

MINISTRY FORMATION

APOLOGETICS IN A SECULAR WORLD

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“The pastoral conversion of the parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church” Vatican, June 29, 2020

16. ...the current Parish model no longer adequately corresponds to the many expectations of the faithful, especially when one considers the multiplicity of community types in existence today. It is true that a characteristic of the Parish is that its rootedness at the center of where people live from day to day. However, the Parish territory is no longer a geographical space only, but also the context in which people express their lives in terms of relationships, reciprocal service and ancient traditions. As a result, any pastoral action that is limited to the territory of the Parish is outdated, which is something the parishioners themselves observe when their Parish appears to be more interested in preserving a nostalgia of former times as opposed to looking to the future with courage.

17. Moreover, mere repetitive action that fails to have an impact upon people's concrete lives remains a sterile attempt at survival, which is usually welcomed by general indifference. If the Parish does not exude that spiritual dynamic of evangelization, it runs the risk of becoming self-referential and fossilized, offering experiences that are devoid of evangelical flavor and missionary drive, of interest only to small groups.

We are having the wrong conversation:

In a time of significant change (pandemic), we cannot assume we will find religion in the predictable places or in predictable forms. And if we do not find as much of it in those places as we did before, we cannot assume that it is disappearing.

We are only just now coming to terms with the fact that more and more religion happens outside of traditional institutions.

Nancy Ammerman, Professor of Sociology of Religion, Boston University

Students may have thousands of friends online (parallel play), but few in real life; they may be experts at talking with their thumbs, but not so much with their tongues.

They do not have a tribe or a sense of belonging. They feel disconnected from what it means to be human.”

Varun Soni, Dean of Religious Life, USC writing in LA Times

Belonging (Josh Packard, Lasailian Educational Research Initiative, 2020) found that meaningful adult relationships are critical to a young person's well-being. **We, as church, are fooling ourselves if we believe we, as Church, are the main character in the “play” of normal Catholic's lives.**

The higher the number of positive adult relationships that are authentic, vulnerable, curious, warm, and structured, the more a young person will be able to cultivate positive feelings of belonging. The study reported that 62% of young people with zero trusted adult relationships feel completely alone. Conversely, for young people with five or more trusted adult relationships, only 9% report feeling alone.

So in our never-ending struggle to raise good “products” – sports, clubs, academics- our over/under involved parents have traded a good resume, achievement, college acceptance for stress, anxiety, loneliness, depression, etc.. (Matt Schwartz)

From Dr. Packard’s Research:

I am NOTICED

I am NAMED

I am KNOWN

This is not new to our own local culture. In 1982 and 1997, The Diocese of Rockford conducted in-depth surveys of every parish and school in the Diocese based on deanery and city. In both studies, over 95% of parishes wanted:

1. More youth involvement.
2. Better programs for youth and their parents.
3. Better understanding of Church practice and theology.

1. Doctrine vs. Discipline

Why is the Catholic Church so ritualistic? It seems like everyone must do things in a very specific way when receiving sacraments and must be told when to stand, sit and kneel during Mass.

Liturgy, as life, is ritual. But culture determines these disciplines and has for 2,000 years. Liturgy by, definition is the work of the people- hence changeable. Liturgy is a discipline. Not even the Vatican has kneelers. We “changed” liturgy in 2011 and countless times before that pre-Vatican II- specifically in 1955 with the Easter Triduum.

Explain the obligatory nature of attending Mass and Holy Days.

Attendance and membership do not mean discipleship and faithfulness. This phenomenon is new to Catholic faith- only about 117 years old thanks to Pope Pius X. Pius emphasized frequent reception of the Eucharist, full active and conscience participation, age of discretion for Eucharist- to get their parents to Mass and build adherence to Catholic schools, CCD- catechism- although the United States’ version was not universal, Canon Law, frequent confession.

Geography, travel, industrialization are huge factors to determine “obligation. Not even every church in the Diocese of Rockford has daily Mass or Mass every Sunday. Holy Days are permeable since 1966 and dependent upon the local council of bishops. Any Diocese can

suspend a Holy Day or a discipline of fasting/abstinence as they see fit. The Diocese of Rockford did it in 2008.

Why is there such animosity towards those who would prefer the Latin Mass and more orthodox traditions which, in their mind, is more closely related to the original fathers of the church?

Current Mass is closer to original Mass. An understanding of our current Liturgical Calendar helps with this...but we focus too much on disciplines (fasting, abstinence, etc).

2. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism- Christian Smith, Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers, 2004, 2009, 2015.

Teenagers tend to espouse a religious outlook that is distinct from the traditional faith commitments of most U.S. religious traditions – an outlook that can be described as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

“Contrary to popular assumptions and stereotypes, teenage religiosity is ‘extraordinarily’ conventional.”

“The vast majority of U.S. teens are not alienated or rebellious. Most are quite content to follow in their parents’ footsteps.”

“Most religious communities’ central problem is not teen rebellion but ‘benign whateverism.’ ”
Most youth call themselves Christians and attend worship—and often Christian education and youth ministry programs—regularly.... but have no ‘language’ to prove it. Most youth go along to get along.

“...most American youth faithfully mirror the aspirations, lifestyles, practices, and problems of the adult world into which they are socialized... Young people are a mirror and barometer of their parents.”

“Children’s worship and spiritual habits are directly related to their parent’s worship and spiritual habits.”

Many teens are inarticulate about their faith...The reality is that do not possess the skills to communicate their faith...The reality is that they have a hard time naming adults with whom

they can discuss faith...The reality is that many adults do not possess the skills to communicate their faith. (Matt Schwartz)

Adult children who do not believe and go to mass --would be interesting to hear your response.

Ownership, accountability, failure, reward.

In our society today it seems each person can make their own judgment on what is right or wrong, resulting in relative morality. How do I discuss moral absolutism with my friends?

Today, our culture triumphs truth as personal. But history is full of generations like this. Adults have no idea what moral absolutism is because of the fear to offend. Too often we provide incomplete theological answers to personal pastoral situations.

Not going to force religion on my kids. Kids need to figure out what is best for them. Maybe my kids will pick a different religion someday...the point is for them to find their own faith and connections to a higher power and how they go about it should not matter.

Children do not decide food, clothing, crossing the street, school, medicine, etc. Kids, even in their 20's and 30's still cannot determine what is best for them. Issue is not the kids, it's the parents and the culture. If parents were better assimilated and enculturated, there would be no issue...just look at the culture of sports in America.

3. Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue

Starting point- Jews, Christians and Muslims do not view worship as an appeasement of the God(s) to avoid harsh judgment or damnation. And all three are monotheistic religions that are known as the "Abrahamic Religions."

Do Catholics believe that those who do not belong to the Catholic Church will not be saved? If that is basically true, don't some conditions apply?

How can we show (in a loving way) that the Catholic faith has the "whole" truth, if we believe that other faith groups (Jewish, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam) have and profess some or part of the truth? I did not do a lot of research to "choose" Catholicism (I was born into it). I do not find many around me who are willing to put in even casual amounts of time to explore the different faith traditions.

Nostra Aetate, Vatican II, 1965

Religions that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus, in *Hinduism*, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, *Buddhism*, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts

or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.(4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

3. The Church regards with esteem also the *Moslems*. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

Is it true that the Catholic Church considers baptisms performed in other faiths legitimate when initiating people?

Yes, "we believe in one baptism".

Dominus Iesus, Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, 2000.

"Therefore, these separated Churches and communities as such, though we believe they suffer from defects, have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church".⁶⁶

For those who are not formally and visibly members of the Church, "salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make

them formally part of the Church, but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation.

21. With respect to the *way* in which the salvific grace of God comes to individual non-Christians, the Second Vatican Council limited itself to the statement that God bestows it “in ways known to himself”. It is clear that it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God.

Certainly, the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God,⁸⁵ and which are part of what “the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures, and religions”.⁸⁶ Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God.⁸⁷ One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments.⁸⁸ Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. *1 Cor* 10:20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation.⁸⁹

Equality, which is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ — who is God himself made man — in relation to the founders of the other religions.

What should be the biggest take-aways or summaries of the different faith traditions? Where are we in union, where do we differ?

In terms of other Christians, there are more in common than differences- one baptism, salvation of sins and primacy of the Bible.

What happens to baptized Catholics, when they die, who have stopped practicing their Catholic faith, became Evangelicals and do not believe that Jesus is present in the Eucharist.

Still Catholic.

Why do Catholics show Christ on the cross when our Protestant friends show an empty cross? Protestants say this is reflective of what is true today, Jesus is risen and resides in heaven.

Judaism- crushing glass at a Wedding. Catholics- no Easter Sunday without Good Friday.

How do we discuss the reverence of Saints with our Protestant friends?

Look at pictures on your phone.

Most Christian denominations claim to trace the origins of their faith back to the apostles. For example, Pentecostals claim their religion began at Pentecost. How can we as Catholics be sure that our claims of our faith beginning with the Apostles are valid and not just wishful thinking?

Scripture and Tradition, deposit of faith

How do we explain to those of the Episcopal faith that we cannot take their Eucharist, especially when they say that it is also the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ as we believe with our Eucharist?

Any other Christian faith/Communion not Eucharist. To Catholics, actions and words have meaning beyond. Similar to pre-marital or adulterous sex.

4. The Bible

Why is the Catholic bible bigger?

Catholics claim 7 other books to be deuterocanonical "in the spirit of the canon." It is found in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint), and Aramaic and Hebrew fragments of the book were discovered at Qumran in 1952. The only reason these books are not in Protestant bibles has nothing to do with theology but rather language. The 7 extra books were written in Greek to Greek-speaking Jews in North Africa (Egypt). Because they are not written in Hebrew is the only reason Protestants do not have them. Moreover, there are hundreds of books (OT and NT) that are not in the bible but still used for study and theology.

Why does God behave so evilly--the OT requirement to put the "ban" on, killing every man, woman, and child of the people we just defeated?

God is all powerful- how did you win the Championship? God is NOT evil when revealing himself to individuals. Exodus 3.

The Old Testament prophets proclaimed the coming of a Savior. All through Advent we read and heard the prophet Isaiah foretelling of the Messiah. How is it that the Jewish people did not connect the dots?

Culture of Jews in first century- Sadducees and the Temple- Jewish Feasts

5. History

Was the Catholic Church created by Constantine?

No. Legalized in 325 at Council of Nicea to bring harmony to the empire. Also, Nicene Creed and complete divorce from Judaism.

The Bible says we will know false prophets by the fruit they produce. The Catholic Church has certainly produced good fruit (many saints, hospitals and orphanages, disaster relief, etc.) but it has also consistently produced bad fruit. Really bad. Especially lately. How many highly placed leaders of the Catholic Church must be uncovered as corrupt and/or abusive before we say the whole tree is poisoned?

Church work is like watching sausage get made. Corruption in the Church is not just the cover-up of sexual abuse but many other things.

In the light of the evidence supporting the process of evolution, how can I discuss the concept of creation with my secular friends?

JPII spoke in favor of evolution because it does not contradict Divine Revelation and natural law. Evolution is the process of creation knowing its creator, which only humans can do.

By not allowing women priests, aren't we losing half of our potential talent pool?

Sexuality is complementary, not exclusion. Church is ALWAYS a female and the priest is ALWAYS male.

How do you explain the conservative vs. liberal war in the church? And is not the conservative strand simply just an example of modern-day Pharisees (demanding adherence to the law rather than focusing on mercy).

New phenomenon usually focused on Liturgy and culture but very little to do with the Pastoral and Social Doctrine of the Church.

6. Eucharist

How can a priest just say "magic words" and bread and wine become Eucharist?

Salvific efficacy is not dependent upon the personal faith of the giver or receiver. Thank God!

How can we allow civil authorities to take away our right to worship during a pandemic?

Common Good

7. Revelation

If God exists why not show himself now? It has been over 2000 years.

Jews said same thing 2,000 years ago. This is why the Church exists.

If all those Mary appearances are real, why is it that only 1 or 2 people see it and not a big crowd?

Personal/private revelation vs. universal revelation.