with God, others, or even with themselves. They become incapable of maintaining a foundation, a soul, or a mystical depth to their human existence.

On the other hand, when such persons begin to give attention to the spiritual, to matters of the soul, they are soon able to escape the impersonal and superficial. They begin to see the falsities of earthly wealth and power. They find the power and wealth of God to be altogether wonderful and satisfying. God is true wealth. “*God’s power is not like that of the [rich and] powerful of this world. God’s ways are*

not as we imagine them or as we might (initially) wish them to be. God does not enter into competition with earthly powers in this world. He does not marshal his divisions alongside other divisions... He contrasts the noisy and ostentatious power of this world with the defenseless power of love, which succumbs to death on the Cross.”⁵³ As the rich discover God, they find the real power that leads to the real riches of life. As one Church leader declared: “To humanity, which at times seems to be lost and dominated by the power of evil, egoism and fear, the risen Lord offers as a gift His love that forgives, reconciles and reopens the spirit to hope. It is love that converts hearts and gives peace. How much need the world has to understand and accept Divine Mercy! God, I trust in You, have mercy on us and on the whole world.”⁵⁴

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Culture Today

7. Modernism

Today, our culture promotes a form of **modernism**, which seeks to set aside all forms of traditional religious faith and worship for modern progress, with the mentality that there is no right worship of God, or that worship is itself unnecessary for our modernized society, and that because this thinking is new, it is better. While there are in fact “*positive elements of modernity*” that are to be “*accepted unreservedly*,”⁵⁵ modernity becomes problematic when it narrows itself, in the name of objectivity or progress, such that it can allow only a part of the truth to be considered, viewed, or sought. Some today hold that every perceptible fault or flaw that exists is simply due to an absence of knowledge, one that will be alleviated as reason advances. They think that it is only a matter of time until we reach perfection on our own with human effort through **progressivism**. For them, progress is worshipped as the hope of happiness and fulfillment, and the means to solve all human problems. In this mindset, when technological advances cause injustice (moral issues), they are considered tolerable in the name of progress. “*If we can do it, we have the right to do it.*”

In this thinking, today, we are replacing worship of God with **technolatry**, the worship of technology and progress as the only

ultimate good. The machine is becoming master of the person. We live an increasingly artificial existence, where reality is being replaced by virtual reality or an altogether new simulated reality, the real by the sub-real or non-real. We have become so stimulated and stupefied by technological devices and their entertainments that we no longer show concern for our own problematic self-centered, individualistic, subhuman existence or for the deeper issues and questions about the purpose of life. Spiritual neglect, as well as human neglect, is the result. In this way, life is lived without self-evaluation, without repentance.

Such a perspective eliminates the need for salvation and for a savior. It is true that one enemy of freedom and truth is ignorance. But, the process of knowing (pursuit of knowledge) is sometimes clouded by sin. Ignorance and sin impair our capacity to know the truth,⁵⁶ from seeing it as it is, and thus from accepting it. Sin causes doubt and skepticism. It leads to close-mindedness, causing truth to be replaced with lies. It is wickedness that blinds,⁵⁷ while the truth (seen with grace) is folly only to the sinner.⁵⁸ Not all 'knowledge' is good, as for example the knowledge of evil or of 'knowing' things wrongly. After all, Adam was cursed for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the end, progressivism tends unequivocally to see some bad knowledge as good, and some good knowledge as a nuisance. This mentality allows ignorance of the knowledge of God to abound; and further, often in the name of professionalism, knowledge of God's Revelation is quietly dismissed as valueless. Such wistfulness is a familiar problem today, a kind of modern day quietism of progress and technology against religion. However, in reality, the pursuit of progress without sufficient concern for truth, goodness, and faith is no genuine progress at all.

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Today, more than ever in history, we are living through the fulfillment of the book of Revelation. And today we must become more aware of the beast like a leopard. For, as John says of him: "*And out of the sea, in my vision, a beast came up to land... This beast which I saw was like a leopard, but it had bear's feet and a lion's mouth. To it the dragon gave the strength that was his, and great dominion.*"⁵⁹ The beast like a leopard is stealing our souls, often while we remain unaware. This beast "*acts in the shadow, keeps out of sight*

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and hides himself in such a way as to enter in everywhere... with cunning and with the means of social communication, that is to say, through propaganda... [promoting seductively] a law which is completely opposed to that of God.”⁶⁰

The beast opens his mouth to utter blasphemies against God... his greatest blasphemy is that of denying the worship due to God alone by giving it to creatures and to Satan himself... In this way souls become driven along the perverse and wicked road of disobedience to the laws of the Lord, become submerged in sin and are thus prevented from receiving the gift of grace and of the life of God... gradually being led to take away the worship that is due to God alone, in order to give it to false divinities.”⁶¹

The beast like a leopard is working today, “with great astuteness, to bring humanity everywhere to disdain the holy law of God, to work in open opposition to the ten commandments, and to take away the worship due to God alone in order to offer it to certain false idols which become extolled and adored by an ever increasing number of people: reason, flesh, money, discord, domination, violence, pleasure. Thus souls are precipitated into the dark slavery of evil, of vice and of sin and, at the moment of death and of the judgment of God, into the pool of eternal fire which is hell.”⁶²

You must “unmask all these subtle snares which the black beast sets for you and [help] make futile in the end the great attack which he has launched today against Christ and his Church.”⁶³

DAY ONE

Today's Crisis of Culture: The Beast like a Leopard

Reflection: *One Night I Had a Dream*

I dreamed I was walking along the beach with God, and across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to God, and the other to me.

When the last scene of my life flashed before me, I look back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest time in my life. This really bothered me and I questioned God about it.

"God, You said that once I decided to follow You, You would walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I do not understand why, in times when I needed You most, You should leave me alone."

Then GOD replied: *"My precious child, I love you and would never, never leave you wondering during your time of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints in the sand, it was then that I carried you."*

Mary Stevenson

Today's Crisis of Faith: The Beast like a Lamb



*Recent times have seen the rise to
prominence of various **(false) doctrines**
which tend to devalue even the truths which had been judged certain.*

John Paul II

*The tail of the devil is functioning
in the disintegration of the Catholic world.
The darkness of Satan has entered and spread
throughout the Catholic Church even to its summit.*

***Apostasy**, the loss of the faith,
is spreading throughout the world
and into the highest levels within the Church.*

Paul VI

*The beast has infiltrated into the interior of the Church...
[with the goal] of destroying Christ and His Church,
and building a new idol,
namely **a false christ and a false church.***

Marian locution to Fr. Gobbi

Joseph Ratzinger retells a popular story in his *Introduction to Christianity* about a clown who is attempting to put out a fire on the circus grounds. As the fire gets out of control, he rushes to the nearby

town to alert the people and seek help. When he approaches the townspeople waving and gesturing, they only respond with laughter, convinced that he is acting his part as the circus clown. The more he tries, the more they laugh. Soon, both circus and town are consumed by the fire, and all are lost. If only they had tried to understand, had listened and heeded his warnings! Not a few people today perceive the Gospel as a circus and the authority of the Church as a clown, while the fire destroying humanity is raging unabated and spreading quickly. Even within the Church, there are today several obstacles to faith that are causing much havoc and crisis. Here are seven *obstacles to truth in our faith today* that we need to shed light on:

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Faith Today

1. Atheism

In the realm of religion, some today say, “**God yes, or perhaps even Christ yes, but Church no.**”⁶⁴ Such people consider themselves *good* Christians even though they do not attend church regularly. They believe in God, though they do not connect this relationship with the Church. Without the Church, God becomes quickly a reflection of one’s self-making. In effect, they end up worshipping a false idol, a homemade god whom they have created, for this nevertheless allows them to continue living as they want. As Archbishop Nolan recently noted: “*Maybe the greatest threat to the church is not heresy, not dissent, not secularism, not even moral relativism, but this sanitized, feel-good, boutique, therapeutic spirituality that makes no demands, calls for no sacrifice, asks for no conversion, entails no battle against sin, but only soothes and affirms... [This approach to faith then becomes] cotton candyish: a lot of fluff, air and sugar, but no substance... [And becoming critical of the Church itself, many today] claim she is hopelessly outmoded, patriarchal, oppressive, insensitive, corrupt, unenlightened -- all (of) which really translates: unwilling to do what they want.*”⁶⁵

To them, the Church seems to be outdated, her proposals unnecessary or not relevant. They often think that they do not need the Church. Thus, they do not seek out her Message. They think they can solve all their problems themselves or that the Church will even cause

them more problems. They see the Church as an enemy of personal freedom and even a cause of social violence. They think that they will have to give up doing their own thing if they turn to God or allow His Church to guide their lives.

This approach is difficult to overcome and causes the Church much suffering. Against such false notions, we must propose that *"the Church of love is also the Church of truth."*⁶⁶ The Church is the Church of God, and God wills all persons to enter her to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, that is the knowledge of God.⁶⁷ True happiness is found in the Church and in a true understanding of the Church, which such persons often lack through no fault of their own.

Many others today are experiencing a new religiosity, one that is weak and without any genuine experience of the personal God. Their relationship with God is something more superficial and emotional than doctrinal. In effect, they say, ***"Religion yes, but God no."*** They tend to look for something spiritual that will give their restless heart a certain degree of satisfaction. They look for a sweetness that material things alone are not providing them. But, they become satisfied with religious mediocrity and superficiality. They end up *"separating [themselves] from the need of faith, from a concrete 'yes' to God that is full of meaning. [Such] people are looking more for immediate satisfaction without the need to truly commit themselves... [but they] end up merely satisfying immediate wants"*⁶⁸ becoming imprisoned in desire and their own sense of satisfaction. They claim to be religious but do not commit themselves to a personal relationship with Christ or to any specific standard of belief. On one hand they maintain their faith with pious practices, including important ones such as occasional Sunday church attendance, but continue to remain devoid of depth and spirit, and live disconnected from God in their daily life and commitments. There is no real influence of the faith in their lives; they never cease from living in a worldly way. Such religious indifference soon takes on a form of **practical atheism**. Ultimately, such persons live as though they did not believe in God. This attitude of *believing without belonging and belonging without practicing*, leads to a **neo-paganism**, in which modern religion exists as a hood ornament (often to appease conscience), when just below the surface these people are really driven by the worship of material goods

and pleasures and the worship of self, while deliberately suppressing conscience with a sort of superficial religiosity. Such people live as though their sense of religion and righteousness can shift with changing perceptions and whims. They search not for the truth of God but for an easier religion and a more self-fulfilling religious experience.

Some people today say straight out, “**God no, Church no, Religion no.**” Even as cultural Christians, they live a life of **agnosticism**, whereby the things of God are rejected, simply unknowable or so confusing as to take too much effort to try to figure out. For some today, there is a widespread idea that Christianity is nothing more than an arbitrary set of laws and bans set forth by competing religiously-affiliated groups, which one is bound to keep and, hence, appears to outsiders as unnecessarily toilsome and burdensome. For some, religion is the *opium of the people* (Marx); it is make-believe, and even degrading. With this thinking, one is freer without such a burden or myth. Such persons try to forget God and banish all serious religious talk about God from life and society. Because of their influence, today, vast areas of the world live with a forgetfulness concerning God. Whole groups of previously Christianized peoples have rejected God in favor of placing at the center man himself. This has culturally opened the way for many persons to abandon the Faith and even place themselves clearly against it. Cultural leaders often use methods of influence to silence the Word of God and the Church, and to make it appear in a bad light, even while no explicit or public statements of apostasy are directly made. They act in the form of a “*silent apostasy.*”

We are left to wonder how it is that such people justify rejecting the truth of the Christian message. One scholar deduces that “*Careful scrutiny, [he believes], can make it apparent that every intellectual stance, including all religions and ideologies, rests upon a multitude of unspecifiable and unverifiable assumptions, and in that sense may be called a ‘faith.’ Agnosticism is itself a faith, insofar as it implies the assertion that we lack the capacity to attain sure knowledge about the transcendent... [He concludes that] Everybody, then, operates on some faith or other, and each faith is, in the nature of the case, incapable of being cogently proved.*”⁶⁹ Ultimately, we all believe something; and as Chesterton reflected: when people stop believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing, they believe in anything.

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Faith Today

2. Subjectivism

Some today are trapped in a life dominated by the whim of feelings, devoid of objectivity, faith, and reason. Moral **subjectivism** is the false belief that all we can know is what we ourselves feel, that only what I perceive is real to me. Such persons base their relationship with God predominantly on personal experience, at the expense of moral and religious truth. By dismissing Biblical truth for feelings, they replace religious truth with subjective emotional feeling. Subjectivism tries to supplant truth with emotion by teaching that *“the only thing I care to know about God is what I’m feeling”* and *“the path to self-fulfillment is what you feel, not what you think or know.”* Such persons worship the god of feelings. For them, **“I feel” has replaced “I believe.”** Politically, such thinking considers it praiseworthy to represent political and legislative policies that differ from one’s own personal faith and beliefs. According to Russell Shaw, for some people, *“it’s a matter of faith that faith is irrelevant to life... This is one more way of saying truth is subjective, created by and existing in the mind, rather than objective, grounded in the reality of a world that is as it is, whether I recognize it or not.”*⁷⁰ In all areas of life and culture, such thinking has led to **permissivism**, with its advocacy of indulgent attitudes toward morally wrong behavior.

But, feelings at times deceive and distort the process of seeking truth. Emotions are not always based on reason. Sometimes we confuse knowing and faith with feelings and moods. If we base our experience of God on feelings alone, then we will never discover who He really is. If we base our beliefs on feelings, we can reason that anything we may feel like doing is then all right to do. Subjectivism is a poison that claims morality is *“manmade, private, subjective, a matter of feeling, a subdivision of psychology.”*⁷¹ When people glorify feelings instead of glorifying God, focusing excessively on self-esteem instead of on God’s truth, a crisis of identity ensues.

This **“feel-good” approach** has also become a problem of modern religion, whereby some of today’s religious leaders whitewash the reality of sin and judgment by overemphasizing a feel-good

religion. They might say: *“God loves you as you are. This is all you need to know. It does not matter what you do, only that you accept that God loves you no matter what. Do your own thing. (There is no need for hard truths and real conversion.) Just be yourself; just do what makes you happy. That’s all God wants.”* God is no longer shown to be the Source of all love *and truth*, the God Who calls all to repent, convert, and obey His decrees. Instead, He is depicted as an overindulgent parent spoiling His children, trying to be more their *“buddy”* than their Heavenly Father.

For others, religion itself is reduced to an ideology or set of values, instead of a personal encounter with God. What becomes important is that we all get along, that we all have consensus, in a society that promotes a new spirit of pacifism, ecology, and false ecumenism. Absolute values, like human life and religious truth have become relative, while relative values like solidarity, love of peace, and respect for nature have become absolute. This thinking is leading humanity toward idolatry and an era of religious deception, that of the antichrist. Dialogue and activism are replacing doctrine and the call to personal conversion. In this way, the worldly mentality prevails more and more; and, while Christ is still spoken of in a superficial way, in reality, He becomes more and more meaningless, as religion becomes diluted and deprived of the unique saving work of the Redemption. The notion of a single saving divine truth is renounced. This spiritual and moral vacuum has affected large groups of Jews, Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants alike. In such a climate, the remnant believers who remain faithful to the truths of God are labeled radical or reactionary and are increasingly persecuted; while authentic religious and personal conversion is labeled as dehumanizing and nonconforming. This is one of the great dangers that threaten true religion itself today.⁷²

The problem with such an approach is that it ignores that we have a Father who, having created us, wants to give us the treasures He possesses. And He wills for us to establish values of peace and non-violence. But, we must be willing to acknowledge and obey His marvelous Law of love and truth, even when we do not feel like it and even when it is difficult. And this must be based on a personal relationship with Him Who is the Redeemer of humanity. God is infinitely good towards all men, and especially towards sinners, the sick, the

dying, and all those who suffer. He wants only one thing: to love us all, to give us His grace, to forgive us when we repent of sin, and, most of all, to judge us with His mercy, so that we may be saved and numbered among His elect. We are invited to call Him “*Abba, Father*” with confidence and love and to trust that we shall receive everything good from Him. But, we must decide who to serve, God or ourselves. If we choose God, we must say ‘yes’ to Him unconditionally as He truly is. We must set our sights on the things of Heaven, or we will not have any motivations for goodness and truth, and we will stop desiring what is *truly* good for us and become enslaved to our own ever-changing feelings and whims, and then never find true happiness.

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Faith Today

3. Fideism

Some today act “*religious,*” but fail to acknowledge that all authentic religion is founded on reason in the search of truth. In a form of **fideism**, or faith-alone religion, they set reason aside for blind faith or think erroneously that we are saved by faith alone (without reason). It is an interesting occurrence, and an all too common a phenomenon today, to see so many people who are otherwise rational become quite irrational when it comes to religion. In its thinking, though often unconsciously, such persons often conclude that “*no religion has an intelligible basis, that none manifest a coherent whole. [In the end, religion becomes] a series of ‘myths’ or ‘ideologies’ that explain things according to the believer’s wishes. What is true is what we will to be true. But such faiths’ do not have any basis in ‘fact’ [because such ‘believers’] are not open to any rational reflection or analysis at all.*”⁷³ This at times leads to **religious fanaticism**, with its excessive, uncritical and irrational zeal, like in the case of Islamic terrorism today. This happens today in religious cults, where persons are led to abandon their use of reason and redouble their efforts toward blind religious allegiance, often without being mindful of the aim or goal itself. It is quite difficult to reach out to such persons with the God of truth, since their trained perspective claims to be immune from all outside criticisms. But, in such cases today, we must do more than

offer them Western nihilism and atheistic humanism as a solution, as one expert remarks, saying: “*If, as secularists seem to suggest, engaging the Islamic world means turning ‘moderate’ Muslims into good Western secularizing liberals, then we really are condemned to a bloody clash of civilizations.*”⁷⁴ Ultimately, on the world scene, both the East and the West must consider open and real dialogue on the brink of a **clash of civilizations** where both sides must be willing to self-examination and to discover, or re-discover, the truth of the relation between God (Allah) and man, between faith and reason. Otherwise, how can we defend our campaign to withdraw the West from Islamic extremists who insist on the murder of infidels in the name of religion, while simultaneously seeking to deposit Western democracy that sanctions the murder of the unborn in the name of reasonableness?

This phenomenon of **irrational religiosity** and religious irrationality also occurs today as many mainstream Christians approach their faith while ignoring and even rejecting sound logic and reason in regard to their beliefs. Some Christians today make no attempt to ground their faith in truth and reason, and some even reject reason as having no place in religious thought. Subsequently, their loss of faith in reason has led many of them to beliefs that are not grounded in faith at all.

With personal belief and free will, one can believe anything about anything, whether true or not. Unfortunately, many today are religiously inclined toward those who are lukewarm like themselves, who offer an easy-living, watered-down version of the gospel, or who have redefined “*Sunday worship*” as another form of entertainment. They fit religion into their own framework of convenience at the cost of betraying reason and truth. Instead of reframing their lives around the religion of the God of truth, of faith, and of reason, they form religion around their lives in ways contrary to reason and thus also to faith itself.

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Faith Today

4. Liberalism

Even within the study of theology, there exists today a widespread rejection of religious truth, which has caused a **tsunami of dissent**. Today, in many ways, the doctrine of the Church is being falsified. Some religious leaders are today essentially saying: *“I am smarter and wiser and better able to decide what to believe than Christ and His Church’s teaching authority.”* Today, groups of theologians have given doctrine a new meaning far from the teachings of the Church, called **liberalism**. There has also been a widespread denigration and even denial of certain doctrines of salvation now opinioned to be out of date with modern culture. Religious leaders, religion teachers, and many faithful Christians have been greatly affected. *“Recent times have seen the rise to prominence of various (false) doctrines which tend to devalue even the truths which had been judged certain... There is a new assumption that all positions are equally valid, (that is,) that truth reveals itself equally in different doctrines even if they contradict one another.”*⁷⁵ Many theologians and Church leaders today rationalize their views, making excuses for avoiding obedience to Christ and to His Church. In effect, they have established themselves as the new teaching authority of religion. Their lack of integrity is corrupted and its results have led to many of the Church’s recent scandals. Dissent has led to **heterodoxy**, to unbelief, to defiance, to open rebellion, to schism, to scandal, and eventually, it will lead to death. These theologians approach religion in an excessively critical way that is devoid of faith.

What is needed is not to be counter-critical, but post-critical, that is, to establish a dynamic equilibrium between critical reason and theological faith, between appropriate theological autonomy and faithful obedience to Christ-established authority with fidelity to the Christian sources. We must establish a theology that is properly critical in thinking while harmonizing history, doctrine, experience, and faith. Theology should be *both* innovative and orthodox, or in other words, it should imitate the pedagogy of Christ, Who is *“the perfect Communicator.”*⁷⁶

There is today a global crisis of faith that has derived from a two-fold source, which if reversed would also become its two-fold remedy, namely: the lack of enough authentic living witnesses of Christ and the neglect of consistently teaching sacred doctrine faithfully.⁷⁷ The result has been whole generations of Christians who suffer

religious illiteracy and doctrine-less beliefs, who are inspired more by secular “*heroes*” than by Christ and the saints. Today, many people cannot live the Faith because they do not know the Faith; and the Faith they think they know, they only know partially and with inaccuracies and gaps. But, today more and more of the faithful are tired of this approach and situation. They are awaking to a sense that something is amiss and they are more and more seeking the truth that they perceive has been denied them. The truth they are calling out for is their “*right to receive ‘the word of faith’ not in a mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor!*”⁷⁸ They want modern heroes of Christ, living saints of the Gospel, to inspire them with the whole truth of God’s Revelation.

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Faith Today

5. Nominalism

Some today try to exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute whereby they attempt to determine good and evil for themselves, in a form of religious relativism. As long as they are at peace with themselves, they think they are free. But, some kinds of behavior do in truth prevent believers from sharing in God’s grace and eternal life. The Apostle Paul mentions some of these behaviors in *I Corinthians 6:9f*. We must also remember that it is *never* right, even for the gravest reasons, to directly do evil, even that good may come from it.⁷⁹ The attempt to absolute freedom from religious restrictions actually leads to enslavement to sin. Another form of this view occurs when we think we can pick and choose which teachings of the Faith to believe while choosing others to reject, as if we were playing god ourselves. Like choosing food in a cafeteria line, sometimes this way of thinking is referred to as *cafeteria Christianity*.

Some today easily persuade themselves that what they do not want to be true is thus false.⁸⁰ Or they simply live by the lowest standard with a form of **nominal Christianity**; they convince themselves that certain moral teachings of Christ do not apply to them or in their situation. They attempt to live in a moral vacuum while maintaining a spirit of autonomy from the moral law, as if it did not apply to them. But, due to original sin, the human mind, if left to itself, is

inclined to falsehood.⁸¹ Sometimes persons may be tempted to run from the truth because they are afraid of its demands. They attempt to attain salvation based on a mistaken notion of freedom. But, every person has the obligation to properly form and then obey his conscience, according to objective truths concerning good and evil, which themselves have been determined by God. *“Freedom of conscience is never freedom ‘from’ the truth but always and only freedom ‘in’ the truth.”*⁸² In the end, only the pure of heart will see God and the truth He reveals.⁸³

I myself spent much of my young teen and adult life living a form of **religious minimalism** whereby I sought to do the least I could in regard to God and religion and the most I could in regard to myself and the world. I sought all the world had to offer and achieved success beyond my years. But, I was not happy. I would fall into depressed states. I needed more and more stimulants to keep me going, while I looked for the next big rush, to give some purpose to my life. I wanted to rule the world, to attain the pleasures of money, sex, and power. I kept a distance from God, except when I needed Him. But, nothing satisfied me. My life spiraled out of control and came dangerously close to ending. Amazingly, God had other plans for me, for I was never beyond the long arm of the Lord and His mercy. He reached out to me one Sunday during the reading from the Book of Revelation: *“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.”*⁸⁴ I immediately froze and broke out in a cold sweat. I knew in the core of my being that God was speaking to *me* and that He was going to vomit *me* out of His mouth. I was an unrepentant sinner, though I attended church on Sundays. I was convicted and found guilty, and I knew it.

This was the beginning of my conversion, and though I have stumbled and still do sometimes, I have never looked back. I cried, in sorrow for my sins, but more for joy, because I really felt loved by God for the first time in my life. I soon found that the more I drew to Christ, the more I found my heart’s true longings – love, joy, peace, happiness – fulfilled. It was as though I had been living my life in black and white, and upon repentance I began to see everything in full color for the first time. Fear of the Lord led me to Wisdom, and Wisdom to Love. From repentance, I grew in grace, and from grace

toward new hope, toward holiness, and now in the love of Christ, I desire to witness God's love and to be a saint. *"He rescued [me] from the power of darkness and brought [me] into the kingdom of his beloved Son. Through him [I] have redemption, the forgiveness of [my] sins."*⁸⁵ I received a new life and new hope. I have since seen that similar conversions took place in Mary Magdalene, Augustine of Hippo, Francis of Assisi, and in the eighteenth century-African-slave-trader-turned-penitent-Anglican-minister-and-abolitionist, John Newton, who wrote the famous song, 'Amazing Grace', after his own conversion. *"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."*

I found courage in discovering that a great sinner can repent, even after a few failed half-hearted attempts, to become a re-born child of God. How wonderful it is to know the Lord has redeemed *me*! I cry in acknowledgment, *Sola gratia! Only by grace!* It was penance that helped me to appreciate grace. We could all use a little more penance in our lives – to help us appreciate grace, which makes us righteous, and to help us to produce some good fruit, for ourselves and others. The psalmist declares: *"It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to thy name, O Most High; to declare thy steadfast love in the morning, and thy faithfulness by night...The righteous flourish... They (shall) bring forth fruit."*⁸⁶ From then on, I took *the road less traveled*, and it *has made all the difference* for the good! And now I want to tell the world how good the Lord is and what good He has done in my life, as another song declares: *I will shout it from the mountain top; I want the world to know the Lord of Love has come to me. I want to pass it on.* And how thankful to God I am!

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Faith Today

6. Spiritualism

Some seek the solution to their problems in religious practices that are not compatible with faith and reality itself. Some even believe that there is more than one Christ, including Buddha, Krishna, and Mohammed. Some try to reduce God to some form of impersonal cosmic energy. G. K. Chesterton said, *"There are those who hate Christianity and call their hatred an all-embracing love for all relig-*

ions.” More and more today people believe in a whole series of practices of ‘alternative’ religions and **spiritualism**, which border on **the magical**, and often include false superstitions and the occult. Often they focus not on the transcendent God but on a radical internalization into nature, themselves and nothingness; or they attempt to see divinity in everything equally, in all that is, and especially in themselves. Belief in the reincarnation often accompanies such cults, like with self-help gurus like L. Ron Hubbard and his scientology.

These groups are often part of the pseudo-mysticism of the **New Age movement** and its attempts to transcend religion from within. Spanish prelate, Bishop Berzosa, summarizes the process of cultural and religious shifts over the past several decades leading to the growth of New Age thinking: “the 60s, Christ yes, the Church no. The 70s: **God yes, Christ no.** The 80s: **Religion yes, God no.** The 90s: **spirituality yes, religion no.**” In other words, he sees the shift from the “passage from a confessional religiosity to one of experience, from an institutionalized religiosity to a personalized one, from a formal religiosity to a more interiorized one.”⁸⁷ Bishop Berzosa also points out four spiritual “lies or temptations” of the Evil One regarding New Age thinking: You will be like gods (pantheism); you will never die (reincarnation), you can determine good and evil for yourself (moral relativism and subjectivism), and your eyes will be opened (Enlightenment esoterics). He said those most drawn to New Age spirituality today are “people of the first world, of the middle class, between 25 and 50 years of age – whose stomachs are full, but whose heads and hearts are empty, and who are the great absent ones from our Christian communities.”

Some of New Age practices foster the worship of self or a form of the dark side. Anything ‘New Age’—such as reiki, yoga, tarot cards, ‘New Age’ exercises, massages and music—is occult! Do not be fooled because someone influential claims otherwise. Even with yoga, interestingly, as we see the latest spin attempting to bend it to fit Christianity, the truth is clear, as Sannyasin Arumugaswami, managing editor of *Hinduism Today*, acknowledges, when he admits that yoga is “based as it is on Hindu Scripture and developed by Hindu sages. *Yoga opens up new and more refined states of mind, and to understand them one needs to believe in and understand the Hindu way of looking at God. ... [I admit readily that] A Christian trying to adapt these*

practices will likely disrupt their own Christian beliefs.”⁸⁸ Besides, “*Unlike yoga or other relaxation techniques, Christian prayer doesn’t seek simply to calm our nerves but to put us in personal contact with the living God.*”⁸⁹ Why settle for these cheap imitations and demonic practices? In the end, these false answers to life’s questions deprive us of truth and authentic peace, while they take us away from Christ at the same time.

In reality, just because we think something is true does not make it true, no matter how much we may believe it or are told to believe it. We may wonder why there are so many differing and contradictory opinions about God today. Even among Christians, there are tens of thousands of denominations today, each disagreeing with the other about some interpretation of beliefs concerning the Word of God. Certainly, as all agree, this has led to the dissolving of a unity and truth. Not that the truth no longer exists, or that it is no longer true, but that it is comparatively harder to find. And to make matters even more complicated, **religious pluralism** has led to religious self-worship, all at the expense of the true religion of God.

As has been said, the religious tensions that divide humanity, that divide the East and the West, are leading to a clash of civilizations. Irrational religion, based on militant fundamentalism and demonstrated by its suicide bombers, is clashing with the religion of love, which is based upon faith and reason and is most markedly demonstrated by its martyrs.

The truth is that Jesus is the King and Lord of all of humanity, of every person, and of history. “*His empire includes not only (Christian) nations, not only baptized persons who, though of right belonging to the Church, have been led astray by error, or have been cut off from her by schism, but also all those who are outside the Christian faith; so that truly the whole of mankind is subject to the power of [God].*”⁹⁰

Seven Obstacles to Truth in Our Faith Today

7. Demonism

Some today reject the traditional way of seeing the personification of evil as the devil. They falsely believe that Satan is a primitive myth. But, the devil, who is the “*father of lies*” and a murderer from

the beginning, is a real fallen angel who tries to deceive us and tempt us to sin and destruction, and often through the appearance of good. His ploys can be quite alluring and seductive, as they appear enticing at first, but they always lead to sin and death. Satan is deceiving many today who do not recognize him. He convinces people to follow him or his ways by convincing them he does not exist. Such people end up worshiping him, in a form of **demonism**, even though they refuse to believe he exists. Many Christians have started on a spiritual journey of faith, but then have stopped because of obstacles placed in their path by the devil. They have allowed Satan to discourage them. While “*the devil... the proud spirit... cannot endure to be mocked,*”⁹¹ instead of mocking him today, many just make fun of those who acknowledge his existence. But, he exercises his influence even over those who do not believe in him, and perhaps even more so. He places thoughts in our mind, and he wants us to respond to these “*temptations*” while not knowing they are from him.

When we do not pay attention to his tactics, then the devil succeeds more easily. C.S. Lewis discusses this in his wonderful book about the devil’s tactics called *Screwtape Letters*. The Enemy, the Serpent, is finally defeated precisely through being detected and unmasked. He invents heresies and causes schism so as to undermine the true Faith, to corrupt the truth, to destroy Christian unity. He gets everyone to think that “*everyone is good and everyone is saved.*” This thinking leads us to think the devil is irrelevant and to *act* as though he does not exist. But, he seeks to devour and destroy souls. He hates us because God loves us and he wants to hurt God by taking us away from Him.

He hates the family, which is an earthly image of the Trinity, and seeks to destroy it; and by destroying the family, Satan plans to destroy society and the Church. At the center of society is the Church and at the center of the Church is the family, which is a domestic church. Satan knows that if he can destroy the family, the Church and society will fall as well. But, God has a different plan – to redeem your life, your family, and society itself through you.

By lies that have all the appearance of truth, Satan undermines the truth with trickery. His tactic is to isolate us and move us away from religious practice. He wants us to react to life with our emotions, exciting our passions, letting our emotions run free, so that we avoid

controlling our thoughts and actions with reason, virtue, grace, and truth. He wants us to have a “*no holds barred*” approach to life.

Some, who refuse to acknowledge his influence now, may spend eternity calling him “*Papa Satan, Papa Satan.*”⁹² God even warns that those who will have nothing to do with His truth make themselves children of the devil.⁹³ “*Abandon all hope ye who enter here,*”⁹⁴ will be the last sign on their journey to eternal loss.

The devil is real and Jesus knew this. Today, He calls His Church to “*cast out demons*”⁹⁵ in His Name. An example of the reality of demonic possession is found in the modern case of Anneliese Michel, who was a normal, religiously nurtured young girl. Without warning, her life changed on a day in 1968 as a sixteen year-old when soon after epileptic-like attacks began, Anneliese started seeing the faces of demons during her daily praying and feeling an enormously powerful force pressing down on her. In the fall of 1970, while the young people of the world were pursuing the hedonistic excesses of the time, Anneliese was battling with the belief that she was possessed. Voices also began following her, telling her that she will “*stew in hell.*” Her blue eyes would turn black filled with hatred and her hands and body would become wracked with strange contortions. Family members began hearing strange noises in the ceiling and below the floor and smelling the stench of burning and sewage throughout the rooms of the house. Anneliese insulted, beat, and began biting the other members of her family. She gained unbelievable physical strength. She slept on the stone floor, ate spiders, flies, and coal, and drank her own urine. She would scream throughout the house for hours while breaking crucifixes, destroying paintings of God, and pulling apart rosaries, and she began committing acts of self-mutilation. Other times she was peaceful and filled with joy, even capable of successful study. Two priests examined her to determine carefully what was actually happening. As humans, we have three dimensions: the body, the spirit, and the soul. The priests thus had to examine whether her condition was psychosomatic, psychiatric, or spiritual. They determined her case was primarily a spiritual matter, although it involved the physical and psychological as well.

It was determined to conduct a series of exorcisms to save Anneliese. Exorcisms have always been part of the Church’s pastoral ministry; they are visible manifestations of the battle between the

Kingdom of God and the powers of darkness. During the exorcism, it was discovered that Anneliese was reportedly possessed by at least six harassing spirits – including Lucifer, and the souls of Judas Iscariot, Nero, Cain, Hitler, and Fleischmann, a disgraced Frankish Priest from the sixteenth century, and some other damned souls. Anneliese's attacks were sometimes so strong that she would have to be held down by three men, or even chained up. She would often find herself paralyzed and falling unconscious. During exorcisms, she spoke any language at will including Latin, Chinese, and Dutch. The exorcism continued over many months, always with the same prayers. Over forty audiotapes recorded the exorcisms, including the voices of the demons, in order to preserve the details. Often she refused to eat because the demons would not allow it, causing her neck muscles to become stiffened. She reacted most violently to holy water. On December 30, 1975, one of the demons screamed: "*We are not coming out because He (Christ) will not permit it! (The Savior) does not permit it.*" Lucifer himself spoke through her of the punishments soon to befall humanity for its sins: "*By order of the One up there, you should warn people of the danger of a world without God. They have abandoned the One in whom they can find peace... Death, tribulations, and famine, O yes, they will come again!*" The demons begged to be released from the girl's body. But, Heaven had charged them to remain. In this case, the demons stated that a woman from Anneliese's mother village, jealous of her marital and financial good fortune, had cursed her daughter, Anneliese. In spite of this, demonic possessions can only occur when permitted by God. God permitted this for Anneliese's sanctification and the salvation of souls.⁹⁶

The last day of the Exorcism Rite was on June 30th, 1976, and Anneliese was suffering at this point from pneumonia, severe dehydration, and malnutrition. She had been fasting to combat Satan's influence and did not want medical treatment. "*Please give me absolution*" is the last statement Anneliese made to the exorcists.

Possession occurs in people who have opened themselves to the work of Satan, through sin, mediums, or by direct permission. Otherwise, without our permission the kingdom of darkness can do us no internal harm. Anneliese was an innocent child who was possessed through her permission, so that many souls would be saved who were caught in sin. She was clearly and lucidly aware of her struggle with

the powers of evil within her and she knew of her heavenly mission to help others to be saved. In the midst of her sufferings, a heavenly Woman appeared to her, saying: *“It is a great suffering for my heart that so many souls are lost! It is necessary to do penance for priests, for the youth, and for your country. Would you like to do penance for these souls so that not so many are lost?”* Anneliese agreed and later gave a hand written letter to the exorcist priest not long before her death, stating that she no longer wanted any more exorcisms. Without her approval, the exorcists could not continue. In the letter she said that a heavenly Woman had appeared to her to offer her two choices: first, to be freed from the demons immediately; or second, to remain possessed for a time longer as a victim soul to show the entire world the truth of the dangers and powers of demons; and that Anneliese would also, through this, save souls by her sufferings. Based on this heavenly invitation, Anneliese had chosen to remain possessed and thus had the exorcisms stopped. The heavenly Woman had also told her that she would be freed from the demons before her death and would die in the state of grace.

Anneliese spoke of offering her suffering for the sins of wayward youth and apostate priests. She wanted people to realize that Satan is real and he is more active now than ever before, and that hell exists for unconverted souls; and that we must make choices upon which our eternal salvation or damnation depend. The ultimate consequence of unrepented mortal sin is hell. Hell is the only alternative to Heaven. We must take conversion seriously. We are all called to repent, and to worship and to love the Triune God. The German exorcist in this case, Fr. Ernst Alt, years later in an article makes this appeal, saying: *“No raising of the arm to some new Führer! No falling into materialism! No succumbing to false values! No yielding to pressure by the mass media! What else? Bend the knee and pray, paying homage to [God] in a spirit of truth and love.”*⁹⁷

Anneliese suffered a real passion like that of Christ. And Jesus suffered in her, keeping several demons in bondage. He spoke to her saying: *“I am making use of your suffering, sorrow and lack of solace to save souls.”* He promised her a great reward saying: *“You will become a great saint.”* In her humility, she did not want to believe this, but He gave her a sign it was true. She even prophesied the day of her death. On July 1, 1976, the day that she had predicted as the day of

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her liberation, she died peacefully in her sleep. Around midnight when, according to what she said, the demons had to leave her, she stopped raging. Exhausted but peaceful, she finally went to sleep and never woke up. The movie, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, based on her life, succeeded in reminding people that the devil, demons, and hell are real. Some consider Anneliese a saint today and visit her tomb. Her mother said, around the time the movie was released in 2005, that the exorcism had indeed been justified: *“I know that we did the right thing because I saw the sign of Christ in her hands (and her feet). She was bearing the stigmata (wounds of Christ crucified) and that was a sign from God that we should exorcise the demons... She died to save other lost souls, to atone for their sins.”*

The single, greatest, most difficult criticism against the belief in the existence of God is the problem of evil. Satan has infiltrated every aspect of our world, even into the Church. Some today even knowingly allow Satan to guide them. The devil is working to destroy God’s plans. He hates God and he hates us. Scripture attests, *“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.”*⁹⁸ The dark effects of evil over many hearts today will grow even darker and there will be more suffering unless we return to God. Though he is merely a creature whose actions are limited by God, the devil has power to tempt all humanity. His actions cause grave injuries – both spiritual, moral and physical – to each man and to society; but, he cannot prevent the building up of God’s reign. God permits evil because He respects the freedom of His creatures and He knows how to derive good from all evil and sin for those who love Him.⁹⁹ God wants to help us to be free of the devil’s traps of darkness and sin. God wants to bring us into the light of truth and life, if we freely accept His help. Anneliese reminds us that we are all required to *“work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling.”*¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, while some acknowledge the devil and his evil exists, and that man’s evil is real, overwhelmed by evil, they choose to despair and cry out, *“Where is God? Where is the God of love? How can God be loving, while allowing such evil?”* But, evil is not a thing; evil is the result of a wrong choice. God created all things good – our choices in using things wrongly can cause evil, because of our free will (which allows us to refuse to love), to bring about a

negation of love and goodness. The origin of evil is not God, but our freely choosing sin and selfishness. All evil comes from either humans or fallen angels who have chosen to reject God's love – freely choosing against God and His plan of love.

In His Goodness, God permits evil. He brings good out of all things, including evil and sin, for those who love Him.¹⁰¹ God permits evil people do evil things, but only for a greater good. *"The wicked exist in this world either to be converted or that through them the good may exercise patience."*¹⁰² When wondering how to deal with such persons, Basil the Great says: *"We should tolerate association with sinners only for the purpose of recalling them to repentance, by every means short of committing sin ourselves. But when every form of solicitude has been applied in their regard, we should avoid those who persist in their evil ways."* Humility and mercy are needed, as God teaches us. The answer to the problem of evil is God; it is love and obedience.

Evil is a lack of what should be; it is an absence of good. Evil has manifestations in the created world, including in natural disasters. The solution to the reality of evil is prayer. As evil causes unrest and civil disorder, so too, contrarily, prayer can avert wars and sickness. Even with the reality of evil and its dire effects, ultimately, God is victorious over all evil. He promises that in *everything*, including sin and evil, He works *for good* for those who love Him.¹⁰³ To prove this promise, let us examine the greatest evil in human history, namely the killing of the Son of God. Transversely, the greatest good that has ever occurred was His resurrection from the dead on the third day, completing His triumph over sin and death. In the mysterious plan of the loving God, He does not cause evil, but He *allows* it for a *greater good*. That does not make the reality of evil any less severe in itself. We must lovingly trust God even in the midst of suffering evil; and we ourselves must always avoid freely and directly participating in evil itself. For *only* those who love God will experience the good He brings out of evil (Romans 8:28).

Evil befalls both the sinner and the completely innocent. But, sometimes, a person may seem innocent, but in reality is not. We may not see their sin, but God does, and He lovingly punishes such a person remedially to call them back to Himself and to what is good. Regarding the truly innocent, sometimes God permits them to suffer

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evil for the sake of others, to allow them to engage in redemptive suffering, united with Christ crucified. Making sacrifices, offering to God our sufferings united with Christ, becomes a great blessing to the entire world, when offered up to God for others' good. This was the case with Anneliese.

There is much sin in the world, which is influenced by the world, the flesh, and the devil. We find it easier to do evil than to do good. This is called concupiscence. We are capable of doing evil on our own, with our fallen nature, while we can only do good consistently with God's help and grace. Evil leads to sin, and sin in itself causes a darkening of the light of our intellect, which gives rise to blindness to truth and goodness and thus furthers evil, while the conscience is slowly quieted, so that soon evil and sin prevail. On the other hand, as we shall soon see, there is also much good in the world; God's grace is always superior to the devil's influence. Besides, the devil is not the focus of life, God is and He rules the world for good.

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The reality of the grave dangers which threaten the Church today, with so many diabolical attacks which are being carried out against it to destroy it, calls us to sobriety. This time we live in today is seeing the fulfillment of the second beast in the book of Revelation, which is that of the beast like a lamb, as John describes him: *"Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon."*¹⁰⁴

As the vision unfolds, *"there comes out of the earth, by way of aid to the Black Beast which arises out of the sea [who is like a leopard], a beast which has two horns like those of a lamb... The beast has on its head two horns like those of a lamb."*¹⁰⁵

The image of the two horns in Scripture is that of sacrifice and the image of the lamb is that of the priesthood. *"To the symbol of the sacrifice, there is intimately connected that of the priesthood; the two horns. The high priest of the Old Testament wore a headpiece with two horns. The bishops of the church wear the mitre with two horns to indicate the fullness of their priesthood... the beast with the two horns like a lamb indicates [the beast has] infiltrated into the interior of the Church... [with the goal] of destroying Christ and His Church, [and] building a new idol, namely a false christ and a false church."*¹⁰⁶

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Satan has entered in even to the summit of the Church. Pope Paul VI remarked that the smoke of Satan was seeping into the Church of God through cracks in the wall. On October 13, 1977, Paul VI told the world: *“The tail of the devil is functioning in the disintegration of the Catholic world. The darkness of Satan has entered and spread throughout the Catholic Church even to its summit. Apostasy, the loss of the faith, is spreading throughout the world and into the highest levels within the Church.”*

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Having introduced and evaluated the numerous obstacles to the discovery of religious truth and to theological faith, I wonder if it is enough to simply address these stumbling blocks. I think, as necessary as this is, it is not enough.

We must as well consider that the cause of our modern crisis of faith is also the lack of authentic witness on the part of believing Christians. And as Christians, we must acknowledge *“our responsibilities as Christians for the evils of today. We must ask ourselves how we have failed to be a force for good against atheism, religious indifference, secularism, ethical relativism, the violations of the right to life, disregard for the poor.”*¹⁰⁷ Many today lack an authentic experience of the Lord’s charity due to the poor example of other Christians. This is in great part why they fall prey to the various obstacles to faith. A genuine encounter with the Lord given through an authentic living witness is what changes one’s life for the better; it changes all the dimensions of life. Christianity is above all an *encounter* with Christ, and often through an *encounter* with a Christ-I-Am-Now (Christian). The Gospel is given to us by God to transform us – to permeate our way of thinking (the way we judge things) and our everyday behavior. Entering into a true relationship with Christ changes our relations with our spouse, with our children, with our way of approaching our professional work, our leisure, the use of money, and our friendships. This encounter changes our lives, making them more human and more holy. Eventually, this experience spreads beyond the private sphere, changing the ways of families, professions, society, politics, and culture. We must say ‘yes’ to both religion and to a genuine and sustaining *encounter* with the living God. Christ warns us that we must not become one of these *stumbling stones*, which will then become a *millstone*, one that becomes tied around our neck, as we

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are cast into the sea, and drowned,¹⁰⁸ for not being authentic living witnesses of God's love and truth!

This book offers a genuine reason to live, the greatest reason to believe, to hope, and to love! Your life can have deeper meaning. This book contains the truth that will lead you to lasting happiness and give your life true purpose. There is another way to experience your life. This book will show you, like you have never seen before, that it is in Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Who sets you free *if* you let Him. By His power and grace, He will break you free of the obstacles to faith that have been your stumbling stones and build you into His temple of holiness. Remove the obstacles to faith itself by repenting; then open your heart to God, and His grace will do the rest. **You are redeemed!** God has redeemed us all!

Come and see!

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Imagine... You are walking down a dusty, dirt road, following this man named Jesus, the One who healed the blind, exercised demons, and performed many other miracles. You are walking along, quite content, expecting Him to perform another miracle, when all of a sudden, Jesus stops as He approaches a divide in the road—a place where your journey is about to take on a spiritual dimension. He turns to you and tells you that He is about to turn right. As you look to the right, you see a very narrow, winding, rocky path, one with thorny brambles on both sides, and you are thinking, “How on earth am I going to go that way? I don't even know where it leads.” Almost as though He is reading your mind, Jesus proceeds to tell you, “THIS is the way to life, to the heavenly paradise ... you'll have to follow Me above anything or anyone else in your life, including yourself, and the journey will likely be painful, but trust Me.” Then you notice the road sign beside the right path that reads “Heavenly PEACE”. Having your doubts that any path like this could be peaceful, you look to the left and see a wide, level, asphalt-paved, multi-lane highway that you can see winds through a lush countryside, though you do not know for sure where this route leads either. It seems much more pleasant and very inviting, although you realize Jesus is not the one inviting you down this path. The road sign beside this route on the left reads, “WORLDLY peace”. Jesus explains the difference between heavenly

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peace and worldly peace, saying, “Not as the world gives peace will I give it to you.” Then He explains there is a cost for choosing either route; that to go right and follow Him, you will have to surrender yourself to totally trust that He is leading you in the right direction, or to go left and follow your own whims, you will have to surrender yourself to go on without Him.

God invites you to follow Him on the narrow path. Jesus suggests that you first count the COST ... the cost of going either way? You may begin to reason that either path makes sense. But, often reason makes you short-sighted when comparing the two costs, especially when you do not consider the destination of each path which only faith can make complete sense of. And then there is the enemy who will try to deceive you into going left along the path of Worldly peace with short-term offers and quick gains that may inevitably blur your consideration of the heavenly destination God desires for you. If you make the choice irrationally, or by using reasoning alone, you will only see the difficulties along the way of Christ, without considering the rewards—the heavenly peace you receive along the way AND forever in Heaven.¹⁰⁹

Jesus will not choose your path for you, but He offers you free will, grace, and guidance – to go His way of heavenly Peace or your way of Worldly peace. As you choose which way to go, He asks you to discern His Will rather than your own, and to consider the long-term consequences and costs of your choice. As He begins to turn right, Jesus invites you to follow Him along the path that leads to heavenly Peace, to thus remain free and truly happy in this life, and by it, to be led to Heaven to be with Him forever. You must now decide which direction to take, the one to life with Him or the one to death on your own. Christ is taking the one on the right, NOW! What shall it be?¹¹⁰ Move forward or turn back.

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DAY TWO:

Today's Crisis of Faith: The Beast like a Lamb

Scripture Verses to Remember: *"Great peace have those who love Thy law; nothing can make them stumble."* (Psalm 119:165)

"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Whoever humbles himself... is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:1-4)

Prayer:

MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

- Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*

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- ¹ From Julian of Norwich, cited in CCC 313.
² Hebrews 11:1
³ Benedict XVI, SC 2
⁴ FR 28
⁵ Hebrews 11:6
⁶ 2 Timothy 4:3-4
⁷ Louis Marie de Montfort, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*.
⁸ Catherine de Hueck Doherty, *The Gospel Without Compromise* (Madonna House Publications, 2002).
⁹ John Paul II quoting Paul VI, ZENIT 6-4-2004.
¹⁰ Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), Talk upon receiving the St. Benedict Award (Subiaco, Italy), 4/11/05
¹¹ Leo XIII, *Humanum genus* 24
¹² Preface by H. Lyman Stebbins to *I Believe in Love* by Jean C.J. d'Elbee (Sophia, 2001)
¹³ John Paul II, ZENIT 6-4-2004.
¹⁴ Benedict XVI, Homily during Baptisms (1/8/06), ZE06010805.
¹⁵ JP II, *Centesimus annus* 44
¹⁶ JP II, EV 19
¹⁷ Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *Homily* (April 18, 2005)
¹⁸ Archbishop Chaput, World Youth Day Address, Spain, August 23, 2011
¹⁹ JP II, CA46 cited in VS 101.
²⁰ Zenit.org 9/9/11
²¹ Gregory XVI, *Mirari vos* 14
²² This view is discussed with criticism by Fr. James V. Schall, S.J., *On the Stertness of Christianity*, accessed online at http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features/schall_sternness_dec04.asp (7/19/05).
²³ See John 19:10-11, Romans 13:1-2
²⁴ Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys* (2000)
²⁵ JP II, 6/4/2004
²⁶ George Weigel, *Letters to a Young Catholic* (NY: Basic Books2004), 74
²⁷ Romans 1:18-2:11
²⁸ Benedict XVI, WYD (August 2005)
²⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Die Gottesfrage des heutigen Menschen* (Vienna, 1956); Eng. trans., Hilda Graef, *The God Question and Modern Man* (NY, 1967), 71
³⁰ Fr. James V. Schall, S.J., *Simply Complex or Complicated Simplicity?* (6/12/05), accessed online at http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2005/schall_complex_july05.asp
³¹ James V. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 114

- ³² Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*. Ignatius: San Francisco, 2006; 85-86.
- ³³ JP II, *Message to the 8th International Youth Forum*, 3/31/04
- ³⁴ From his book, *Truth or Weak Faith: Dialogue on Christianity and Relativism* (Italian), as cited in Zenit (12/17/06)
- ³⁵ JP II, *Message to the 8th International Youth Forum*, 3/31/04
- ³⁶ John 18:37
- ³⁷ Closing Message “To Men of Thought and Science” in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (NY: America Press, 1966), 731
- ³⁸ Benedict XVI’s Address to US Bishops, Zenit (1/19/12)
- ³⁹ Benedict XVI’s Address to US Bishops, Zenit (1/19/12)
- ⁴⁰ Acquired online at www.interviewwithgod.com/patriotic (6/8/06)
- ⁴¹ Benedict XVI, *Homily*, 8/16/05
- ⁴² Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, 18, 33-42, 64.
- ⁴³ Ratzinger, 44-45, 51
- ⁴⁴ George Weigel discusses “Christophobia” in his book: *The Cube and the Cathedral*. This term he cites from Joseph Weiler.
- ⁴⁵ As reported by Zenit.org 9/9/11
- ⁴⁶ Mary Ellen Bork, *Reflections on Equality and Difference*, Voices: Women for Faith & Family (Vol. XIX No. 3 Michaelmas 2004), accessed online at <http://wff.org/04-3-CollaborationMenWomen.html> (5/15/05).
- ⁴⁷ See messages of Our Lady of Good Success
- ⁴⁸ Pius XII, *Sport at the Service of the Spirit* (July 29, 1945)
- ⁴⁹ Richard Easterlin studied public opinion surveys in the 1970s and drew these conclusions; see also *The Paradox of Prosperity* (1999) from the Henley Centre
- ⁵⁰ Father Raniero Cantalamessa (preacher of the Pontifical Household), Sunday Homily (6/24/05), Zenit News Service.
- ⁵¹ John Paul II (hereafter JP II), 5/28/04
- ⁵² *Principles of Social Reconstruction*
- ⁵³ Benedict XVI, *World Youth Day Vigil Address* (Cologne, Germany), August 20, 2005.
- ⁵⁴ JP II, Divine Mercy Sunday Angelus (posthumous), 4/3/05
- ⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, *Regensburg Lecture* (9/12/06)
- ⁵⁶ JP II, FR 19
- ⁵⁷ Wisdom 2:21
- ⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:14
- ⁵⁹ Revelation 13:1-2
- ⁶⁰ From Marian locutions to Fr. Gobbi
- ⁶¹ From Marian locutions to Fr. Gobbi
- ⁶² From Marian locutions to Fr. Gobbi
- ⁶³ From Marian locutions to Fr. Gobbi
- ⁶⁴ Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *God and the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), reprinted interview online at Zenit.org (4/27/05).
- ⁶⁵ <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0700389.htm>
- ⁶⁶ Benedict XVI, *General Audience* (4/6/06).

⁶⁷ 1 Timothy 2:4

⁶⁸ Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *God and the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), reprinted interview online at [Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org) (4/27/05).

⁶⁹ Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology* (NY: Crossroad, 1992), 59-60

⁷⁰ Russell Shaw, *Terri: Canary in a Moral Cave*, Catholic Exchange website: http://www.catholicexchange.com/vm/index.asp?vm_id=1&art_id=28021 (4/4/05).

⁷¹ Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 26

⁷² According to Giacomo Biffi in a presentation to the Vatican (2/27/07)

⁷³ Fr. James V. Schall, S.J., *Catholicism: Simply Complex or Complicated Simplicity?*, June 12, 2005, accessed online at

http://ignatiainsight.com/features2005/schall_complex_july05.asp (7/19/05).

⁷⁴ Weigel, *Letters to a Young Catholic*, 235

⁷⁵ JPII, FR 5

⁷⁶ (Pontifical) Commission for the Means of Social Communication, *Communio et Progressio*, 11, 126

⁷⁷ For more on this topic, see Bowring, *To Hold and Teach the Catholic Faith* (New York: St. Pauls/Alba House, 2006)

⁷⁸ JPII, CT 30

⁷⁹ JPII, VS 80; see Romans 3:8

⁸⁰ CCC 37

⁸¹ JPII, FR 22

⁸² JPII, VS 64

⁸³ Matthew 5:8

⁸⁴ Revelation 3:15-16

⁸⁵ Colossians 1:12-15

⁸⁶ Psalm 92:1-2, 12, 14

⁸⁷ Zenit.org 9/9/11

⁸⁸ http://www.denverpost.com/lifestyles/ci_3819655

⁸⁹ Thomas Williams, *Spiritual Progress* (New York: Faith Words, 2007), 70

⁹⁰ Leo XIII, *Annum sacrum*, 3

⁹¹ Thomas More, quoted in the beginning of C. S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*

⁹² Dante, *Inferno*, Canto VII

⁹³ See John 8:44

⁹⁴ Dante, *Inferno*, Canto III

⁹⁵ Matthew 10:8; see also Luke 10:17-20 and Mark 16:17

⁹⁶ "Some of the possessed have suffered so much and at the same time have submitted so perfectly to God's will, leading an intense life of prayer and sacrifice, that they have begun to experience the phenomena of the mystical life without having been freed from their possession. There are several cases like this throughout history, of long enduring possessions, experienced together with mysticism. One may ask how is it possible for a person to be possessed and at the same time enjoy intense union with God. The answer is simple. The demon is in the body and the soul is united to God while bearing this cross of possession. This is the reason why Holy Communion can be given to a possessed person during exorcism, if the person is in a state of grace to receive the sacrament. The demon does not necessarily leave even

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when the person receives Holy Communion, because God permits the person's sufferings for its sanctification and the good of the Church. This cross of the possessed person will gain many graces for other souls." Excerpt from Fr. Jose Antonio Fortea and Lawrence E.U. LeBlanc, *Anneliese Michel: The true story of a case of demonic possession, Germany -1976* (unpublished manuscript, 2011).

⁹⁷ *Love One Another Magazine*, 6th Issue (2005)

⁹⁸ 1 Peter 5:8-9

⁹⁹ See CCC 309f

¹⁰⁰ Philippians 2:12b

¹⁰¹ Romans 8:28

¹⁰² Augustine of Hippo

¹⁰³ Romans 8:28

¹⁰⁴ Revelation 13:11

¹⁰⁵ From Marian locutions to Fr. Gobbi

¹⁰⁶ From Marian locutions to Fr. Gobbi

¹⁰⁷ JPII, Homily, Jubilee Day of Pardon (3-12-00)

¹⁰⁸ See Luke 17:2

¹⁰⁹ Romans 8:18

¹¹⁰ Original story inspired by Deacon Gerry Kazin and used with permission.