

God's Plan For Life

God's Plan For Life

By

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Acknowledgements

In my spiritual journey through life, everything that I have received has been given to me by someone else. It naturally follows that almost everything contained in this book was given to me by someone else. One could say that nearly the entire book is “plagiarized.” However, I am optimistic about its value because what I have selected are what I believe to be some of the most precious jewels. I have fitted them together in a way that highlights the best of what God has planned for us. In selecting those jewels, I have drawn heavily from “The Life in the Spirit Seminars Team Manual” developed by the Word of God community in Ann Arbor Michigan and printed by Servant Books in 1973 and 1979. I used this, changing it and adapting it, for many years, while teaching and preparing people for the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Parish of St. Kilian in Mission Viejo, CA.

Rev. Matthew Habiger provided much of the material for the chapter on Role of Conscience. He would be the first to admit that nearly everything there also came from others – scripture, papal encyclicals, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the insightful writings of Msg. Vincent Foy of Toronto, Canada.

Rev. Matthew Habiger, Rev. Daniel McCaffrey and I presented many pro-life conferences together all around the United States where much of the subject matter of this book was presented and became refined through experience.

Finally, I am indebted to the many editors, reviewers and supporters that help to make a publication like this become a reality.

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Foreword

With the election of our present Holy Father, Benedict XVI, the Church's faithful and perennial adherence to objective morality is once again guaranteed. However, the exaggerated emphasis on "Political Correctness" has pressured many into a stance of timidity and fear of speaking the truth concerning human acts and the ramifications which those acts have on the world in general, and the individual in particular. In an era when objective morality has been forced to take a back seat, it is reassuring to find knowledgeable and dedicated Catholics, like Brian Murphy, willing to point out the pitfalls of current trends and the solutions by which they may be corrected.

God, out of love for His people, has given us simple guidelines and, in turn, expects faithful and loving adherence to his plan. He does not wish to make life difficult. Rather, he teaches how compliance with His commands can lead to true freedom and ultimate happiness and peace. The majority of the world's problems have their genesis in the mistaken perception that license is freedom, whereas, in reality, it only leads to greater slavery.

Jesus Christ, by His passion, death and resurrection, has bought for us the freedom of the Children of God. That freedom is attained only by following God-given principles which have proven true for millennia.

This present work by Brian Murphy is a successful attempt to bring into focus the call of each person to holiness and wholeness based on God's plan for salvation, life, love, marriage, family and children, as revealed by the Apostles and their successors today.

The reader will notice that pertinent scripture passages are quoted in full as a way to ease exploration and comprehension of God's plan. Also, the well-placed study guides will prove invaluable as a teaching aid.

Our Lord reminds us that the harvest is rich but the laborers are few. May He use this book as an instrument to inspire and increase the number of His loyal workers to implement His own Plan for Life.

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Introduction

There are many wonderful spiritual books available dealing with a wide variety of spiritual topics. However, there is a need for a book that provides a simple guide to the Christian faith within the context of today's culture. To that end, the reader is invited to make a spiritual journey with us. The journey will not end with simple conversion. It will continue with provision of some "solid food" to chew on after completing the process of Christian initiation. The title of this book, "God's Plan For Life" might mislead some people into thinking that the author is perpetrating some new revolutionary plan in God's name. Such is not the case. There is a lot of material that clashes directly with current culture. However, there is nothing revolutionary, unorthodox or contrary to the messages given to us by the Prophets, the Apostles of God and their rightfully authorized descendents. Our journey is divided into two parts. Part 1, entitled "God's Plan For Salvation" leads the reader through a spiritual process of Christian initiation, conversion or renewal, according to God's plan. It is very appropriate for anyone who feels a little bit lost, confused or unsatisfied with their religious formation up to the present time. About the only "pre-requisite" is that the reader have some basic belief in God as creator of the universe and be willing to ponder the words of the Bible. Part 2, entitled "God's Plan For Life" provides good guidance, as well as many challenges, to help Christians come to terms with the modern world of our time and God's plan for life, love, marriage, family and community.

God's plan for life is revealed to us in the Bible. We will make abundant use of Bible passages to expound on his wonderful plan. To make it easier on the reader, the Bible passages are incorporated directly into the text with parentheses [] around the passage. God's plan for life is a plan for our success, happiness and prosperity as well as a plan for us to have eternal life.

It is hoped that this book will become a well-used reference for all sorts of classes in Christian initiation, renewal and catechesis within churches and schools. Hopefully, it will also be found in homes where both young and old may benefit from the revealed truths. God's plan for life is the best possible plan in existence. Wise men will pay close attention to it.

The Four Spiritual Truths

In God's plan for life, there are four fundamental spiritual truths:

The first truth is that God loves us. That means that he desires everything good for you and me. He wants us to have a full, happy life, to be healthy in mind and body, successful, prosperous and truly free.

The second truth is that often we do not feel or experience God's love. We may not feel his love because we are separated from God and therefore cannot share in God's love with others. We become separated from him by sin, Satan and the rule of darkness.

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The third truth is that Jesus Christ is the only one who can give us power to live a new life, no longer separated from God. God has always known and understood our problem of separation. In order to solve that problem he himself became man in the person of Jesus Christ with the sole purpose of restoring our relationship to him so that we can recognize and experience his love.

The fourth truth is that it is not enough to be aware of, know or understand the first three truths. To be restored into God's plan for life, we must repent of our sins, accept Jesus Christ by making him Lord of our life so that we can be baptized in the Holy Spirit and thereby experience the power to live a new life.

Part 1 will provide more detail about each of these four fundamental truths. Those who complete this journey, whether through this book or by any other means, become alive with the glow of the Holy Spirit, ready to take on the challenges of fulfilling God's plan for life.

Part 2 will lead the participant to many sources of spiritual growth and to a more complete understanding of the present as well as the eternal aspects of God's plan for life. Some difficult issues will be discussed such as the role of one's conscience in moral reasoning, the call to generosity in procreation, economic causes of prosperity and poverty, world wide demographics, the mission of the Church, the "second death" and the Last Judgment.

"Gospel" means "good news." The good news is that we will be raised from the dead to live forever, if we follow God's plan for life. Praise the Lord!

If you do not have a Bible, you will need to purchase one. I recommend The New American Bible, St. Joseph Giant Type Edition, Catholic Book Publishing Company, New York. This is a soft cover Bible of medium size for a medium price. The "giant" type is not that big - only 12 point and is a pleasure to read.

Part 1

God's Plan For Salvation

Chapter 1
God's Love

The first of the four spiritual truths (listed in the Introduction) is that God loves us.

God is not someone who is beyond our contact, but is someone who loves us and wants to be in a personal relationship with us and who wants to give us a better life. Some misconceptions about Christianity can be an obstacle to our finding this better life through Christ. You may have been taught Christianity as a restrictive morality – rules to keep so that you can go to heaven. What is missing here? What is missing is that there is no relationship. You cannot have a personal relationship with rules. You can only have a personal relationship with a person.

Alternatively, you may have been taught a Christianity that says “as long as I love my neighbor and lead a good life, it doesn't matter what I believe.” What is missing here? Again, what is missing is that there is no relationship. As in all relationships, it does matter very much what you believe.

Perhaps you have come to believe that God is someone whom you cannot contact and who does not do anything that you can experience or know to be his work. The truth is that God loves us. He wants to make contact with us and have a personal relationship with us. He wants to give us a new and better life. For this reason, he became man – Jesus Christ.

We can experience a better life as a result of authentic Christianity. We can have knowledge of God and the power to live the Christian life. We can have happiness, peace and joy, better personal relationships and healing. We can also experience better, more genuine Christian community in our homes and in whatever community to which we may belong.

In this journey, you can take steps which will allow Jesus Christ to establish or restore a deeper relationship with you. Everyone can experience a change. Those who have been nominal Christians or fallen-away Christians can experience a change. Those who know Jesus but who want to know him more can experience a change. You can all begin right away to turn to the Lord. The Lord will reach out to you, but you must reach out to him.

We now turn to the prophets. Prophets are people who speak God's message. The message can be about anything. Prophecies can be about the past, the present, the future, a description of a spiritual condition of a community or simply a promise. Listen to what the prophet Jeremiah says:

[When you call me, when you go to pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you, says the Lord.] Jer. 29:12-13

Listen to what the prophet Ezekial says:

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[I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest says the Lord God. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal (but the sleek and the strong I will destroy), shepherding them rightly.] Ez. 34:15-16

God wants to rescue us! He loves us! But those who resist him out of pride of their own physical strength will be destroyed. All through the Old Testament, God repeats his desire to rescue us because he loves us. In Psalm 145 it says:

[You, Lord are near to all who call upon you, to all who call upon you in truth.] Ps 145:18-19

The same theme continues and becomes amplified in the New Testament. One of the most famous and beloved passages is a quotation from Jesus Christ himself in the third chapter of the Book of John:

[For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.] Jn 3:16

This is a promise from God. God keeps all of his promises. There is more. Jesus said:

[A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.] Jn 10:10

Now, this directly contradicts those who think that Christianity is restrictive. Jesus makes a promise – that we can have more abundant life – not less abundant – more abundant.

So far, we have just taken a few passages from the Old and New Testament as examples. There are hundreds more all throughout the Bible and they all show how much God loves us, wants us to survive, and wants us to have abundant life.

The journey to eternal life for you can begin right now. Starting at this very moment, pray every day to the Lord. When you pray, get away from all noisy distractions, especially the radio and television, and find a quiet place. Simply ask the Lord in your own words to show you the way to eternal life.

Now in this special journey there is going to be homework. Unlike school, nobody is going to check it. We are offering you a daily series of short Bible passages to read and reflect upon. It is important to pray, in your private quiet place, before reading each passage so that you will be able to “hear” what God is saying.

The list below provides a Bible verse to read each day, for the next eight weeks. Each week corresponds to one chapter in this book.

A guide to the abbreviations of the books of the Bible can be found on one of the introductory pages at the very beginning of your Bible.

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At the end of each week, there is a full chapter to study. "John 1" means the Book of John, chapter 1.

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Journey to Eternal Life Home Study Plan

<u>Week 1</u> <u>God's Love</u>	<u>Week 2</u> <u>Sin</u>	<u>Week 3</u> <u>Salvation</u>	<u>Week 4</u> <u>The New Life</u>	<u>Week 5</u> <u>God's Gift</u>	<u>Week 6</u> <u>Growth I</u>	<u>Week 7</u> <u>Growth II</u>	<u>Week 8</u> <u>Growth III</u>
<u>Day 1</u> Jer 31:3	Rom 1:29-32	Mic 4:1-6	Ezek 36:22-28	Tit 3:4-6	I Pet 5:7-9	Jn 4:14	Phil 2:13
<u>Day 2</u> Jer 31:33-34	Rom 2:3-6	Isa 55:9	Jn 14:15-18	Jn 7:37-38	Matt 25:23	Jn 15:5-6	Phil 3:8-9
<u>Day 3</u> Ezek 34:14-16	Rom 2:12-16	Eph 6:12	Acts 2:1-4	Mk 1:15	Eph 6:18	Eph 4:22-23	Jas 1:2-4
<u>Day 4</u> Jn 3:16	Rom 2:17-24	Jn 11:21-27	Acts 19:5-7	Acts 2:38-39	Rom 8:6	Lk 5:15-16	I Cor 10:13
<u>Day 5</u> Isa 55:1-3	Rom 3:21-26	Rom 5:6-8	Gal 5:22-23	I Cor 6:9-10	I Cor 14:1	II Tim 3:15-17	Rom 8:28
<u>Day 6</u> Jer 29:11-13	Deut 30:15-20	Isa 53:4-6	I Cor 12:7-11	Rom 4:20-21	1 Cor 3:1-3	Acts 2:41-47	Rom 12:4-5
<u>Day 7</u> Ps 145:18	Jer 31:33-34	Col 1:13-14	Eph 2:19-22	Luke 11:9-13	II Cor 4:16 II Cor 5:1,5	Col 4:5-6	Heb 10:24-25
Study John 1 Colossians 1	Matthew 5 Matthew 6	John 3 Acts 2	John 4 Acts 13	John 14 Acts 8	John 15 Galatians 5	John 17 Philippians 3	John 20 Rev 21

The second of the four spiritual truths (listed in the Introduction) is that often we do not always feel or experience God's love. We do not feel his love because we are separated from God and therefore cannot share in God's love with others. We enter life separated from him by sin, Satan and the rule of darkness.

There is something seriously wrong with the world, with society as a whole and with individual lives. Something major is needed to fix it. The present condition of the world, with its murder and chaos, is not God's plan, although he tolerates it for a purpose that we shall explain later. God made the world to be a place of peace, justice and happiness, a place in which he would reign. He still wants the world to be that way. The great Prophet Isaiah tells us what is coming (the future). As we read his words, realize that Jerusalem is a symbol of all of God's people.

[This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!]

Isa 2:1-5

Obviously, this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. But like most of the prophecies of Isaiah, it will be. Those who believe that these words will be fulfilled are not few. The words "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks..." are written on the walls of the corridor of the United Nations building in New York City. They are written there because the many people who built the United Nations believed that they would be fulfilled and they hoped that better dialog between nations would help the prophecy to be fulfilled. However, we realize that what is being described is a new social order that is quite absent in the world today. What is being described in Isaiah is a new order in which people are imbued with the desire for the teachings of God and are willing to "walk in his paths," that is, follow God's methods of dealing with issues rather than the world's. It is not just a lofty goal. It is something that is achievable. Most of Isaiah's prophecies have already been fulfilled. We expect this one to be fulfilled as well.

Everyone can agree that there is something seriously wrong with the way the world is now (wars, poverty, riots, racial conflict, drugs, gangs, rampant murder and exploitation). There is more than just a number of individual problems – society as a whole or the system as a whole has something wrong with it. Many social problems are getting worse. Many happenings are out of man's control. Many individuals suffer from loneliness, isolation, depression, anxieties, insecurities, lack of direction, meaninglessness and personal relationships characterized by fear, mistrust, suspicion or exploitation. Something major is needed to correct the situation in the world.

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Since the cause of what is wrong with society is something bigger than man can handle on his own, men need God to find the new life that they want.

There are a variety of man-made secular efforts, but they are not succeeding. For example, the civil war over drugs that has been going on for 40 years in Columbia was recently described in a major U.S. newspaper, not as a war but as a "condition". It is chronic, a medical term which means long lasting or recurring frequently over a long period.

Better education is not the answer. Even the most educated men in our universities are having a hard time bringing normalcy to their own lives, their work and their relationships.

More economic prosperity is not the answer. Even the most highly placed executives in our modern business corporations, with their multi-million dollar salaries, are having a hard time bringing normalcy to their own lives, their work and their relationships.

Codes of ethics are not the answer. Religions and religious philosophies, which men have developed, try to achieve a solution: Buddhism, Yoga, Transcendental Meditation and New Age. These contain some truth but not enough to solve the problem. They do not contain the complete plan of God for human life and therefore can mislead and become distractions from the truth or from the path to truth.

Some forms of Christianity amount to being man's efforts to find a good life and change the world: secular Christianity or some types of traditionalist Christianity. These are based on man's wisdom and can also be distractions; God's wisdom is needed. Listen to what the Prophet Isaiah says:

[For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.] Isa 55:8-9

This ought to seize our attention! We cannot think our way out of the problem. Our plans cannot solve the problem. Our ways will not work. We need to listen to what God has to say because he not only understands the problem, but knows us better than we know ourselves.

God tells us that we are not just confronted with particular wrongs in society or in ourselves; behind the particular things that are wrong, there is something bigger than men can handle: It is the pervasive power of sin. The Apostle Paul describes this completely in the Book of Romans:

[Universal Bondage of Sin.

Well, then, are we better off? Not entirely, for we have already brought the charge against Jews and Greeks alike that they are all under the domination of sin, as it is written: "There is no one just, not one, there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. All have gone astray; all alike are worthless; there is not one who does good, (there is not) even one. Their throats are open graves; they deceive with their tongues; the venom of asps is on their lips; their mouths are full of bitter cursing. Their feet are quick to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they know not. There is no

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fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that what the law says is addressed to those under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world stand accountable to God, since no human being will be justified in his sight by observing the law; for through the law comes consciousness of sin.] Rom 3:19-23

What Paul is saying is that everyone is guilty. Nobody can claim heaven by being righteous because everyone has sinned. The problem is universal. The problem is enormous – too big for man to deal with by himself. The problem is the dominion of darkness. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says:

[He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.] Col 1:13

With the words "he delivered" it is clear that the action of God is required. Man cannot do it by himself. With the words "the power of darkness" it is clear that Paul is talking about something more powerful than just human weakness. There is a force in rebellion against God. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he explains this force:

[For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.] Eph 6:12

In short, Satan is the source of the power of darkness. This is further re-enforced by the Apostle John who says in his first letter:

[We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one.]
1 Jn 5:19

The evil one is Satan. He has great power and causes great conflict and destruction. The result of this is that we are not free. Nor is our society. People are in spiritual bondage, under the oppression of evil. When Paul talks to the Christians in Ephesus, he reminds them of their former condition of slavery to sin:

[And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.] Eph 2:1-3

Man was created to need God to achieve true peace, justice and truth. The spiritual realm is not an optional extra. Jesus Christ tells us this very simply and directly:

[I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.] Jn 15:5

Of course, we can do lots of things in life. We are free to choose what we do. What Jesus says is that what we do will have no permanent value without him. We can have many projects, but without him, the projects will not yield good things. Only in God's kingdom, under his rule, are good everlasting things possible.

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[Turn to me and be safe, all you ends of the earth, for I am God; there is no other.]

Isa 45:22

Under God's rule, life can be changed now.

[Thus says the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I, the LORD, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go. If you would hearken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river, and your vindication like the waves of the sea;] Isa 48:17-18

This invitation is brought to a climax when Jesus Christ arrives and opens up his ministry:

[After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."] Mk 1:14-15

Recall that "gospel" means "good news." There is a choice before us: to live under the dominion of darkness or in the kingdom of God. The choice is ours. We have free will to choose either path in life.

Let's review again the four spiritual truths:

The first truth is that God loves us.

The second truth is that we may not feel his love because we are separated from God and therefore cannot share in God's love with others. We enter life separated from him by sin, Satan and the rule of darkness.

The third truth is that Jesus Christ is the only one who can give us power to live a new life, no longer separated from God. Sin brought separation. Christ brought union!

The fourth truth is that it is not enough to be aware of, know or understand the first three truths. To be restored into God's plan for life, we must repent of our sins, accept Jesus Christ by making him Lord of our life so that we can be baptized in the Holy Spirit and thereby experience the power to live a new life.

We dealt with the first two truths in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively. This chapter is about the third truth - The triumph of Christ over the Rule of Darkness. Jesus Christ manifested the triumph over darkness at many points in his earthly life. One of the most dramatic was during his visit to the territory of the Gadarenes, as described by Matthew:

[When he came to the other side, to the territory of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs who were coming from the tombs met him. They were so savage that no one could travel by that road. They cried out, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the appointed time?" Some distance away a herd of many swine was feeding. The demons pleaded with him, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go then!" They came out and entered the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea where they drowned. The swineherds ran away, and when they came to the town they reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. Thereupon the whole town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him to leave their district.] Mt 8:28-34

A demoniac is a human being that is possessed by the devil (Satan) or other demons. Demonic possession is not too common but it does occur, even today. People could not travel the road past the demoniacs because they would be yelled at, cursed, threatened and possibly physically attacked. Now what is quite interesting is that the demons know who Jesus is, long before his own disciples knew. The demons address him as "Son of God." They also admit that Jesus has power to torment them before the "appointed time" which is the end of the world and the final judgment, and the demons apparently know this quite well and are in fear of it. The demons are in total submission to Jesus and beg him for another place to go, knowing that he is going to drive them out. Jesus has full and complete authority over the demons. With a very short and simple command "Go then" something very dramatic happens. No one can see the demons because they are invisible spirits. Yet, something moves from the humans (the demoniacs) to the pigs. The effect is very visible. The pigs do something that pigs never do. They rush down the steep bank

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and instead of stopping at the precipice like sensible pigs do, they continue moving into the sea and are drowned. The pigs go crazy – a direct effect of the demons within them. Meanwhile, although it does not say so, one may safely presume that the demoniacs are no longer possessed; they have been restored to a sensible peaceful state. For this everyone present there at the time should have praised God! However, the swineherds (the people who owned and took care of the swine) ran away to town and came back with an unfriendly cohort of people who asked Jesus to leave. Why were they so thankless? They should have been rejoicing at this fantastic victory over evil and hugging their fellow human beings who were restored to normalcy.

The swineherds were too upset over their substantial financial loss of a whole herd of pigs, which probably took many years to grow, to see the totality of what just happened. Incidentally, there is a warning here for us. We must not let any tragic financial loss obscure our spiritual vision of everything that may be taking place.

Most importantly, Jesus was victorious over evil and was completely in control. For the first time in human history, here was a living Savior, somebody that could be relied upon to drive out all kinds of demons. He did it because he loves us. Jesus is a great teacher. In this one short incident, he teaches many truths:

1. Demons exist, even though they are invisible.
2. Demons drive their subjects toward irrational behavior.
3. Jesus is in control of all demons and can drive them out.
4. Jesus and the demons are opposed to one another.
5. One day, the demons will be tormented. (This will be the final Judgment.)

So, why doesn't Jesus just cast out all of the demons from all of humanity and solve the whole problem immediately? The answer is found in the next passage where Jesus explained the behavior of demons in sufficient detail for us to be warned and prepared:

[When an unclean spirit goes out of someone, it roams through arid regions searching for rest but, finding none, it says, "I shall return to my home from which I came." But upon returning, it finds it swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and brings back seven other spirits more wicked than itself who move in and dwell there, and the last condition of that person is worse than the first.] Luke 11:24-26

Jesus can cast the demons out and by doing so, the home (the human person) is "swept clean" – there are no more demons. However, in a short while they come back! And if the home is empty and not filled with good works, a strong will, a well formed conscience and acts of prayer, courage and determination in resisting evil, the demon successfully re-invades that person along with more evil spirits. The last condition of that person is worse than the first. So, we have a role to play. Jesus can cast them out, but we have to work hard in prayer to keep them from coming back. Perhaps we may ask "Why doesn't God just destroy all evil forever?" The answer is that he would have to destroy humanity along with the demons because we have a propensity to cooperate with them. He won't do that because he loves us. So, he has a better plan.

In another conversation with the people around him, Jesus reveals more about the true nature of our problem of sin, the trickery of evil and the source of truth that we can turn to:

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[Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. *This is a perfect definition of true slavery. Also, true freedom is not just political freedom, but freedom from sin.* A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if a son frees you, then you will truly be free. I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you. I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father." They answered and said to him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You are doing the works of your father!" (So) they said to him, "We are not illegitimate. We have one Father, God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you cannot bear to hear my word. You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies. *This is a perfect description of the devil or Satan – the father of lies.* But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me. Can any of you charge me with sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not listen, because you do not belong to God." The Jews answered and said to him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed?" Jesus answered, "I am not possessed; I honor my Father, but you dishonor me. I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the one who judges. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." (So) the Jews said to him, "Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'he is our God.' You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad. So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM." So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area.] John 8:31-59

The Jews asked Jesus "Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus does not evade the question. Rather, he answers it very directly – "I AM." But to fully understand this answer we need to know who "I AM" is. This person is clearly identified several centuries earlier during the encounter of Moses with God present in the burning bush:

[Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There an angel of the LORD appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, "I

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must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!" he answered, "here I am." God said, "Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father," he continued, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. But the LORD said, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the country of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. So indeed the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have truly noted that the Egyptians are oppressing them. Come, now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?" he answered, "I will be with you; and this shall be your proof that it is I who have sent you: when you bring my people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this very mountain." "But," said Moses to God, "when I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to tell them?" God replied, "I am who am." Then he added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you." God spoke further to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. "This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations.] Ex 3:1-15

"I AM" is God. Jesus is "I AM." Jesus is God! Jesus is the one who spoke to Moses. Jesus has very clearly answered the question of who he is. He has performed miracles, such as the world has never seen before, to back up his claim. He has revealed the two principal characters in the struggle over man – Satan, the father of lies and Jesus (God in the form of man), who loves us perfectly and provides us with all truth.

Jesus gave power over demons to his disciples with instructions to preach the gospel, heal the sick and cast out demons. They were ecstatic over their success.

[The seventy (-two) returned rejoicing, and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name." Jesus said, "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven."] Luke 10:18

This simple teaching by Jesus does several things:

It establishes clearly that Satan is the fallen angel opposed to Christ. Jesus then cautions the disciples not to get carried away with spiritual power. They must not boast or brag about the power; rather they should rejoice because they have been accepted into God's kingdom and are saved. This spiritual power is not limited. They will have power to cast out demons (exorcism) even in the most difficult cases. This power of exorcism is still used in the Church.

Now we will present the two arch-rivals that are struggling for the souls of men. In the table below, we put Christ in the left column. The left column contains the plans,

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commandments, exhortations, promises, truths and prophecies of God to appeal lovingly to man for man's acceptance and conversion of heart. The right column contains the schemes, false promises and lies of Satan and their ultimate consequences. The arrow symbol ">" means "leads to" and what follows the arrow is a consequence. On the left, the consequences are all good and lead to life. On the right, they are all bad and lead to the ultimate consequence which is death. Satan's objective is not simply to make man miserable and go to hell. Satan's objective is to completely destroy the human race. God's objective is to save it through his Son Jesus Christ. Take some time to study the table carefully. For now, its purpose is to identify the struggle – not to solve the problem or to stoke feelings of guilt. We will offer God's solution later.

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CHRIST	SATAN
Offers man happiness, life & salvation.	Directs man to misery death & condemnation.
<p>"You shall not kill." Ex 20:13. (<i>One of the Ten Commandments</i>) "I came that you might have life and have it to the fullest." Jn 10:10</p>	Murder, abortion, international war, assassination, gang war, terrorism, death camps, genocide, forced deprivation & starvation > death.
<p>health, physical healing (natural and miraculous). "...the sick upon whom they lay their hands will recover." Mark 16:18. "...whoever is alive and believes in me will never die." John 11:26</p>	Disease (2500 genetically inherited), plagues, germ warfare, sexually transmitted diseases > misery & death.
<p>"You shall not commit adultery." EX 20:14 (<i>One of the Ten Commandments</i>) Marriage > sexual joy > children with a father and mother to care for their life and survival. "If your eye offends you, pluck it out! If your right hand offends you, cut it off!" Matt 5:29 "What a wretched man I am! Who can free me from this body under the power of death? All praise to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Rom 7:24-25. "...if by the spirit you put to death the evil deeds of the body, you will live." Rom 8:13. "Happy are they who wash their robes so as to have free access to the tree of life and enter the city through its gates! Outside are the dogs and sorcerers, the fornicators and murderers, the idol worshipers and all who love falsehood." Rev 22:14-15.</p>	<p>Fornication and the lie of "safe sex" > children born out of wedlock > stressed single parent > poverty > starvation > death. Lust > sexual domination > adultery > family break-up > misery > poverty > death. Masturbation > fantasizing of fornication or adultery > fornication or adultery or avoidance of marriage or hasty marriage in a climate of domination > marriage break-up > misery > no more children (death). Pornography > fantasies > confusion in male-female relationships, sexual exploitation of women and children > misery, prostitution > disease & death. Artificial birth control > blocks life; IUD's > sterilization; pills > birth defects. Artificial insemination: the end does not justify the means; the means undermines marriage and creates misery through custodial discord. It also opens up embryonic research on fetuses (death).</p>

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CHRIST	SATAN
<p>"You shall not bear false witness". Ex 20 <i>(One of the Ten Commandments)</i> "Lying speech is his (<i>Satan's</i>) native tongue; he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:44</p> <p>"Between buying and selling, sin is wedged in." Sirach 27:2</p>	<p>false witness > innocent death. Deceit, half truths; in business: allowing others to receive undue blame; perception management; sales misrepresentation; "oil the squeaky wheel"; adhering to a deceitful corporate culture; If you don't, you are not a "team player".</p>
<p>"You shall not steal". Ex 20:15 <i>(One of the Ten Commandments)</i> "The reward of humility and fear of the Lord is riches, honor and life." Prov 22:4.</p>	<p>Stealing, pilfering, shoplifting, income tax evasion, falsification of expense reports, deceiving investors and other white collar crimes > economic collapse > poverty.</p>
<p>Offers life with the Holy spirit > fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5): Love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and self control > happiness & everlasting life.</p>	<p>Life without the Holy Spirit > sins of the flesh: Lewd conduct, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, bickering, jealousy, outbursts of rage, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies > misery & condemnation.</p>
<p>"I am the Lord your God and you shall have no other Gods before me." Ex 20:2 <i>(One of the Ten Commandments)</i> "...store up heavenly treasure..." Matt 6:20. "Like an open city with no defenses is the man with no check on his feelings." Prov 25:28. "Pray constantly..." Eph 6:18. "he who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal and I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:54. "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete..." John 14:16.</p>	<p>Spend many hours every day pursuing wealth, pleasure, relaxation and entertainment; work on self-esteem; get in touch with your emotions; express your emotions freely; read self-oriented magazines and consult horoscopes or call a psychic advertised on TV; take pills for every minor health problem; use a medium such as a Ouija board > misguidance > confusion and spiritual deprivation > misery, hours spent in depression and self pity > spiritual death, alcoholism, drug abuse and sometimes madness or suicide.</p>
<p>"The prince of this world has been condemned." John 16:11.</p>	<p>The world teaches that God does not exist or is irrelevant and that Church teachings are old fashioned, or fanatical, or "unconstitutional".</p>
<p>Christ came to conquer Satan and to save the human race that he loves.</p>	<p>Satan's time is running out as he desperately tries to destroy the human race that he hates.</p>

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While most of the table is self-explanatory, a few areas require further explanation. Since God's loves us, we know that he did not invent disease. Nor does he inflict disease upon any poor sinner. We don't know how disease originated but we know that disease is evil because it is opposed to God's plan for life. That does not mean that someone who has a disease is evil. The sick patient is merely suffering the consequence of an evil that has entered the human race. Sick people must never think that God is punishing them. God does not punish his loved ones in that way. The disorder of disease has entered the human race. While we cannot explain it all, there are a few examples that help us to understand Satan's role. Satan leads men to drunkenness. Drunkenness during the procreative process leads to birth defects. Birth defects contaminate the gene pool for endless generations.

Satan encourages lust which can lead to bestiality (sexual intercourse with animals). Sexual intercourse with animals can result in viral infections that may be harmless to animals but deadly to humans. AIDS probably began in this way. The virus first originated in monkeys in Africa and probably got passed to humans through acts of bestiality. Disease leads to death, which is Satan's goal, so Satan does everything possible to spread disease. It is not a punishment from God. The poor human patient that God loves is not possessed but rather is a victim.

The subject of masturbation needs to be discussed because the present culture accepts masturbation and most health books say that it is good for you because it helps to develop sexual fulfillment. This is one of Satan's lies. The problem with masturbation is that the person is fanaticizing, with substantial amounts of mental energy, acts of fornication or adultery. Such a person is dominated by uncontrolled lust that will eventually, in some future circumstance, lead to a real act of fornication or adultery, which is sinful and contrary to God's plan for life. Rather than lead to sexual fulfillment, masturbation leads to sin, slavery and death. Masturbation is a violation of chastity and is intrinsically evil. Christ did not masturbate. Christ did not have to relieve himself of excessive sexual desire. Rather, Christ is the example of God's plan for life – a human person with sexual appetite completely in control. It was so well in control that he chose not to use it. He did not marry. He had a higher purpose – to show God's infinite love for us. That same sexual control is available to us. We will return to the subject of God's plan for procreation in later chapters.

Pornography is prevalent throughout the culture, the print media and the television media. Many men will ask "What is wrong with a beautiful woman? She was made by God and is part of his plan." Well, it's a little like asking what is wrong with a beautiful brand new shiny sports car? Its engine is purring and it is cruising at 65 mph with the top down on a sunny day. The only problem is that it is going down the wrong side of the freeway. There is going to be a crash. So it is with the pornographic woman. There is going to be a crash – an illicit sexual act or possibly even a rape. The whole nature of pornography is an illusion, one of Satan's dirty lies. Men are naturally made by God to retain colorful memories of beautiful women so that they will return to the beautiful woman that they saw, speak to her, fall in love with her, marry her, have children and add to the prosperity of the human race. The problem is, a man cannot find the woman in a photograph. The woman, for him, does not exist. It is a deceitful dirty trick. Furthermore, the memory of her from the photograph is not easily erased. Even worse, the memory of her may obscure the memory of the person that he is truly called to love – his true girlfriend, fiancée or his wife. He may

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disparage his wife because she does not match up with the image of the beautiful woman from the photograph.

As pornography is tempting to men, women face the deceit of false romance. False romance is abundantly found in novels, movies, soap operas on television and more recently with "reality" courtship shows on television. In the same way that a wife cannot compete in beauty to the pornographic photograph, the husband cannot compete with the young buffs with enormous financial resources romancing with limousines and plush resorts. The illusion leads to unhappiness, despair and contempt for her husband because he doesn't treat her the same way. She can become very depressed over what she wants but cannot have.

The world is confused about feelings. Psychologists often take a dim view of pent up feelings and encourage people to get in touch with their feelings and to let their emotions out. Yet, the Book of Proverbs, which contains many Divine insights into everyday human life, says:

[Like an open city with no defenses is the man with no check on his feelings.] Prov 5:28.

What happens to an open city with no defenses? The enemy is able to enter easily, march up and down the streets attacking, sacking, burning and plundering everything in sight. So it is with a person with un-controlled emotions. Demons can rush in and the soul is stirred up by the enemy into a tizzy of contradicting and confusing ideas and emotions so that others are hurt by the malicious speech that gushes forth uncontrollably. Truth is destroyed and replaced with bitter feelings. A person may feel the urge to go into the office and shoot one's mouth off at the boss. Or someone may wait for their spouse to walk in the front door to greet the spouse with a blast of pent up emotions from an arduous problem at home. The results are nearly always disastrous.

Now that we have presented the problem, it is time to focus on the solution. God sent his son Jesus to break the hold of Satan and give us new life through his death and resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Lord and Savior. We call him Savior because he solves the problem of sin. He conquers sin completely and then gives us the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of God himself, so that we too can have the power to control our emotions and conquer sin. God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to free us from darkness and Satan. When Paul wrote to the Colossians (the people who resided in Colossus), he said:

[He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.] Col 1:13-14

Paul is describing the personal experience of being radically changed. This radical change is available to everybody.

When a friend of Jesus named Lazarus died from sickness, Jesus came to visit his tomb and a conversation was begun by his sister Martha who wished that Jesus had arrived sooner, before Lazarus died, so that Jesus could have healed him:

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[Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (But) even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.]" Jn 11:21-27

Jesus is saying to Martha that the resurrection is not some far away concept. He is the resurrection and he was present right there with Martha. In the remainder of the account, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus walked out of the tomb, still bound in burial cloths. They untied him and he was alive again. Even many of the skeptics believed in Jesus after that miracle.

[When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.] Mt 16:13-17.

Jesus clearly acknowledges Peter's declaration that he is the Messiah. As the identity of Jesus was revealed and made manifest, God's marvelous plan of Salvation continued to unfold. The plan of Salvation was not accomplished easily, with a few words of exorcism. Saving all of humanity involves much more than expelling a few demons. Billions of souls are at stake. In order to save man from his sins, restore his relationship with God AND prevent a relapse, Jesus had to do several things:

- he had to break the hold of Satan on humanity.
- he had to suffer and die on the cross to expiate for the past sins of humanity.
- he had to show us the path of the cross to lead us out of the grip of Satan to our destiny – eternal life.
- he had to rise from the dead to return to heaven to continue the plan of salvation.
- From heaven, he gives the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God himself, to those who repent, so that repentant souls will have power to overcome passion and sin and not fall backwards to the original sorry state.

This is an enormous plan! The plan began thousands of years before, transcends nearly all of human history and now reaches a climax in his ministry of 3 short years. Jesus himself announces the commencement of the assault on Satan's kingdom and the coming of the plan of salvation.

[Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.] Jn 12:31

Many people ask why God doesn't just wipe out evil. Why doesn't he just destroy all evil with some enormous explosion of spiritual power? Well, the problem with that plan is that he would have to destroy the human race which co-operates with evil. God's plan is

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infinitely wiser. Humans sometimes like to solve problems by dropping a bomb on them. God's ways are much better. His desire is to rescue the human race.

God's plan includes an expiation (a reparation for wrong doing; an atonement). The infinite justice of God demands a redress for the sins of humanity. The voluntary horrible suffering of Jesus (the perfectly innocent human) who willingly let his body be pierced on the cross and his blood spilled, satisfies the demands of justice. Our sins can be forgiven because of the suffering and the blood of Jesus.

The expiation of our sins was prophesied long before by Isaiah:

[Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins. Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way. But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all.] Isa 53:4-6

The Apostle Paul explains God's plan to Titus:

[For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deluded, slaves to various desires and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful ourselves and hating one another. But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.] Tit 3:3-7

The gift of the Holy Spirit is crucial in order to live a new life of freedom from sin. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God which is given by Jesus to all believers.

In the next passage, the Apostle John (one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus) cautions the Christians who have recently been released from the grip of Satan and have begun to experience receiving the Holy Spirit as the ultimate defense against evil. He teaches them how to carefully co-operate with the spirit of God and remain true:

[Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the antichrist that, as you heard, is to come, but in fact is already in the world. You belong to God, children, and you have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They belong to the world; accordingly, their teaching belongs to the world, and the world listens to them. We belong to God, and anyone who knows God listens to us, while anyone who does not belong to God refuses to hear us. This is how we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit. Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as

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expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit. Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world. Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God. We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. In this love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.] 1 Jn 4:1-21

Salvation is more than just going to heaven. It is a whole new way of life on earth as well.

In summary, Jesus is Lord! God gave full power and authority to Jesus to bring freedom and new life to those who accept him. Jesus himself says it:

[All power in heaven and earth has been given to me.] Mt 28:18

The Apostle, Paul, explains this authority in a letter to the Philippians:

[Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.] Phil 2:5-11

Jesus lives in his church and acts through it and in it to bring life to those who are his followers:

[He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.] Eph 2:17-22

In the next chapter, we will discuss what the new life is and what a person can expect from receiving the Holy Spirit. We will discuss how to turn to Christ so that we can receive the fullness of the life that he is offering.

References: Acts 8, Acts 10-11

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See many good pamphlets and books from Dove Publications, 1970, Pecos, New Mexico 87552. <http://www.pecosmonastery.org/DovePub.htm>

Examples:

Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Scriptural Foundation/Fr. Francis Martin

Christian Initiation & Baptism in the Holy Spirit/McDonnell & Montague

Again we mention the four spiritual truths:

1. God loves us. (Chapter 1)
2. There is a problem of sin, Satan and the rule of darkness. (Chapter 2)
3. God freed us from darkness and the power of Satan through Jesus Christ. (Chapter 3)
4. God wants to give us a new life through the Holy Spirit, but we must repent and accept Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives and ask for the Holy Spirit. (this chapter)

God is offering us a relationship in which we can have new life. He will give us the gift of new life in the Spirit. He will change and heal us to make us new. He will join us to a Christian community or to other people who will help us to grow in this new life.

At lot has been said and written about a relationship with God. I can only testify from my own experience, which is different from others and has its own limitations. My experience cannot tell me or the reader what the relationship can be. I have not arrived there yet. I have never seen God, Jesus, Mary or an angel. From my first experience with God, when I was 19, he began to heal me. I was arrogant toward leaders, feisty, foul-mouthed, sexually depraved, full of rude jokes, a thief, impatient and quite well established on the road to utter destruction. I will describe my conversion experience in a later chapter. As a result of finding a relationship with God, he has given me control of my passions, cleaned my speech, provided abundant patient endurance, healed me of food allergies and concurrent sinus infections, healed my family of multiple small ailments and led me continuously on the path to discover the truth about his plan for life. That's a fantastic relationship! Most of the voices I hear are the demons – not Him. The demons are incessantly noisy. But his truth and protection slowly permeate my mind through regular prayer.

In every loving relationship, nothing can be forced. God does not force us to do anything. If we decide to do absolutely nothing, nothing will happen and nothing will change. However, there will be consequences of our inaction. We won't be rescued. We will discuss this further in Part 2.

A person who is drowning and gasping for air in the wild ocean surf must co-operate with the life guard who is attempting to rescue them. If the victim struggles in the wrong way, both victim and life guard may sink or they may get hit at the wrong time in the wrong way by a wave and gulp water instead of air. If the victim just goes limp and does nothing, their head may fall below the water line as they are being towed to shore and they may drown before reaching safety. The victim must listen to the instructions from the life guard. The victim must co-operate in order to be saved. So too, we must co-operate in order to be spiritually saved. We have to turn to Christ to allow him to do what he is offering to do. In order to receive the new life that God is offering us, we must turn away from those things which block our relationship with God and accept Jesus Christ as our Lord. We need a change of direction – a re-orientation of our lives – away from those things which block our relationship with God and which give Satan a hold on us – toward God and obedience. Only when we follow him can he lead us to a new life.

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God does not want the obedience of slaves, who obey out of fear of punishment, or the obedience of employees, who obey because they are rewarded. He wants the obedience of sons who obey out of love and respect for their father.

We must accept Jesus as our Lord.

The word "repentance" refers to this change of direction. Repentance means "to turn away from." It is an action. It is more than a feeling of being sorry.

Repentance involves honesty – the admission that there are things in our lives that are wrong and need changing. For many people, this can be the most difficult step. Our mind likes to rationalize and justify all of our misdeeds, disordered habits, and sinful situations. To see through the confusion of values in our culture, we need to carefully compare where we are and what we are doing to God's plan. Honesty is the initial step that admits that there are serious discrepancies.

Repentance involves humility – the willingness to change and the awareness that we need God's help. The word "humility" is frequently misunderstood. It does not mean "poor me – I am no good." It does not mean "I cannot do anything" or "I am not very good at anything." On the contrary, the humble person achieves many notable accomplishments because the humble person recognizes that help is required. The proud person treats religion as a "crutch." The humble person is willing to beg God for assistance in coping with the inevitable struggle that is going to take place. False humility says "I am not perfect and never will be."

Repentance involves renunciation – turning away from wrong doing and deciding not to do it again. Renunciation is a conscious decision followed by a decisive action to change course.

Repentance involves asking forgiveness for what we have done wrong.

We do not need to become perfect in order to repent. On the contrary, we need to repent in order to become perfect. We should try not to place limits on how much we will repent. Jesus asks us not to shun an aspiration to be perfect:

[You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.] Matt 5:48

God's plan is that we become perfect! That is our destiny! That will be our joy!

We cannot become perfect without the Holy Spirit and a long relationship with him. However to receive the Holy Spirit, we must specifically and immediately turn away from serious matters. Serious matters include, but are not limited to non-Christian religions, spiritualism, witchcraft, occultism, sexual intercourse outside of marriage, adultery, homosexual acts, murder, robbery, shoplifting, cheating (business deals or exams), lying, slander, drunkenness (not drinking), or getting "stoned" on drugs.

In order to receive the new life that God is offering to us, we must ask him for it in faith, expecting to receive it because he wants us to have it and he promised that he would give it to us.

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Faith means relying on what God has said. Very few of us, if any, have ever walked on water. Yet, the following account of Peter walking on the water illustrates several important aspects of faith:

[Then he (*Jesus*) made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them, saying, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." he said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."]
(Mt 14:22-33)

- It was Peter's idea to walk on the water. The Lord did not order him to do so. Faith spawns creativity. Glorious ideas and innovations spring up within us.
- Jesus encouraged Peter with an invitation to continue and come to him.
- Peter stepped out of the boat. Peter initiated the action. We are not to always wait for the Lord to tell us what to do. We have to get out of the boat and step into unknown and dangerous waters.
- It was by the power of God that Peter walked on the water. Peter could not do it alone.
- When fear overtook Peter, faith left him. The same thing happens to us. Like Peter, we need to learn this lesson, sometimes over and over. We are called to have courage.

We know that everything that God says is true because he knows everything and does not lie. Our Christian lives are based on FACTS; we put FAITH in the facts; our FEELINGS follow. We deal with feelings of doubt by looking at the facts. When we see the fact that God promised something, we can expect that it will happen to us.

We need more than doctrinal belief alone; we need to claim the promises of God. We need to ask him to baptize us in the Holy Spirit. We can expect God to baptize us in the Spirit because he told us that he wants it for us. The gospel writer, Luke, quotes Jesus very clearly on this matter.

[And I tell you, ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"] (Lk 11:9-13)

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The foregoing passage is often misunderstood. One may be inclined to think that all you have to do is ask Jesus for an egg and you will get one. No, this misses the point. The main point or "punch line" is the last sentence: "...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" We have to ask.

We need the Holy Spirit because we need the power of God to defeat Satan and live the spiritual life. In an encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus made it very clear:

[I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit"] (Jn.3:5).

God loves us and wants us to be united with him. We can have the Holy Spirit because of what Jesus did for us and not because we can earn it or deserve it.

WE MUST PRAY. Begin praying hard every day to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Pray now. Just talk to the Lord. Tell him that you are sorry for your sins and will strive to turn away from them. Ask him for the Holy Spirit. Ask others to pray for you. A community of prayer is always more powerful than one alone.

Luke's account of how the apostles received the Holy Spirit contains many important elements of God's plan. He is writing to a man named Theophilus:

[In the first book (*the gospel of Luke*), O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. While meeting with them he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father about which you have heard from me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Notice that the disciples of Jesus were not instructed to go out and preach the gospel. First, they had to wait for the Holy Spirit. The same applies to us. We should not attempt any ministry work in the Church until we have received the Holy Spirit.

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The disciples have not received the Holy Spirit yet, so they still do not understand. They are looking to Jesus to apply political power to kick the Roman occupiers out of Israel and return control of the country to the Jews.

he said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you

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stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away; and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.] Acts 1:1-14

Notice that they devoted themselves to prayer. We must do the same to receive the Holy Spirit.

[When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God." They were all astounded and bewildered, and said to one another, "What does this mean?" But others said, scoffing, "They have had too much new wine."

Now, in the passage that follows, observe the transformation of Peter. Here is the man who snuck along behind the cohort of guards who arrested Jesus, to see what might happen to him. When he was confronted, he denied Jesus three times. Immediately after the crucifixion of Jesus, there was no public witnessing. Now, in a loud voice, Peter fearlessly addresses the whole community in Jerusalem:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, "You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'It will come to pass in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. And I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire, and a cloud of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, and it shall be that everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord.'

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This poor fisherman just quoted five verses of the Prophet Joel, (Joel 3:1-5) word for word, in public. How many of us can do the same? Now listen to the following bold statement:

You who are Israelites, hear these words. Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it.] Acts 2:1-24

That kind of talk is a direct challenge to the Jewish authorities and could have gotten him immediately arrested. Eventually it did. Obviously, Peter has changed. He is courageous to the point of physical persecution. That is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

We can expect God to touch us personally with the power of his Spirit.

Once the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles, they immediately began evangelizing the world and became the ministers of the gift of the Holy Spirit to others. In the Church, the ministry of helping people make a true repentance is done with the Sacrament of Confession (Penance or Reconciliation). The ministry of baptizing is done with the Sacrament of Baptism. The Sacrament of Confirmation (confirming a person in the Holy Spirit) is ministered to adults to help them fully activate all of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit so that they can be fearless witnesses of the Gospel in a wide variety of vocations and ministries. This is in fulfillment of God's plan. After he rose from the dead, Jesus commissioned his disciples with these words:

[Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."] Matt 28:18-20

This commission from Jesus to his disciples is rich in meaning. From it, we can make several conclusions:

- Jesus is the final authority in God's plan for life. "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus establishes the moral law. He establishes the Church. He judges all of our thoughts and actions. He is the author of life, the sustainer of life, the healer of life, the redeemer of life and the provider of everlasting life. To accept Jesus must include accepting life. To reject life is to reject Jesus.
- The apostles are commissioned to instruct all the nations of the world. Indeed, the Church is founded in every nation, even those where it is outlawed.
- The apostles are empowered to baptize in the Holy Spirit. This is the power that Bishops use in the Sacrament of Confirmation to confer the Holy Spirit.
- The apostles are not ordered to teach their own ideas about spiritual matters; rather, they must teach what Jesus taught them. Similarly, we should not teach ourselves or others our own ideas about spiritual matters; rather, we should listen to the apostles, who have authority from God.

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- Jesus will always be with his apostles (the Church). Obviously, this extends to the successors of the original twelve apostles. Otherwise, the promise to be with them until the “end of the age” could not be fulfilled.
- The world will eventually come to an end. More is taught on this in other parts of the Gospel.

This book cannot replace a live minister of the Gospel. At this point the reader who is making this pilgrimage must turn to the local Church to continue the journey. The local Church has a variety of spiritual education and formation programs that lead to the administration of the Sacraments of Confession, Baptism and Confirmation. Our purpose will be to provide some guidance, explanations and teachings to support anyone going through this wonderful spiritual conversion process.

When someone receives the Holy Spirit, there should be changes. Some are noticeable. Others may be very subtle, or may not manifest themselves for weeks, months or years. Initial experience varies widely from individual to individual.

- Some will experience the presence of God in a new way. There may be a shedding of fears. There may be a sense of greater wisdom. Very few hear the direct voice of God but many experience inspirations of truth, wisdom, direction for their life and understanding of the realities around them.
- Some experience the love of Jesus. It is quite easy to love somebody that you know suffered and died for your benefit.
- Some experience peace and joy. There is a lot to rejoice about when one discovers that one's destiny has changed from self destruction to everlasting life.
- Some experience a great love of scripture. The words of scripture often become the words of God speaking to our hearts directly. It is like the other half of our conversation with God suddenly becomes audible. The silence of our invisible inaudible God is now replaced with his voice speaking with a miraculous wisdom that penetrates to the depth of our being.
- Some experience a love of the Church. Since the Church is the source of the Gospel message, discovering the Gospel gives us great appreciation for the messenger that brought it to us.
- Some rejoice in new-found freedom
 - [... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ (Jesus) have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit.] (Gal 5:22-25)
- Some experience all of the above.
- Some receive gifts of the Spirit. There are seven which are described in the table below.

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Wisdom	Wisdom is the ability to make wise decisions in one's life so that actions become more holy and consistent with God's plan for life.
Understanding	Understanding God's revelations, his plans, his commandments and his life of grace is crucial to becoming free.
Counsel	Counsel is the ability to help and guide all people to choose what is pleasing to God.
Fortitude	Fortitude is spiritual strength to resist evil under dire circumstances.
Knowledge	Knowledge is knowing God's ways. It may include supernatural knowledge, insight or knowledge of spiritual events such as knowing when someone has been healed.
Piety	Piety is holiness. Holiness reaches its fulfillment in courageous acts of faith, hope and love.
Fear of the Lord	Fear of the Lord is profound respect for God and his ways. It is not a fear that drives one into hiding. It is knowing that there are serious consequences (both good and bad) for all human actions and events.

- In addition to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, we may receive the charismatic gifts of the Spirit (speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy...). These are used for ministry and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

As one can see, the list of gifts and graces from receiving the Holy Spirit is quite substantial. God's plan is full of wonderful happenings and even some surprises!

My good friend, Patrick Donovan, has lived a life full of God's surprises. When he was a young man attending college near home in 1958, Patrick found himself surrounded by one of the most grievous sins – racial prejudice. When his college buddy, John Bishop, had no place to go for Easter Holidays, Patrick asked his parents if he could bring him home to celebrate Easter with his family in Sioux City, Iowa. His Father declined, saying that it would create too much turmoil. John Bishop, a pre-med student, was a black man. Years passed. Patrick got married, and helped his faithful wife raise four children. One of his granddaughters, Kathleen, was born out of wedlock and adopted. Patrick prayed steadily for Kathleen, asking for God's blessings on her. As an adopted child, neither her birth mom nor grandfather Patrick had any legal right or method to contact her. What Patrick did not know was that while he prayed, God blessed Kathleen with strength and leadership to survive the death of both of her adopted parents, her father when she was 15 and her

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mother when she was 20. As an adult facing marriage Kathleen's fiancé prompted her to try to contact her biological mother and possibly her grandparents as well. She was successful, and Patrick and his wife welcomed Kathleen and her then future husband, Jason into the family. Kathleen and Jason had crossed what bigots call "the color line," as Kathleen is of white skin and Jason is a gentleman of color. A fulfillment of Patrick's mid 50's college action against racial bias was now vividly integrated into a joyous reunion with his granddaughter Kathleen. It was a surprise gift from God beyond Patrick's most imaginative dreams. Through the power of love and prayer, his family defeated one of the greatest sins he experienced in his hometown.

There are many obstacles to receiving God's gifts. He wants us to have them. But he will never force them upon us. Obstacles to receiving God's gifts include:

- A feeling of unworthiness
Everyone is unworthy. But when a person says to someone, I do not want your gift because I am unworthy, this is an insult to the giver, who took the trouble to arrange for the gift. God knows we are unworthy. We do not need to remind him. Rather, we should openly accept whatever he has in store for us, knowing that he loves us and that it will be good for us and for his kingdom on earth.
- The fear of making a fool of oneself or the fear of what others think
Some people thought that the Apostles made fools of themselves on the day of Pentecost when they received the Holy Spirit [But other said scoffing, "They have had too much new wine."] Acts 2:13 The scoffers were implying that the Apostles were drunk and acting crazy. Indeed, their behavior was strange – suddenly manifesting great joy and praising God in strange languages. There will always be people around to scoff at us. They scoffed at Jesus. Part of our calling is to resist the wounds to our pride as we are ridiculed.
- The fear of having our personalities taken over
Spiritual transformation can be so dramatic for some people that it may seem to others as though their personalities have been taken over. Indeed, in many cases, radical change occurs and is a good thing. We need radical change. But we must be completely assured that God will never take over our spirit or our free will. That would be completely contrary to his plan. Maintaining each person's free will is a central element in God's plan for life that he will never violate under any circumstances.
- Doubt or temptation by Satan to not believe or to reject God's gifts
The Lord calls us to faith because we need to believe in order to see what is not visible. If we insist on seeing in order to believe, we will never progress, because it is impossible to see the invisible realities of the spiritual life. Satan is capable of whispering many things in our minds to cause us to doubt and not believe. To combat this, we need to trust God's word. His promises are true.
- Failure to repent
Perhaps the biggest obstacle to receiving the new life is a failure to repent, for whatever reason. Repentance is the door that we must pass through to receive

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God's promises. This aspect is un-negotiable. Exceptions are, for practical purposes, non-existent.

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In reviewing our lives, it is always helpful to return to the Ten Commandments. While they do not spell out in detail all of our moral and spiritual obligations, they form the basis of the moral law that needs to be fulfilled in spirit. They are irrefutable under all circumstances.

The Ten Commandments **Exodus Chapter 20**

- 1. I, the Lord am your God...you shall not have other Gods before me.**
- 2. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.**
- 3. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.**
- 4. Honor your father and your mother.**
- 5. You shall not kill.**
- 6. You shall not commit adultery.**
- 7. You shall not steal.**
- 8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**
- 9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.**
- 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife... nor anything else that belongs to him.**

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The following is a commitment to Christ. It is a teacher's aid that can be used to help guide a person in making or renewing a profession of faith. The person is asked to answer the first three questions and then to speak the remainder of the commitment.

The Commitment to Christ

Do you renounce Satan and all wrongdoing?

Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died to free us from our sins and that he rose to bring us new life?

Will you follow Jesus as your Lord?

Lord Jesus Christ, I want to belong to you from now on. I want to be freed from the dominion of darkness and the rule of Satan and I want to enter into your kingdom and be part of your people.

I will turn away from all wrongdoing and I will avoid everything that leads me to wrongdoing. I ask you to forgive all the sins that I have committed.

I offer my life to you and I promise to obey you as my Lord.

I ask you to baptize me in the Holy Spirit and to give me all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in accordance with your will.

Chapter 5
Prayer for the Holy Spirit

The Apostles spent many days in the upper room in Jerusalem praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit. It does not happen instantly. Prayer is crucial. In this chapter we will visit with the Lord in the Bible as he prayed or taught us to pray.

Prayer should be kept simple. Pray from the mind and the heart. Do not indulge in the sheer multiplication of words. Here is what Jesus said about prayer as recalled by the Apostle Matthew:

[But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one. If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.] Mt 6:6-15

One may ask, if God knows what we need before we pray, why is there a need to pray? The answer is that we need to establish a relationship with God. All relationships require communication. He cannot communicate with us if we remain distant, occupying ourselves with other things. While we pray to him, he speaks to us by illuminating our minds. As our minds become illuminated, we receive wisdom, understanding...eventually leading to all of his gifts of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, we do not just pray for what we need. We pray for what others need. Of course God knows their needs too. However, when we pray for others, we join with God, his saints and angels in illuminating everyone to those needs. This can result in human actions to address those needs. It can also result in supernatural intervention and healing.

There is prayer of repentance:

["Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity--greedy, dishonest, adulterous--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.' But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.' I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."] Luke 18:10-14

There is persistence in prayer:

[And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,' and he says in reply from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.' I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves

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because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.”] Lk 11:5-8

One may ask, if God hears everything, why do we have to repeat the prayer? The answer is that God does hear everything, but we don't. We have to persist in our prayer so that eventually we will hear what God has to say. The result has several possibilities. We may realize that we are praying for the wrong thing and change our focus. We may realize that there are many other possible solutions to the problem that we are praying for. We may realize that God is already answering our prayer, but we failed to see it. The list goes on. In general we fail to see the big picture. Persistence helps us to overcome that weakness. It also helps us to appreciate the results more when the prayer is answered.

If we have not been baptized or confirmed, praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit is probably the most important prayer in our conversion experience. The Apostle Paul understood the importance of this aspect of conversion. Listen to how he speaks to a dozen Ephesians:

[While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior of the country and came (down) to Ephesus where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They answered him, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." he said, "How were you baptized?" They replied, "With the baptism of John." Paul then said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid (his) hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Altogether there were about twelve men.] Acts 19:1-7

Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers? This is a very important question. Many people today have been introduced to Christianity but for a variety of reasons, never completed their conversion experience. Some might answer like the Ephesians did "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Paul taught them and then baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is the Sacrament of Baptism, which is performed by a priest. It may be performed on infants or adults. When it is performed on infants, it is the parent's duty to educate the child in the ways of the Lord so that the child grows up in truth with the help of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul laid his hands on the Ephesians, they spoke in tongues and prophesied. This is analogous to the Sacrament of Confirmation, which is performed by a Bishop, a descendent of the Apostles. In the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Bishop will place his hand on your forehead and say "Receive the Holy Spirit" just like Paul did to the Ephesians. Not many people speak in tongues and prophesy when they are confirmed, but there are many other gifts of the Holy Spirit that are received. Regardless of what gifts are received, everyone can be empowered by the Holy Spirit toward courageous acts of faith, hope and love.

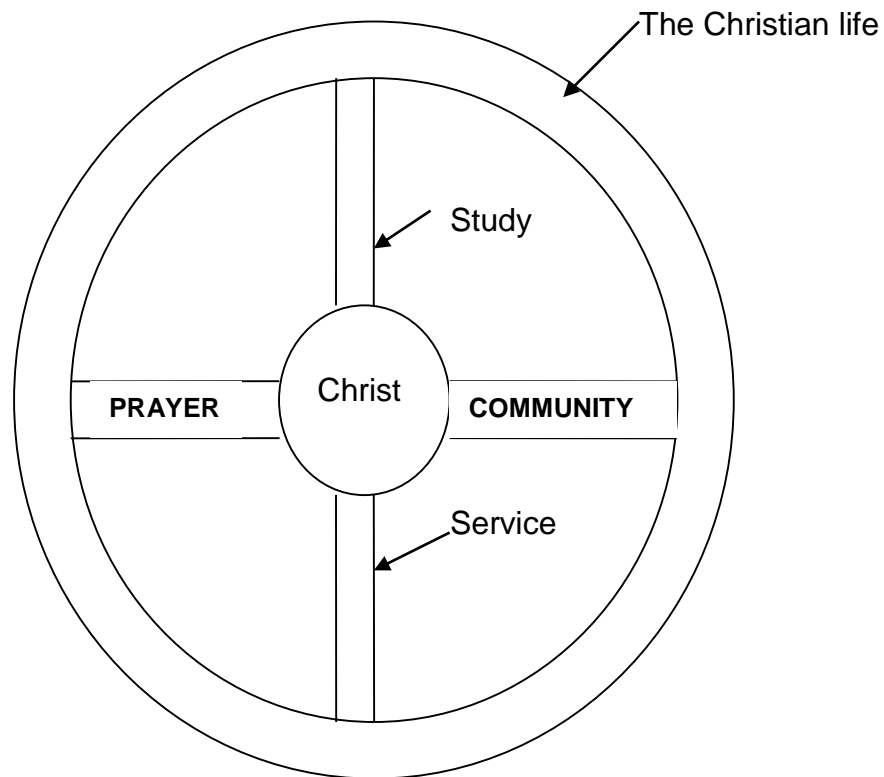
Now is the time for you to ask your Church community to lead you to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Baptism and Confirmation. They will pray with you to receive the Holy Spirit.

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I became a Christian while listening to Pastor Johnson on CJAD in Montreal in the summer of 1962. I was 19. It was a talk radio show and I was intrigued by the answer to questions provided by the Pastor. At one point in the program, he suddenly stopped taking calls and said "All that you have to do to have everlasting life is to fall down on your knees, repent of your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior." So, I got down on my knees and began to say that I was sorry for my sins. I was then surrounded by a powerful feeling of the presence of a supernatural being. My emotions were tingling and I felt connected to some spirit. I whispered to myself "Jesus, you are alive." The sensations immediately grew stronger in waves, confirming for me that Jesus is alive. The experience lasted about two minutes and left me with the absolute certain conviction that Jesus Christ is alive. I found a Bible and began reading it for the first time. As I read the Bible I began to experience a problem that I was having while studying books in college. My eyes would water so that I could not read. I wanted very much to keep reading, so I asked the Lord to dry my eyes up. He did it instantly! I kept reading. The Gospel of Matthew convinced me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Messiah. My life changed dramatically. Now my eyes never water from reading. Instead, I have abundant tears when I am filled with the joy of the Lord. However, my conversion was not complete. Everyone follows different paths. Although a lot of sinful behavior ceased immediately, other serious sins remained. Two years later, I was received, with my sins, into the Catholic Church. It's a merciful Church! I did not come to a proper understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit until six years later.

Chapter 6
Growth in the Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit is only a beginning; we need to grow in the Life in the Spirit. In order to grow in Life in the Spirit, we have to make use of the basic means of growth. Each of us needs certain practices in our lives: PRAYER, STUDY, SERVICE & COMMUNITY. These are depicted in the wheel diagram.



The rim of the wheel represents the Christian life. The hub of the wheel is Christ. All power to drive the wheel comes from the hub. However, in order for the power to get from the hub to move the rim, there must be spokes. Power is transferred through the spokes to the rim to make it go around. The spokes are prayer, study, service and community. All four are necessary to have a balanced Christian life.

PRAYER: We should spend time with the Lord in prayer every day. Personal relationships (friendships) don't grow without two people spending time together, so we have to spend time with the Lord to grow in our relationship with him. We can expect the Lord to speak to us and to reveal himself to us if we give him a chance. Set aside time every day for prayer and scripture reading.

- Decide on a particular time.
- Find a place.

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- Reading and meditating on the Psalms can be very helpful.

My conversion process has been continuing steadily for over 40 years. If at any point, I had stopped praying, I am convinced that my journey would have ended at that point. Prayer sustains the relationship with God and keeps our journey moving in the right direction.

Community Prayer

[...Again, (amen,) I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."] Mt 18:19-20

These words of Jesus are a tremendous encouragement to pray with others. God wants us to be together and to be united in mind and spirit. In community prayer, many of the prayers are vocal. They are not made vocally so that God can hear. They are made vocally so that the members of the group can hear each other and put their hearts and minds in agreement. Prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples prayed in community:

[When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.]

Acts 1:13-14

[They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.] Acts 2:42-47

- Community prayer is vocal because we are communicating to God AND to one another.
- It is unstructured so that it can be guided by the Spirit.
- It may be one person at a time or everybody together.

Prayer for the Gifts of the Spirit

[...how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"] Luke 11:13

Everyone should pray for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit - Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord.

Prayer in Time of Trial

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[Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." he took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." he advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again, "My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!" Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open. He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing again. Then he returned to his disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand when the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. Get up, let us go. Look, my betrayer is at hand."]

Mt 26:36-46

Notice the communication between Jesus and God the Father. Jesus knew the plan. He prophesied more than once that he would be handed over to be crucified. Just the night before, at the last supper, he said that his body would be given up and his blood shed. So during this prayer in time of trial, when Jesus knows his arrest and crucifixion really are about to happen, he checks in with God the Father to confirm the plan.

Prayer of Petition

[First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.] 1 Tim 2:1-4

Prayer for the Charismatic Gifts

What are the charismatic gifts of the Spirit? I do not want you to be unaware. The Apostle Paul discusses the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit in his letter to the Corinthians:

[Now in regard to spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be unaware. You know how, when you were pagans, you were constantly attracted and led away to mute idols. Therefore, I tell you that nobody speaking by the spirit of God says, "Jesus be accursed." And no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

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Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If (one) part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way.] 1 Cor 12

[If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.] 1 Cor 13

[Pursue love, but strive eagerly for the spiritual gifts, above all that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to human beings but to God, for no one listens; he utters mysteries in spirit. On the other hand, one who prophesies does speak to human beings, for their building up, encouragement, and solace. Whoever speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but whoever prophesies builds up the church. Now I should like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.] 1 Cor 14: 1-5

The charismatic gifts should be used for ministry. Since all Christians should be involved in ministry in one form or another, all Christians should pray for and use the charismatic gifts as the Holy Spirit provides them.

Prayer of Praise

[Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.] Mk 14:26

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Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn! If it was good for them it is certainly good for us! Praising God always lifts the soul toward heaven.

The Rosary

Too often, the Rosary can become babbling (uttering words imperfectly or indistinctly) or a sheer multiplication of words, something that Jesus cautioned against. Mt. 6:7

- Meditate on the mysteries. When the mind wanders away from meditations on the life of Christ (the mysteries of the Rosary), prayer ceases.

Eucharistic prayer

Jesus planned the celebration of breaking bread (the Eucharist or holy Communion) long before his coming on earth. During his earthly ministry, when he spoke about it for the first time, he was direct and very clear. Understandably, his hearers had a hard time accepting his plan. Listen to the words of Jesus:

[The next day, the crowd that remained across the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not gone along with his disciples in the boat, but only his disciples had left. Other boats came from Tiberias near the place where they had eaten the bread when the Lord gave thanks. When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal." So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: 'he gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. But I told you that although you have seen (me), you do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it (on) the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him (on) the last day." The Jews murmured about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down

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from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us (his) flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?" he was referring to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot; it was he who would betray him, one of the Twelve.]
John 6:22-71

No words of mine can replace the words of Jesus regarding our Catholic belief concerning the Eucharist. We partake of the Eucharist during the celebration of the Mass. We believe that it is the body and blood of Jesus because he said so. I cannot offer any helpful spiritual insights concerning the Eucharist because it is a mystery that we do not understand. However, there are many writings in the Church that expound on this mystery. For myself, I believe it because of the words of Jesus in the foregoing passage and because Jesus made a very special effort to implement the celebration of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, just before he was arrested.

[While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."] Mk 14:22-25

It may help to point out that the Apostle Paul professed this same teaching in the early Church:

[Therefore, my beloved, avoid idolatry. I am speaking as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I am saying. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

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Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.]

1 Cor 10:14-17,

In all of our prayers, we may ask for a particular ministry or we may just turn to the Lord and receive a new life in the Holy Spirit from him.

In the spring of 1971, eight years after my conversion to Christ, I began to find people who were set free from their sins by the power of the Holy Spirit. I longed for that freedom, having been a prisoner of my passions for so long. For me, my conversion to Christ was a tremendous improvement, but it was not enough. The charismatic renewal was taking place in various churches at that time and many people began regular attendance at prayer groups and began to experience the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. Although I had been sacramentally confirmed, I had no idea what the sacrament was about. This is not an uncommon problem. I studied the issue more carefully. Then I was "baptized in the Spirit" by a group of prayerful people and immediately experienced a power over passion, especially sexual passion. This was a major breakthrough. It gave me greater freedom and maturity. I was able to understand all of the experiences of people in the New Testament of the Bible. I wanted very much to share this with others so I became a prayer group leader, sang songs of praise on my guitar, taught Life in the Spirit seminars and started a whole new life of growth and ministry in the Church. About 18 months later I married and my wife and I rejoiced over our five children. We both maintained marital chastity through many difficult periods. Despite tremendous spiritual attacks on our marriage from within ourselves and from others, we survived by the grace of God. Thank you Lord!

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This may be a good time to repeat your prayer of Commitment to Christ.

The Commitment to Christ

Do you renounce Satan and all wrongdoing?

Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died to free us from our sins and that he rose to bring us new life?

Will you follow Jesus as your Lord?

Lord Jesus Christ, I want to belong to you from now on. I want to be freed from the dominion of darkness and the rule of Satan and I want to enter into your kingdom and be part of your people.

I will turn away from all wrongdoing and I will avoid everything that leads me to wrongdoing. I ask you to forgive all the sins that I have committed.

I offer my life to you and I promise to obey you as my Lord.

I ask you to baptize me in the Holy Spirit and to give me all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in accordance with your will.

This coming week, give plenty of time to praise and thanksgiving.

STUDY: The most important study of all is to read the Bible. Every Christian should read the entire New Testament over some suitable time period (years). The Old Testament is rich in wisdom and gives us an understanding of the role of prophecy in the unfolding of God's plan for life and salvation. The Bible does not need to be read all at once or "from cover to cover." Most people read it in sections.

There are hundreds of good spiritual books, which can be found at any Catholic book store. Every Catholic should own a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This book is like refined pure gold because it is 100% true. "The gates of hell will never prevail against it." Like the Bible, the Catechism does not need to be read all at once. Reading spiritual books is a pilgrimage with the Lord. He will delight you with discovery of hidden treasures.

COMMUNITY & SERVICE: The Christian life is not something that we live on our own. We live it with the rest of the Christian people. Among other things, this means regular participation in the liturgy of the Church (Sunday Mass). It is one of the Ten Commandments:

[Remember to keep holy the sabbath day.] Ex 20:8

Every parish has many parish ministries. Find one where your gifts, talents and hard labor may contribute to the building of the kingdom of God.

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It is excellent to be part of a Christian Community or prayer group. We need to get together regularly with a group of Christians with whom we can grow in what we have found. Community is not an optional extra; it is essential to life in the Spirit.

[This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.] Jn 15:12

[This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.]
John 13:35

God's plan is for us to come to him with others in a body. The Holy Spirit works through others to build us up. This is how spiritual gifts are used.

The result of Pentecost was to create a community of Christians. Acts 2:41-47.

I would like to share with you a great physical healing. When I reached the age of 13, I had developed serious food allergies to about ten different foods. The worst was oatmeal. I loved porridge with brown sugar and oatmeal cookies. I used to get recurring sinus infections that had to be treated with antibiotics. I had bad sinus headaches, puffed sinuses and total nasal blockage. The infections would turn the mucus to yellow and green. This problem continued until finally when I was 35, the antibiotics did not work anymore. I turned to my prayer community and asked them to pray for me to be healed. Their prayers joined mine off and on for some time. Several weeks later, my sinuses cleared up and I was healed. I praised the Lord and said to him "Lord you made oatmeal. There is nothing wrong with oatmeal. Oatmeal is good for us." And so I proceeded to eat a bowl of oatmeal with no problem of stuffiness or sneezing. I now enjoy oatmeal every day for breakfast. I can breathe through both nostrils all the time. Praise him!

We should show our friends and family the love that we receive in the Holy Spirit.

In the spiritual life, every day the Holy Spirit is at work in us to change us and to make us holier. He is working to draw us into a deeper union with God and with one another, to give us a fuller experience of the new life. He is working to make us realize the need for us to turn away from wrongdoing, to re-order our priorities and to take away all of those things that make us less loving.

My initial conversion experience gave me an interest in reading Scripture (the Bible). However, since I did not know the Holy Spirit until many years later, my interest waned and I did not progress much past the reading of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. However, after I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, my love of Scripture soared. I never tire of reading the Bible.

Thus far we have been talking about the joy of finding the Lord. However, we can expect trials (serious difficulties in life that test our fortitude). The Apostle, Peter, describes this experience with words that we can associate with very closely:

[Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. *I appreciate this description which so closely resembles my own experience. When one has the joy of the Lord, the trial seems very strange.* But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.] 1 Peter 4:12-19

[So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory. Likewise you that are younger be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God; stand fast in it.] 1 Peter 5:1-12

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["...for it is written be holy because I am holy"] 1Peter1:16

One of the most important things to realize during one's growth in the Spirit is that God's plan for life includes many plans. Some people have the idea that there is one unique plan of God for their life. This is not biblical nor is it Catholic teaching. However, some people teach that all you have to do is listen to God's unique plan for your life and everything will work out wonderfully, like it did for them. Well most of us don't listen to God 100% of the time and most of us take rather tortuous paths through life. This teaching would imply that if we miss God's unique plan, take the wrong fork in the road, we are finished forever. It is impossible to become restored to the original unique plan. There is a serious problem with this view. It can lead us to feel trapped in a hopeless state of despair. We can overly punish ourselves by brooding with thoughts such as "I should not have moved; I should not have married and been stuck with...; I should have been a doctor instead of a nurse; I should have been a famous politician instead of a teacher; I should have been an astronaut instead of a lab technician," and the list goes on. Satan will always denigrate our choices and nag us on to aspire fame and fortune. The truth is, God is infinite and there are many, many possible ways of living our lives and doing good things. God has many plans within his grand plan. Whatever plan we pick for our lives (within the moral law) is our choice, our free will. He loves us and will work with us to bless it. The following passage is a very important source of encouragement when things in our life seem to have failed to meet our expectations and our dreams.

[We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.] Romans 8:28

Our projects may fail and our efforts may seem to be in vain, but if our efforts stem from a love of God, they will lead to some good and bear fruit in their time. There are many ways to become healed and restored to the fullness of human dignity consistent with God's overall plan.

With the power of the Holy Spirit, we now have a new power to deal with difficulties. The Lord will teach us things through overcoming difficulties.

During the trials and tribulations of life, the Apostle Paul tells us:

[Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.] 1 Thess 5:16-17

At one point in my career as an engineer in the medical device industry, I was abruptly fired from my position as Vice President of Research and Development of a start-up company. After having saved the company's product line from technical failure, it was quite a blow and a surprise. I packed up my office, drove home and stopped in at Church to say some prayers. I went home and opened my Bible. On that page, I was given a scripture passage:

[For the just man falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble to ruin.]
Prov 24:16.

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Two weeks later I had a higher paying job with one half the commute time! Actually, my engineering career in Southern California continued to be quite tumultuous during the entire 21 years that it lasted. I was laid off five times and fired twice – a total of seven times! It hurts to get fired. It takes a year or two to get over it. My wife and I now have our own company. God is good!

[Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.] Matt 7:13-14

For Christian growth, it is important to take advantage of the teaching that is available in the Church. We need the strength and support of others, the sharing of experience and advice. A good way to put out a fire is to pull the logs apart; a good basis for starting a fire is to put them together in the right way. Jesus wants a big fire of the Spirit:

["I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!"] Luke 12:49

Nearly everybody in our culture is experiencing trials with jobs, family, money and relationships with others. Without the wisdom of God, the trials become worse and can be destructive. Usually the trials arise because someone (perhaps our self) or some group is not following the way of sacrifice and is pursuing a selfish interest, if not full-blown sin. Jesus showed us the way to defeat the devil by going to the cross. The nature of the battle is that we cannot resolve the trial by pointing out the lack of sacrifice of others. That strategy does not work! We must embrace even more burden and show the way of the cross. We are not called to be successful. We are called to be faithful. We do not have to win.

[For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.] Matt 16:25

Indeed, we will find everlasting life, which is priceless and for which no sacrifice is too great.

God loves us and has done everything that he possibly can to rescue us. He not only wants to rescue us from premature physical death, he wants to rescue us from some terrible consequences that lie ahead – eternal damnation. He wants to bring as many souls as possible to eternal life with him in heaven. There will be a final judgment. Listen to the clear words of Jesus on this subject:

["When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."] Matt 25:31-46

Eternal life for the righteous is a marvelous promise! In the following passage, Christ speaks from heaven through the prophetic writings of the Apostle John. As in the prophecies of Isaiah, "Jerusalem" is a symbol for the Church, the people of God:

[Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them (as their God). He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away." The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true." He said to me, "They are accomplished. I (am) the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water. The victor will inherit these gifts, and I shall be his God, and he will be my son.] Rev 21:1-7

Sometimes Christians are afraid to talk about God's plan for judgment. It's an unpleasant subject. We do not want anyone to miss out on the promise of eternal life and go to hell.

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Perhaps we avoid the subject of judgment because we do not want to be perceived as judging others, something that we have been instructed by our Lord not to do. However it is crucial to announce God's judgment. It is not our judgment; it is his. What I sometimes do is quickly add that God's judgment applies to me. It is part of the Gospel. God's plan for life is to rescue us from eternal damnation in hell.

An analogy may help here. Suppose you see two men in a rowboat fishing on a river. The oars are withdrawn; they are quite relaxed, with packs of beer in a cooler and a portable radio playing their favorite music. It's a beautiful day. The river is calm and there is a barely noticeable steady current carrying them past continuous changes in beautiful scenery gently downstream. The two men are tourists and are totally unaware that the river they are on is the upper Niagara. In a few hours, they will be swept over Niagara Falls to certain destruction. Naturally, you call out loud to them "Row...row...there is a waterfall ahead! If you do not row, you will be destroyed!" You are not threatening them. You are trying to rescue them. In the same way, God speaks through his Apostles and teachers in the Church who call out to us, "Repent...reform your lives...do something quickly, before it is too late." Their sense of anxiety is not a threat. It stems from a natural concern for humans to be rescued and saved for eternal life. The fisherman in the boat might not hear you very well and may respond to your shouts by making angry gestures telling you to leave because you are scaring the fish away and you are disturbing their peace and tranquility. But that would not stop you from shouting back or arranging for a long rope to be thrown out to them. Our desire to rescue the fisherman stems from certain knowledge of what is about to happen.

The words of Christ spoken through the prophetic writings of the Apostle John are similarly quite clear:

[But as for cowards, the unfaithful, the depraved, murderers, the unchaste, sorcerers, idol-worshipers, and deceivers of every sort, their lot is in the burning pool of fire and sulfur, which is the second death.] Rev 21:8

This judgment applies to me. I have been a coward, unfaithful, depraved, unchaste as a youth and a deceiver. But thanks to God's rescue plan, I have hope because I was given the opportunity to repent and my sins are forgiven through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

What is the second death? The first death is when we all die due to old age or other causes. Our souls will be judged by God. Our souls, without our bodies, will go to heaven, hell or purgatory. This is the preliminary judgment. When Jesus returns, everyone will be raised from the dead, good and bad alike. Everyone will receive new bodies, including the worst sinners. Then the final Judgment will take place. This is where Jesus sits on his glorious throne with all the nations assembled before him. (Matt 25) The righteous will continue to have eternal life of their real bodies. These bodies will be glorified bodies, a remarkably improved design, that does not get sick or decay. The unrighteous will be thrown into the pool of burning sulphur. Perhaps there is some imagery being used in this expression of "burning sulphur" but the effect is eternal punishment and separation from the beautiful plans that God has for us in the next world.

Which denominations will be saved? I was called to conversion to Jesus Christ by the voice of a Protestant Pastor. Then, I was saved from death numerous times by the truthful

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teaching of the Catholic Church. What is God's plan for salvation? One thing is clear from Jesus' discourse on judgment; it does not matter what label we carry; it matters what we are and what we do. When Jesus returns, he will not separate the Protestants from the Catholics or the Jews from the Muslims. He will separate us into sheep and goats (Matt 25). Our labels will be gone. What remains is our life record. This is not to say that religion does not matter. On the contrary, having access to the truth is extremely important. But it is what we do with the truth that will be judged.

[For it is time for the judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, how will it end for those who fail to obey the gospel of God? "And if the righteous one is barely saved, where will the godless and the sinner appear?"] 1 Peter 4:17-18

Who will be saved? Jesus answers this question directly:

[Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.] Matt 7:13-14

These teachings are not intended to be a discouraging condemnation. They are intended to stir us up out of whatever stupor or complacency we may be in. Seeking God, discovering religious truth and acting on it should be our number one priority in life.

Beware of the Sugar Gospel

As we search for truth, one problem that is going to occur is that we will likely be subjected to the "Sugar Gospel." The Sugar Gospel is preached in many churches of all denominations in America. It is one-half of the total Gospel. I call it a "Sugar Gospel" because it is full of sweetness and goodness. It can be characterized by the frequently repeated phrases and themes such as "Jesus loves you...Jesus will forgive you...Jesus is kind and merciful...Jesus will never leave you...Jesus will heal you...Come and experience the presence of Jesus in the eucharist...There is nothing comparable to the unwavering love of Jesus...He will give you the Holy Spirit and make you whole." While all of this is true, it becomes a misrepresentation of the true Gospel because some serious important elements are left out. Without going into a great amount of detail, one can summarize what's left out by the following list of words:

- Sin
- Repentance
- Moral law
 - Contraception
 - Masturbation
 - Sterilization
 - Co-habitation
 - Divorce
 - Pride
 - Greed
 - The Ten Commandments
- The freedom of chastity (Few of us can remember the last time we heard a homily on chastity.)

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- Judgment (How many Catholics know what the second death is?) Rev. 21:8.

Jesus preached with authority. His mercy is infinite and so is his justice. His message is pure truth and complete truth. The Gospel spoken by Jesus is sprinkled with beautiful promises and severe warnings. Rarely today, does one hear the call to repent let alone the warnings for failure to do so. Those who preach the Sugar Gospel are proclaiming a half truth. A half truth is also a half lie. They are deceivers. Deceivers are liable to Judgment and eternal punishment along with cowards, the unfaithful, the depraved, murderers, the unchaste, sorcerers and idol-worshippers. (Rev 21:8).

Chapter 9
The Spoken Word and the Written Word

When the Apostles preached the Gospel, they preached the Word of God. They preached what was given to them by God. They not only remembered the words of Jesus (God the Son) but through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they taught the truth about God and about his plan for life and for salvation. We call this preaching the spoken Word of God, because it was spoken first by Jesus and then by the Apostles. The spoken Word of God is very powerful because it is simple and it speaks the truth down to the depths of our souls. The spoken word of God is what launched the Church and brought thousands of conversions. The spoken Word of God included all of the teachings of the Christian faith including, faith, morals and teachings on religious observances and practices, such as the celebration of the Eucharist. The Church calls this Tradition. The Tradition of the Church is not something akin to a custom such as the Thanksgiving tradition of eating turkey; Tradition is the treasure house of teachings on faith and morals. After a few decades, the spoken Word of God began to be written down where it became the written Word of God. It is important to note that the spoken Word preceded the written Word. The written Word began as letters and manuscripts which were circulated and read in the early churches. It wasn't until about 300 A.D. that the Fathers of the Church sifted through numerous letters and manuscripts; they rejected many and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit chose those items which became the New Testament of the Bible. They joined the New Testament to the Old Testament. Both the New Testament and the Old Testament of the Bible constitute the written Word of God. All of this fulfills the commission given to the Apostles by Jesus:

["All power in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."] Matt 28:19-20

The Apostles are commanded to teach what Jesus taught them. Then, he promises to be with his Church forever.

["I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you."] John 16:12-15

It would have been too much for the Apostles to hear all of the teachings that Jesus knew they would eventually need. So, he promises that the Holy Spirit will guide them to an understanding of all of the truth that belongs to him.

The Apostle John shows us the importance of the spoken Word. While he is writing (the written Word), he writes in a way that indicates that he would prefer to be present in person with Gaius to speak to him directly (the Spoken Word):

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[I have much to write to you, but I do not wish to write with pen and ink. Instead, I hope to see you soon, when we can talk face to face.] 3 John 1:13-14

The point is not to make one more important than the other. The spoken Word and the written Word are equivalent in importance and they harmonize with each other because they are both an expression of the truth which comes from God. The importance of both the written Word and the spoken Word (Tradition) is apparent in the following exhortation by the Apostle Paul:

[Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours.] 2 Thess:2:15

Those who say "if it is not in the Bible, do not accept it" are sadly mistaken. The Bible is extremely important; it is the written Word. But Tradition adds many important elements to our faith. Tradition also helps to teach us how to abide by the moral law. Tradition is the teaching of the Apostles, handed down to us faithfully for our benefit. Interestingly, there is no doctrine within Tradition that is not strongly supported by the written Word. The two are in harmony with God because they come from God.

From the beginning of Christ's ministry, there was a special relationship between Jesus Christ and Peter.

- Jesus entered Simon Peter's house and healed his mother-in-law. Luke 4:38
- Jesus preached from his boat. Luke 5:3
- Jesus paid the temple tax for Peter and himself. Mt 17:26
- Jesus prayed especially for Peter. Luke 22:32
- Peter was present at the Transfiguration of Jesus. Luke 9:28-36
- Jesus appeared to him first among the apostles. Lk 24:34
- Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him and then commanded him to feed his lambs (apostles) and his sheep (all Christians). Jn 21:15-19.

Today, Jesus Christ makes Peter shepherd of his Church. This had been prophesied:

[When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.]"
Mt 16:13-19

The name, Peter, means "rock." Peter is rock or foundation on earth. (Christ is the spiritual rock, also referred to as the cornerstone.) Christ builds the Church upon the rock (Peter, source of unity). The gates of hell will not prevail against it. This does not mean that Peter (or his successor) cannot sin. It does not mean that there cannot be evil in the Church. It means that the teachings of the Church will never become corrupted.

Jesus gives Peter the keys. Keys are a symbol of authority. This symbolism was used before in the Old Testament:

[I will place the Key of the House of David on his (Eliakin) shoulder.] Is 22:22.

Christian authority is not like worldly authority. It is not the authority of kings, presidents or rulers. It is not an authority that tramples free will. However, it is the authority to speak the truth and impart discipline within the Church. The authority includes the power to bind and loose, but only in matters of faith and morals. The Church is the guiding compass to the world in matters of faith and morals. There is no other compass. Without this compass we have no direction and can easily become lost. In this area alone, Peter and his successors have full authority over the Church and what it teaches.

Jesus' prophetic commission to Peter was fulfilled. Peter and every successor have had the duty and the power to teach the truth and to govern the Church. This power was

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recognized by the early Church. The following are clear examples of the exercise of pastoral authority, recorded in the Bible:

- Peter presided over the election of Mathias, Acts 1:15
- Peter was the first to speak on the day of Pentecost. He spoke very authoritatively. Acts 2:14
- After the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost, Peter performed the first miracle, Acts 3:6
- Peter spoke authoritatively on behalf of all of the Apostles before the Sanhedrin, Acts 4:8
- Peter punished Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5:1-11
- Peter was the first Apostle to preach to the Gentiles, Acts 10
- Peter had the last word and the ultimate authority at first Council of the Church. Acts 15

Christ made Peter the head of the Church with full authority. This was recognized by the Church. Peter was Vicar (Christ's representative on earth) with Christ acting through him.

It was clearly the plan of God to found a Church with unity under authority. Christ foresaw the need for a source of unity. He knew that many false teachers, deceivers and false prophets would come into the world. The Apostle Paul speaks to the Apostle Titus accordingly about the need for "instruction in sound doctrine":

[For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it. For there are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially the circumcision party; they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for base gain what they have no right to teach.]
Titus 1:9-10

This authority was passed down through successors. After Peter, Linus, who is mentioned in the Bible (2 Tim 4:21) became Pope. Then came Anacletus followed by Clement. There is an unbroken line of 265 Popes, from Peter down to Benedict XVI who presides as Pope over the Church today. The "keys" are given by Christ to each Pope along the way.

This unity under authority was recognized by the early Fathers of the Church. St. Augustine said "Where Peter goes, there goes the Church"). It is recognized by all of the Cardinals, Bishops, most priests and most of the laity today.

Pope Benedict XVI is not just a theologian, or a bearer of opinions. Like Peter, he is the Vicar of Christ.

- He is the shepherd.
- He guides us in all truth about faith and morals.
- He cannot add or subtract anything from the "deposit of faith" – namely, all of the teachings and truths revealed by the Word of God, especially those revealed through Jesus Christ.

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- In his teaching ministry of faith and morals, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he is infallible.

It is foolish and sad to separate from him. The Protestant Reformation unfortunately rejected the whole concept of unity under authority. As a result, there is no unity and very little authority within Protestantism. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of denominations and churches that operate independently, teaching different things about faith and morals.

St. Catherine of Sienna said that the Pope is “the sweet voice of Christ”.

Next to the Bible, the most valuable study guide for knowing and understanding God's plan for life is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Every Christian should have a copy.

Part Two

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Chapter 11
In The Beginning

The book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible. A casual reader might be inclined to dismiss the entire book as being an oversimplified attempt to explain creation without the knowledge of modern science. However, once some of the imagery is understood, the book becomes rich in its expression of certain fundamental truths about God and our relationship with him. When we read the book of Genesis, we need to recognize the spiritual elements that are being taught by the message. Adam represents man or all of mankind; Eve represents woman or all women.

[In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." Thus evening came, and morning followed—the first day. Then God said, "Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other." And so it happened: God made the dome, and it separated the water above the dome from the water below it. God called the dome "the sky." Evening came, and morning followed--the second day. Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear." And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land "the earth," and the basin of the water he called "the sea." God saw how good it was. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it." And so it happened: the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed--the third day. Then God said: "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years, and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth." And so it happened: God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night; and he made the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed--the fourth day. Then God said, "Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky." And so it happened: God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of swimming creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw how good it was, and God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth." Evening came, and morning followed--the fifth day. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds." And so it happened: God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. God saw how good it was. Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground." God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth." God also said: "See, I give you every

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seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food." And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed--the sixth day.] Gen 1:1-31

Some pagan religions say that there is a moon god, a sun god or a god of thunder or various gods in the formations of the stars. The Word of God in Genesis tells us that there is one God who made everything, including all of the stars. This may seem obvious to most believers but consider Genesis a re-visit to the important basics. Genesis directly confronts all other religions with the simple truth that there is one Supreme being who made everything.

Another truth that is revealed is that he gave man dominion over all of creation. We can cultivate it or kill it; we have substantial power and control over creation.

The following statement is rich: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them." Gen 1:27

This simple sentence is often overlooked and forgotten, yet it is rich in meaning. It expresses a human dignity that is certainly higher than the animals. We are made in the image of God! When we reflect on this, we can come to appreciate the truth behind it. For example, man has a tremendous sense of justice. We can listen to two people argue for hours or even days about many events that they brought upon each other. We can integrate all of that information and reach a conclusion about who was fairly and justly treated and who was not. We can judge events and actions. That is a characteristic of God.

We love to rescue people. When rescuers drag coal miners out of the ground after several days of entrapment, there is tremendous jubilation. Everyone is joyous and filled with excitement and appreciation. God put that desire in our hearts. He wants to rescue us. Our desire to rescue is just like his desire to rescue.

Like God, we have the ability to create (clay pots, art, automobiles).

We have the ability to forgive and show mercy. Now this is an abstract concept. One would have to tell a long story to explain what it means to show mercy. God is merciful. He gave us a share in that dimension. As a result, we are quite God-like.

We have the ability to love. This is even more God-like, as he loves us.

We have the ability to intercede. We can talk with God and ask him to help our loved ones, to heal them and to restore them to fullness in life.

It doesn't stop. We have the ability to have a relationship with God. Even further, God gave us the ability to receive the Spirit of God. Now this is really making us God-like!

Finally, we are destined for immortality. There is nothing more God-like than to be immortal.

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Isn't it amazing how one sentence from the Word of God in Genesis can expand into so much meaning? This is the truth about human dignity. In God's plan, we are elevated to a very high level, far above the animals. This human dignity demands human respect. It demands that we love like God. It demands a total and complete respect for human life.

[God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it."] Gen 1:28

This is the first command of the Bible. Now the earth is not subdued and is not filled. Only 10% of the land mass surface of the earth consists in cities and farms. Overpopulation is a myth. Even the three most populous nations on earth, China, India and the United States have vast territories that are unpopulated, un-subdued. The population density of India is less than the state of New Jersey. However, one does not need statistics to prove it. The next time you are up in an airplane, look down. In most places, it is empty! Then there are the enormous empty expanses of Canada and Australia which, if traveled by train, can numb the mind of the observer by the repetition of the trees and the emptiness. The same is true in South America and Africa. God's plan for life is to fill the earth and subdue it.

[Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation. Such is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation. At the time when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens--while as yet there was no field shrub on earth and no grass of the field had sprouted, for the LORD God had sent no rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil, but a stream was welling up out of the earth and was watering all the surface of the ground--the LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed.]
Gen 2:1-8

God worked so hard that he decided to rest. He made the seventh day holy. He instructed us to rest. Since we are made like him, we need it. It's not just our physical bodies that need rest; our spirit needs rest. We need a break from the mental stress of work. We also need time to talk to God and worship him. In our culture, this may require formation of some counter-cultural habits, like not shopping on Sunday. We must make sure that we regularly attend Church.

The Genesis account of creation may seem contradicted by science, particularly in terms of the time it took to create the world. However, once the imagery of Genesis is understood, this apparent contradiction disappears. To understand the imagery, it is helpful to look at the Second Letter of the Apostle Peter:

[This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; through them by way of reminder I am trying to stir up your sincere disposition, to recall the words previously spoken by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and savior through your apostles. Know this first of all, that in the last days scoffers will come (to) scoff, living according to their own desires and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? From the time when our ancestors fell asleep, everything has remained as it was from the beginning

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of creation." They deliberately ignore the fact that the heavens existed of old and earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God; through these the world that then existed was destroyed, deluged with water. The present heavens and earth have been reserved by the same word for fire, kept for the day of judgment and of destruction of the godless. But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out. Since everything is to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought (you) to be, conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved in flames and the elements melted by fire. But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace. And consider the patience of our Lord as salvation, as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, also wrote to you, speaking of these things as he does in all his letters. In them there are some things hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction, just as they do the other scriptures.] 2 Peter 3:1-16

"..one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day." God does not need a clock or a calendar. We wear watches and use them frequently. We tend to judge everything by how long it takes. We always want to know "when?" or "how long?" Since God always was and always will be, clocks have no relevance. Was the earth made in seven days or seven thousand years or seven million years? This question is irrelevant to our spirit. It is of interest to scientists but is of little value in understanding God's plan for life.

As an aside, the scientific theory of evolution is not incompatible with God, nor with the account of creation in Genesis. God may have used evolution to create the world. Evolution should be evaluated solely on its scientific merits. Scientifically, there seems to be little doubt that a yellow butterfly may evolve to a brown butterfly to relate better to its environment. However, there seems to be very little compelling evidence that a fish became a rabbit; a rabbit became a dog; a dog became a horse or a monkey and a monkey became a human being. There can be diversification within a species but the theory that one species jumps or evolves into another radically different species has yet to come up with clear evidence of the intermediary steps.

I'm an engineer. When engineers achieve a design that performs well, they use the same design in many different machines. The fact that the vertebrae and organ functions of the animal world are all similar to humans to me is simply evidence that the greatest designer in the world, God, chose to replicate his designs in different creatures. Once you have a very complex eyeball that works really well, why not use it more than once? How God achieved his brilliant, ingenious magnificent design of an eyeball and all of the other complex organs of the human body and how long he took to do it is God's business. I will never know how he did it. In fact, I'm so overwhelmed by the incredible complexity of our bodies, that I frequently offer him thanks and praise for the superb engineering design.

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We have beautiful bodies, made in the image of God. They have the power to procreate! From the very beginning God instructed man very carefully in the proper use of his procreative powers. The Book of Deuteronomy provides explicit instruction – man shall not have sexual relations with his sister, his mother or another man's wife. Nor shall a man have sexual relations with another man, or with an animal. Simply stated, men and women are called to be chaste. Chastity means the absence of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. In God's plan, everyone is called to be chaste. Singles are called to be chaste. The married are called to be chaste. Widows and widowers are called to be chaste. Priests, nuns and monks are called to be chaste. Homosexuals and lesbians are called to be chaste. There are no exceptions. Being chaste is part of being made in the image of God. God's plan for chastity is designed for our prosperity and our longevity. Chastity supports the procreation and development of human life. Lack of chastity leads to social discord, decay, disease and death.

One of the attributes of the Bible is that it is an historical account of God's plans and interventions to save humanity. We call this salvation history. Very early in salvation history, an incident occurred that serves as a very important lesson and message to today's culture. It is the story of Onan.

[About that time Judah parted from his brothers and pitched his tent near a certain Adullamite named Hirah. There he met the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua, married her, and had relations with her. She conceived and bore a son, whom she named Er. Again she conceived and bore a son, whom she named Onan. Then she bore still another son, whom she named Shelah. They were in Chezib when he was born. Judah got a wife named Tamar for his first-born, Er. But Er, Judah's first-born, greatly offended the LORD; so the LORD took his life. Then Judah said to Onan, "Unite with your brother's widow, in fulfillment of your duty as brother-in-law, and thus preserve your brother's line." Onan, however, knew that the descendants would not be counted as his; so whenever he had relations with his brother's widow, he wasted his seed on the ground, to avoid contributing offspring for his brother. What he did greatly offended the LORD, and the LORD took his life too. Thereupon Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Stay as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"--for he feared that Shelah also might die like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father's house. Years passed, and Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. After Judah completed the period of mourning, he went up to Timnah for the shearing of his sheep, in company with his friend Hirah the Adullamite. When Tamar was told that her father-in-law was on his way up to Timnah to shear his sheep, she took off her widow's garb, veiled her face by covering herself with a shawl, and sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the way to Timnah; for she was aware that, although Shelah was now grown up, she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her, he mistook her for a harlot, since she had covered her face. So he went over to her at the roadside, and not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he said, "Come, let me have intercourse with you." She replied, "What will you pay me for letting you have intercourse with me?" He answered, "I will send you a kid from the flock." "Very well," she said, "provided you leave a pledge until you send it." Judah asked, "What pledge am I to give to you?" She answered, "Your seal and cord, and the staff you carry." So he gave them to her and had intercourse with her, and she conceived by him. When she went away, she took off her shawl and put on her widow's garb again. Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite to recover the pledge from the woman; but he could not find her. So he asked the men of the place, "Where is the temple prostitute, the one by the

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roadside in Enaim?" But they answered, "There has never been a temple prostitute here." he went back to Judah and told him, "I could not find her; and besides, the men of the place said there was no temple prostitute there. "Let her keep the things," Judah replied; "otherwise we shall become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her the kid, even though you were unable to find her." About three months later, Judah was told that his daughter-in-law Tamar had played the harlot and was then with child from her harlotry. "Bring her out," cried Judah; "she shall be burned." But as they were bringing her out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "It is by the man to whom these things belong that I am with child. Please verify," she added, "whose seal and cord and whose staff these are. "Judah recognized them and said, "She is more in the right than I am, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." But he had no further relations with her. When the time of her delivery came, she was found to have twins in her womb. While she was giving birth, one infant put out his hand; and the midwife, taking a crimson thread, tied it on his hand, to note that this one came out first. But as he withdrew his hand, his brother came out; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out; he was called Zerah.] Gen 38:1-30

Onan was killed by God. It is not very often in salvation history that God kills a human because he loves us. It happened at the flood because of the immorality and violence within the human race. But God said that he would not do that again. It happened at Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroyed the cities because of the immorality, in particular, sodomy. The word "sodomy" comes from Sodom. God found it necessary to teach a very important lesson. It happened to the first born of David and Bathsheba. The child died as a punishment to David for his treacherous scheme to have Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba killed in battle so that he could take the beautiful Bathsheba as his wife. In the New Testament, God killed Ananias and Saphira in the presence of the Apostle Peter and many onlookers because of their devious scheme to impress people with their alms giving. These events are centuries apart. They do not happen often. However, when they do happen, God has an important purpose. It is to teach us. It is worth noting that the common denominator in all of these events was premeditated wickedness.

To properly understand what Onan did to merit death, we have to look closely at what he actually did. Onan decided that he did not want to have children. He was miffed because any children would be attributed to his dead brother's line and not to him. So whenever he had sexual intercourse with his wife, Tamar (Er's widow), before reaching climax, he withdrew his organ and ejaculated on the ground. In medical terminology, this is called "coitus interruptus" which is Latin for interrupted sexual union. In laymen's terms, it is called "withdrawal." It is a form of contraception that is still used all over the world and by 2% of American married couples today. Onan was killed because he contracepted. He did it more than once. He repeatedly defrauded the marriage of its procreative purpose.

God does not kill everybody who commits serious sin. He loves us and prefers to rescue us. But every once and a while an important lesson has to be taught. This was one such moment. God is saying to his people "no" this is wrong. This is the wrong track. This is not my plan. This kind of deed will have far-reaching evil consequences.

An analogy may help. A father suddenly notices that his four year old son has turned on the gas stove in the kitchen and is about to stick his hand in the silent blue flame to check it out. The father has warned his son before not to play with the stove. The other children

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are watching curiously. In a moment the father realizes that there could be horrible unforeseen consequences of what is about to happen. His son's hand may become so badly burned that he is scarred for life, unable to function normally. The other children may get similar ideas about playing with the stove. The father loves his son dearly and would much prefer not to have to do what he realizes he must do. The father grabs his son, drops his pants and gives him a swift swat on the behind. The child yells and there is a period of anguish. The child's feelings are hurt and so are the father's. In one sense, the child did not deserve the spanking because he was just expressing innocent curiosity. However, the father's overriding concern were the long term unforeseen consequences. The father decided that he had to make a powerful statement.

When God killed Onan he made a powerful statement. Keep in mind that God will give Onan back his life at the resurrection. The death sentence for contraception seems severe but can be understood better when the full scope and long term consequences of the evil of contraception are appreciated. We will gradually develop this theme further to provide more insight.

In the remainder of the Onan account, Judah committed fornication with Tamar, who he thought was a prostitute. He was not killed. Tamar knowingly committed fornication with her father-in-law, Judah and she was not killed. In fact, God blessed her with twins. Judah realized that her intent was to fulfill God's procreative purpose which was being denied to her. "She is more in the right than I am because I did not give her to my son Shelah." Gen 38:26. Onan is killed to provide us with a lesson for all time, just like Sodom and Gomorrah. Not every sodomite is killed. Not everyone who contracepts is killed. One lesson is enough for all of salvation history.

There are several dimensions to Onan's sin.

- He denied children to his wife. The Jews understood this quite well.
- He denied children to the nation of Israel. The Jews understood that quite well too.
- He misused his sexual organs for selfish personal pleasure. Jewish commentaries on the passage make this point.
- Perhaps less understood is the following. It has been revealed to us that the relationship between a husband and wife is like the relationship between Christ and his Church. It is sacred. It is holy and unified and for the baptized it is a Sacrament. What Onan did was strike right at the core of that sacred union.

St. Augustine uses the Onan account to condemn any means by a married couple to prevent conception.

Martin Luther called contraception worse than incest or adultery. Ref: Charles D. Provan, "The Bible and Birth Control" 1989.

The cultural chatter about overpopulation, which is frequently mentioned in the news media and highlighted by various books, such as Paul Ehrlich's "The Population Bomb" is completely contrary to God's plan for life.

Even as long ago as the time of Moses, God's plan for population is revealed. Let's look at the historical setting. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt and Ramses, the king of Egypt

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was growing very concerned about their rapidly increasing numbers. Why was he concerned? He was concerned because of the potential political or revolutionary power that they could develop. So he arranged for the male Jewish babies to be executed. Moses miraculously survived and God chose him to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt. They were in the desert for at least 40 years. Now listen to the words of Moses:

[The LORD, your God, has so multiplied you that you are now as numerous as the stars in the sky. May the LORD, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand times over, and bless you as he promised!] Deut 1:10

They were as numerous "as the stars in the sky." How many is that? Well, they had previously taken a census, so we know the answer. There were 603,550 males. Num 1:46 They didn't count females, not because females were not important, but because they were primarily interested in keeping track of men for military service. For the same reason, they did not count the Levites, who were the priestly class. So let's assume that the number of women equaled the number of men, round downward to be conservative and say that there were about 1.2 million adult Jews in the nation. Moses considers this population growth a tremendous blessing and says "May the Lord ...increase you a thousand times over..." Well, 1.2 million times one thousand is 1.2 billion! Neither Moses nor God is the least bit concerned about this kind of population growth. They do not express 1.2 billion as being a limit but as a sign of potential prosperity. Today, there are less than five million Jews in Israel. So why should one be concerned about overpopulation? Nowhere in the entire Bible does God express any concern about overpopulation. Large populations are part of God's plan for life.

All of the churches, Catholic and Protestant, condemned artificial contraception until the Anglican Episcopalian Lambeth conference in London in 1930. At this conference, the Anglican bishops studied the issue of contraception and decided that it was morally acceptable "under special circumstances." Recognizing the danger from the Lambeth decision and other cultural forces pressuring Catholics to accept contraception, Pope Pius XI issued his encyclical "Casti Connubii" (Christian Marriage) on December 31, 1930, the very same year of the Lambeth conference. The encyclical Casti Connubii maintained the teaching that artificial contraception was "**shameful and intrinsically viscous**". It further states that "**There is no possible circumstance in which husband and wife cannot, strengthened by the Grace of God, fulfill faithfully their duties and preserve in wedlock their chastity unspotted.**" P. 31 Note that the Pope is stating that contraception is a violation of chastity, one of the central elements of God's plan for life.

The Scriptures reveal that when God designed a plan for life, he used careful and loving advanced planning. This planning may be gleaned from one of the prophetic utterances of the Prophet Jeremiah:

[The word of the LORD came to me thus: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.] Jer 1:4-5

This is rather surprising. God knew Jeremiah before he was born. It follows that God knows all of us before we are born. God's advanced loving and careful plan is confirmed by the Apostle Paul who wrote:

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[For those *he foreknew* he also pre-destined to be conformed to the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.] Rom 8:29-30

The same notion of foreknowledge is revealed in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

[Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as *he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world*, to be holy and without blemish before him.] Eph 1:3-4

Love requires advanced planning. God's plan for life began before the world was made.

God essentially says "The plan for life and creation is my plan." Indeed, it is a marvelous plan. We have the power to procreate live little human beings. Children are a blessing; they are innocent and joyful. Children enrich the parents, making them less selfish. Every parent discovers this in one way or another. Children become adults who, through hard work and creativity, provide a vast array of goods and services. Children become inventors that make the production of goods and services even more prolific and more efficient. Children become adult apostles to proclaim the Word of God. Large populations raise the standard of living by providing a wide variety of goods and services to large markets with great economies of scale. God's plan for life leads to prosperity, not poverty.

God's plan for human life is centered around marriage. Pope Paul VI stated it well in his encyclical on human life called "Humanae Vitae" which was issued in July, 1967.

"Marriage is not then the effect of chance or the product of evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind his design of love." Section 2.8.

In the 1960s, there was a lot of cultural chatter about "responsible parenthood." The world taught that responsible parenthood meant having only a few children so that resources would not be spread too thin and the parents could afford to send the children to college. Pope Paul VI gave us a more profound and more complete definition of responsible parenthood:

"In relation to physical, economic psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised, either by the deliberate and generous decision to raise a numerous family, or by the decision, made for grave motives and with due respect for the moral law, to avoid for the time being, or even for an indeterminate period, a new birth." Humane Vitae, Section 2.10.

Notice that responsible parenthood is first of all a call to generosity in procreation! However, it is not the procreation of as many children as possible. Nor is it procreation without sensible accounting for available resources. Human beings, made in the image of God, and empowered with the Holy Spirit have dominion over their passions. They are called to procreate with faith in a loving Father who provides for their needs. Or, they are called to not procreate when circumstances clearly indicate that it is not the right time. For example, if one's house is blown away by a hurricane, it is probably not the time to procreate. The main principle is that the fullness of human dignity, the mind, the spirit, the

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passions and the moral law, all play a balanced role in making procreative decisions. The final decision is up to the married couple themselves.

Chapter 12
The Price of Silence

The Church is in a state of crisis because it is losing the battle for life. It is losing the battle for life because many of its members do not understand the full scope of the evil they are fighting. The Church does not have unity around a strategy. The battle does not have the full support of its members and its leadership. The pro-life movement within the Church has a tendency to think that it is a battle to save babies. In reality, it is a battle to restore God's plan for life. It is a battle that must involve every Christian sole on the planet. It is a battle that starts within the soul. It ends with every single decision to accept or reject God's Plan for life.

The Christian mission is to proclaim God's plan for life. One of the goals in our ministry, which is also called God's Plan For Life, is to convince all Catholic bishops, priests, religious educators, catechists and all of the Christian faithful that they are morally compelled to do the following:

- To restore and rejuvenate the teachings of God's plan for life to the pulpit, to the classroom and to the family dinner table.
- To proclaim God's plan for life AND to call their flocks, family members and friends who have departed from that plan to REPENT!
- To be more courageous in re-building a culture of life.

In this chapter, we are going to be talking a lot about preaching and teaching a Gospel message. It is very simple to see why this is a Gospel message. Jesus Christ is the author of life. Jesus Christ is the redeemer of life. Jesus Christ is the healer of life. Jesus Christ is the provider of more abundant life. Therefore, if you reject life – you reject Jesus Christ. (This idea could be the basis of a homily, catechetical lesson or family dinner table discussion!)

Now, we just used the rather powerful word “repent.” Repent from what? I believe that the Holy Spirit has a very important message for the Church. I believe that the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church that God's loving procreative plan has been replaced with our own selfish contraceptive plan.

When the great encyclical on human life (*Humanae Vitae*) was issued by Pope Paul VI in 1968, the majority of the laity did not accept it. The encyclical taught God's plan for life and addressed modern issues on the subject. The encyclical maintained the central tenet of God's plan for life – human chastity – and denounced abortion, sterilization and contraception of any kind as moral evils. Because of the growing acceptance of contraception, there was a massive rebellion throughout the world against the encyclical, particularly in Europe and North America. Whether or not the clergy accepted the encyclical, the vast majority of the clergy went silent on the subject. Bishops, priests, teachers and religious educators of all kinds went silent. What is the price of that silence?

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The price of silence is that currently 70% of our Catholic congregations are practicing some form of artificial contraception. This figure is from a report by The National Center For health Statistics (NCHS) which did two studies in the 1990's. The first found no difference in the use of contraception between Catholics, Jews, Protestants and the general population. The second study did not bother to try to look for a difference. The easiest way to prevent scientific bias was to study all women, single or married, in their reproductive years of 18 to 45. The 70% represented the number actually using contraception at the time of the interview. The remaining 30 percent who were not contracepting included singles who are not sexually active, married women who were pregnant or who wanted to get pregnant and women who had hysterectomies for medical reasons. It is reasonable to conclude that if one expands the time window in which interviews are conducted, the number would grow from 70% to a much higher number. Some studies have found figures as high as 90 percent when the question is posed more generally in terms like "have you ever used contraception."

The price of silence is that sterilizations involving tubal ligations, hysterectomies for non-medical reasons and vasectomies have become the preferred method of birth control. The contraceptive pill and barrier methods are in widespread use, recommended by educators, family doctors, gynecologists and the major professional medical associations.

The price of silence is that small families abound, large families are scarce, even in the most enthusiastic Christian congregations.

The price of silence is that the fertility rate in over 60 countries in the world has dropped below the replacement rate. The replacement rate is an easy concept to understand. It takes on average 2.1 children per woman to maintain a population at a constant level over a long time period. One child is needed to replace the mother when she dies. One child is required to replace the father and "0.1" is required to make up for infant mortality and women who do not get married.

Below is a list of fertility rates published by the United Nations. The list includes only countries with less than a rate of 2.1. One might be inclined to think that this would only be a handful of countries. On the contrary, the list is substantial!

According to the *1998 Revision* of the official United Nations population estimates and projection, the total fertility rate (TFR) is estimated to be, in 1995-2000, at or below the level of 2.1 children per woman in 61 countries or areas of the world (Table 1) – that is in 10 more than in 1990-1995. The combined population of those 61 countries (2.6 billion in 1998) amounts to 44 per cent of the global population.

Table 1. Total fertility rates in countries with below-replacement fertility

Range of total fertility rate in 1995-2000	
2.10 – 1.80	
Reunion	2.10
Sri Lanka	2.10
Iceland	2.10
TFYR Macedonia	2.06

Dem. People's Rep. Of Korea	2.05
Cyprus	2.03
New Zealand	2.01
Azerbaijan	1.99
United States of America	1.99
Georgia	1.92
Mauritius	1.91
Ireland	1.90
Guadeloupe	1.90
Malta	1.89
Norway	1.85
Yugoslavia	1.84
China	1.80
Range of total fertility rate in 1995-2000 1.79 - 1.50	
Australia	1.79
Republic of Moldova	1.76
Martinique	1.75
Thailand	1.74
Finland	1.73
Denmark	1.72
United Kingdom	1.72
France	1.71
Armenia	1.70
Singapore	1.68
Luxembourg	1.67
Republic of Korea	1.65
Trinidad and Tobago	1.65
Sweden	1.57
Croatia	1.56
Belgium	1.55
Cuba	1.55
Canada	1.55
Poland	1.53
Netherlands	1.50
Barbados	1.50
Range of total fertility rate in 1995-2000 Less than 1.50	
Switzerland	1.47
Japan	1.43
Lithuania	1.42
Austria	1.41
Macau	1.40
Slovakia	1.39
Ukraine	1.38
Hungary	1.37
Portugal	1.37

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Belarus	1.36
Bosnia and herzegovina	1.35
Russian Federation	1.34
China, Hong Kong SAR	1.32
Germany	1.30
Estonia	1.28
Greece	1.28
Slovenia	1.26
Latvia	1.25
Bulgaria	1.23
Italy	1.20
Czech Republic	1.19
Romania	1.17
Spain	1.15

In practically all countries of the more developed regions fertility is significantly below the level necessary for the replacement of generations (TFR of approximately 2.1). In 20 of the more developed countries the TFR has stayed at below-replacement level for at least two decades. In the 1980s-1990s fertility has decreased to levels below replacement in several countries from the less developed regions, including all countries in the populous region of Eastern Asia (except Mongolia). Rapid fertility transition in South-eastern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean brings an increasing number of developing countries close to that threshold: currently the TFR is below 3 (but higher than 2.1) and decreasing in 34 countries with a combined population of 930 million people.

Notice that some "Catholic countries" have the lowest rates! Spain: 1.15; Italy: 1.2; Portugal 1.37; Ireland 1.90

The price of silence is that the contraceptive mentality has infected the Church. The result is:

- Separation from God and a fall from grace
- Loss of awe and respect for God's loving procreative plan
- Fear by would-be parents of the economic and emotional impact of children
- Loss of living faith in God as provider
- Distorted conjugal relationships
- Escalating divorce rates
- 60% of those in poverty are single mothers with children.
- Irresponsible parenthood
- Demographically self destructive fertility rates
- Loss of respect for Church moral teaching authority
- Loss of respect for life
- Disinterest in pro-life causes and voting priorities
- Excessive tolerance of the anti-life agenda
- Unceasing abortion

Fifty percent of abortions are due to contraceptive "failures" yet 80% of aborting mothers know how to use contraceptives but forgot or didn't bother. Therefore, contraception is not

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preventing abortion; nor is it likely to ever succeed in this regard, despite its numerous proponents.

On the contrary, contraception is the root cause of abortion. Why is it the root cause? Consider this: The moment that one says "no" to God's plan for life and uses a technological means to prevent conception, there is a fall from grace. A spiritual blindness engulfs the person. Now it is much easier to take the next step and use a technological means to end the results of conception – namely abortion.

Abortion clinics pass out contraceptives for free. They know that it is good for business. They know that there will be contraceptive failures and the woman will be back for an abortion. Consider that the "contraceptive" pill actually acts as an abortifacient in many cases. That is because it does not always suppress ovulation. Often, there is breakthrough ovulation. The ovum that breaks through can be fertilized to become a human being. However, the hormones in the pill render the uterine wall unsuitable for implantation of the fertilized egg, so the baby dies. This is the moral and physical equivalent of chemical abortion. Because of the large number of women on the pill, some estimate that the number of abortions occurring in this manner exceeds 1.6 million annually, which is even more than the number of surgical abortions.

The price of silence is rampaging surgical abortion. There are 4000 daily in the United States. Over 43 million babies have died in the abortion holocaust in the U.S. alone since 1973. There would be no social security funding crisis if these babies had become working citizens.

About 22% (60 million) of the nation is Catholic. Yet, exit polls at abortion mills indicate that Catholic women are as likely as women in the general population to have an abortion. Being Catholic does not seem to make a difference!

The price of silence is an increase in the loss of respect for human life and an increasing public acceptance of euthanasia. Euthanasia eventually leads to doing away with bothersome sick people, whether they want to die or not.

The price of silence is immoral voting. In 1992, about 44% of the country voted for Bill Clinton, despite his well known strong pro-abortion position. About 44% of Catholics who voted, voted for Bill Clinton. Being Catholic did not seem to make a difference. Bill Clinton twice vetoed the partial birth abortion act. Furthermore, 66% of Catholics said that President Clinton's April 1996 veto of the bill to ban partial birth abortions would either made no difference in their choice between Clinton and Bob Dole in the presidential election - or that it would make them more likely to vote for Clinton. Just after Clinton vetoed the partial birth abortion bill, Catholics preferred Clinton over Dole by 58% to 33%, despite Dole's well-known pro-life position. After the 1996 election, exit polls showed that 53% of Catholics who voted, voted for Clinton.

In summary, the price of silence is that Satan's lies have captivated Catholics as well as Christians of all denominations. As we outlined in Part One, Satan wants to destroy the human race. He now has tools that far exceed the power of the plague and the sword. Contraception has already reduced the human race more than wars ever have or more than AIDs ever will.

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The problems described above have not gone un-noticed by the Magisterium of the Church. Pope John Paul II in his marvelous encyclical "Evangelium Vitae" sums it all up very precisely:

[In fact, while the climate of widespread moral uncertainty can in some way be explained by the multiplicity and gravity of today's social problems, and these can sometimes mitigate the subjective responsibility of individuals, it is no less true that we are confronted by an even larger reality, which can be described as a veritable structure of sin. This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable "culture of death." This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. Looking at the situation from this point of view, it is possible to speak in a certain sense of a war of the powerful against the weak: a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected in one way or another. A person who, because of illness, handicap or, more simply, just by existing, compromises the well-being or life-style of those who are more favored tends to be looked upon as an enemy to be resisted or eliminated. In this way a kind of "conspiracy against life" is unleashed. This conspiracy involves not only individuals in their personal, family or group relationships, but goes far beyond, to the point of damaging and distorting, at the international level, relations between peoples and States.] Evangelium Vitae, paragraph 12.

Pope John Paul II coined the term "culture of death," a rather scathing description of the culture that we live in. He also noted in the same encyclical that the moral decline seems greatest where the teaching of Humanae Vitae was never accepted.

It should be quite apparent by now that politics will not be successful by itself in restoring a culture of life. Christians cannot win the battle for life with one foot stuck in Satan's camp of contraception. The numerous political battles over abortion for the past 35 years have made some important gains, but for every victory, one could name a crushing defeat. Abortion is still the law of the land and the holocaust continues daily. The situation is worse than a stalemate.

In the midst of a "culture of death" as the Pope puts it, God continues to pour out his loving Holy Spirit. He loves us and wants to save us through his Son Jesus Christ. However, the door to receiving the Holy Spirit will never change – it is the door of repentance. To restore God's plan for life, the laity must repent of artificial contraception. Pastors must courageously invite them to do so. The clergy, religious educators and the laity must repent of teaching or advising others to contracept. All must repent of silence.

I would like to share with you a prophecy that I believe that I received through the Holy Spirit. I submit it to the discernment of the Church. Please take a few moments to reflect on it.

The culture of death will not be defeated until there is repentance from contraception.

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With God's infinite mercy, we can save ourselves if we turn back. There is no blame game to play here because everyone is to blame. Every one of us has contributed to the culture of death by some form of action or inaction. What we need to do is to help each other and society crawl out of the abyss.

Many Catholics would love to see our bishops and clergy proclaim the truth fearlessly. During Humanae Vitae conference tours around the U.S., and Mexico, I speak to clergy and suggest a Proposal for Restitution: I suggest that in each parish, a minimum of four homilies be given per year that are fully dedicated to the subject of God's plan for life and the teachings of Humanae Vitae. Many priests have accepted this challenge.

In the midst of arduous difficulties, numerous bishops and others in the clergy are concerned about the shortage of priests and ask us to pray for more vocations. I have reflected on this request in prayer and the spirit within me suggested that I provide this response to the bishops, which I sent in a general letter to many of our beloved shepherds:

Why do you ask me to be more generous with vocations when you yourselves refuse to ask your people to be more generous with offspring?

Again, I believe that the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us what lies at the root of many of our problems in the Church. We desperately need to hear and be taught the call to generosity in procreation. We need to hear it more frequently and more courageously from all those charged with the responsibility to proclaim it.

Ultimately, for God's plan for life to be restored, it is the laity that must repent of their rebellion against God and against the true teaching of the Church. When the laity repent and accept God's plan for life, love, marriage and family, parishes will blossom. Glory will be restored to the Church.

"Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him." Eph 1:3-4

Amen

Chapter 13
The Role of Conscience

When I give conferences to both clergy and laity around the country, I frequently pose this question: "Who establishes the moral law?" In other words, who decides what is right and what is wrong? Then, I give three answers, while reassuring everyone listening that this is not a trick question. The three possible answers are:

1. God establishes the moral law.
2. The Church establishes the moral law.
3. The individual establishes the moral law in his life with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Then, I ask for a show of hands for how many people think that the correct answer is number 1 (God decides). Usually, about one third put up their hand. Then, I ask how many think that the correct answer is number 2 (the Church decides) and again, about one third put up their hand. Finally, I ask how many think that the correct answer is number 3 (the individual decides) and about one third put up their hand. I quickly inform them that the correct answer is number 1 – God decides and I offer the following proof: When Moses went up onto the mountain where he received the Ten Commandments, did he fall into deep prayer and receive the Commandments by inspiration, memorize them and later write them down? No, God wrote them in stone. In fact, the first set of tablets became broken, so God wrote them in stone a second time. Deut 10:4

Sometimes I am inclined to remark that it is no wonder we have moral chaos in our time. Even among God's people, let alone the outside world, we have not come to agreement on who establishes the moral law!

God's plan is no different in the New Testament, even with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus commissioned his disciples with these words:

[Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.] Matt 28:19

Note that he says "...teaching them to observe all that I (*God*) have commanded you." God gives the commandments, both the old law and the new law of love and the Spirit. There is a very good reason for this. God loves us. He does not want us to become deceived. He wants to give us free will but he wants us to have a clear understanding of our choices. He does not want any third party, human or satanic, to distort the moral law. He gives the moral law to the Church with authority to teach it. He gives us the Holy Spirit not to decide the law but to fulfill it, in spirit and truth.

Whenever man tries to decide the moral law and establish it in society, he gets it all messed up. History is full of numerous examples. When the Bolsheviks tried to establish a new moral law of communism in Russia in 1917, millions of people died until finally, after a bitter and contentious "cold war", it was scrapped 70 years later. When Mao Tse Tung tried to establish a new moral law with the Cultural Revolution in China in the 1960s and 70s, millions of innocent people were made to suffer and die. When the Supreme Court of the United States decided in 1973 in the infamous Roe vs Wade decision that abortion was

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acceptable and a woman had a right to receive one, they unleashed a holocaust of previously unimaginable proportions that continues unabated and beyond the grasp of anyone to stop it. Man's efforts to decide the moral law lead to moral disaster.

God's plan for moral decision making began a long time ago with Adam and Eve, our forefathers. Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, an allegorical expression to convey the fact that they were not prone to sickness and death and could enjoy eating without a lot of hard work.

[The LORD God gave man this order: "You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and bad. From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die."] Gen 2:16-17

God's plan was for man to have great freedom. Indeed we see that man has freedom to roam the entire earth, bulldoze mountains, and build tunnels, canals, seaways, harbors, railroads, freeways and rockets to the moon. However, his freedom has limits. He was forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Pope John Paul II explains this allegory in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (The Splendor of Truth). When you eat something, you take it upon yourself. You consume it. Adam was ordered not to take upon himself the power to decide what is good and what is bad. That job was to be left to God alone. Not only that, if he disobeyed, there would be catastrophic consequences. He would lose eternal life and die.

Adam and Eve lived in an elevated state of purity, expressed as follows:

[The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.] Gen 2:25

They were free from lust and all of the problems of mis-use of the body that go with it.

[Now the serpent (*the Devil*) was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?"] Gen 3:1

This is a classical tactic of the Devil used over and over throughout history to cause man to doubt or forget what God said.

[The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad."]

They ate the fruit. They took it upon themselves to decide what is good and what is evil. They fell from that elevated state of body and spirit and eventually died. We inherit the same state of disorder ("original sin") until it is removed by Baptism wherein we can begin the restoration process back to the ideal state.

So when people today try to decide what is good and what is evil, they repeat the error of Adam and Eve. They overstep God's boundary and try to become gods. Instead of being

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restored to the fullness of grace that is our destiny, they are deceived and fall deeper into disorder and sin.

Conscience

So what is our conscience?

“Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment” Catechism of the Catholic Church 1776

“Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act... In all that he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right.” Catechism of the Catholic Church 1778

“The dignity of the human person implies and requires *uprightness of moral conscience*. Conscience includes 1) the perception of the principles of morality; 2) their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods; and 3) finally judgment about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed...” Catechism of the Catholic Church 1780

“Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. ‘He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.’” Catechism of the Catholic Church 1782

Please understand clearly that making moral decisions is different than deciding or establishing the moral law. We must make moral decisions. We must judge actions, but not souls. However, in order for us to make good moral decisions, we must be willing to be taught the moral law by those people who are charged by God to teach it – the bishops and the clergy of the Church (The Magisterium). We must have our consciences formed.

Formation of Conscience

Forming our conscience is a continuous conversion to what is true and to what is good (Veritatis Splendor 63b). Recall the three components of conscience. **First**, we must learn the basic moral principles as known through the natural moral law, through Divine Revelation and by the teachings of the Magisterium. **Second**, we must learn how to do moral reasoning - how the moral principles apply to various situations in life. We must understand why a good moral principle is objective, consistent, with universal application. We see how they apply even to “hard cases.” **Third**, when making moral judgments about a particular human act, we are to use good reasoning in conformity with the truth and in pursuit of the good. All three components of the conscience require education, training, practice, and experience.

Very often we do not know what is good for us. Sinful surroundings and our own fallen nature, more prone to sin than to virtue, encourage us to dismiss teaching authority and prefer our own judgment. Formation of conscience helps us see the contrast between our culture and our faith. The faith is to shape the culture, not vice versa.

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Education of the conscience is a lifelong task. It does not stop after Confirmation, or even after graduation from a Catholic college. Life takes us through different stages, all of which are more complex and rich in the mystery of life. New problems arise which require deeper and better applications of the basic moral principles. Papal encyclical and apostolic exhortations are often addressed to the morality of new problems, e.g. *Humanae Vitae*, *Familiaris Consortio*, *Evangelium Vitae*, *Veritatis Splendor*. These were written for everyone, not just clerics.

In the Vatican document on Religious Liberty the Church teaches: "In forming their consciences the faithful must pay careful attention to the **sacred and certain teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church is by the will of Christ the teacher of truth.** It is her duty to proclaim and teach with authority the truth which is Christ and, at the same time, to declare and confirm by her authority the principles of the moral order which spring from human nature itself." (Dignitatis Humanae 14) (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1785)

Christian Marriage

God has a plan for marriage. It is a very good plan.

"The intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state has been established by the creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws; it is rooted in the contract of its partners that is, in their irrevocable personal consent.... This sacred bond no longer depends on human decision alone." (Gaudium et Spes 48).

"But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment." (Gaudium et Spes 50).

"Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation; rather, its very nature as an unbreakable compact between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner and that it grow and ripen." (Gaudium et Spes 50).

"To these problems there are those who presume to offer dishonorable solutions indeed; they do not recoil even from the taking of life. But the Church issues the reminder that a true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to authentic conjugal love." (Gaudium et Spes 51).

"hence when there is question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspects of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives, but must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love. Such a goal cannot be achieved unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practiced. Relying on these

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principles, sons of the Church may not undertake methods of birth control which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law." (Gaudium et Spes 51).

Humanae Vitae

The encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, presents us with God's plan for love, life, marriage and family. It is based on the principle of marital chastity of the spouses who are restored to a life of grace through Baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit. The encyclical cannot be understood by the unchaste whose eyes and hearts will be blinded to its wisdom. The teaching calls us to generosity in procreation and sensible responsibility within the bounds of the moral law.

"Especially to be rejected is direct abortion – even if done for reasons of health."

"Furthermore, as the Magisterium of the Church has taught repeatedly, direct sterilization of the male or female, whether permanent or temporary, is equally to be condemned.

"Similarly there must be a rejection of all acts that attempt to impede procreation, both those chosen as means to an end and those chosen as ends. This includes acts that precede intercourse, acts that accompany intercourse, and acts that are directed to the natural consequences of intercourse" (*Humanae Vitae* 14).

The Winnipeg Statement

The Winnipeg Statement is a classical example of what can go wrong when a church group, in this case, a group of bishops (Canadian), tries to experiment with a new teaching without the solidarity of the Magisterium of the Church. The Canadian bishops stated in their Winnipeg statement of 27 September 1968:

"#26 Counselors may meet others who, accepting the teaching of the Holy Father, find that because of particular circumstances they are involved in what seems to them a clear conflict of duties, e.g., the reconciling of conjugal love and responsible parenthood with the education of children already born or with the health of the mother. In accord with the accepted principle of moral theology, **if these persons have tried sincerely but without success to pursue a line of conduct in keeping with the given directives, they may be safely assured that, whoever honestly chooses that course which seems right to him does so in good conscience.**"

First, the "accepted principle of moral theology" being referred to is not clear; there is no accepted principle of moral theology that allows contraception. Secondly, the Church teaches that the prohibition against artificial contraception is a moral absolute. The Canadian bishops, on the other hand, say that there are circumstances in which the parties may use contraceptives. It is precisely as though they had said, "Canadian Catholics may in some circumstances commit fornication or adultery or sodomy." In effect, Canadian Catholics were told to return to the sin of Adam and Eve – decide for yourself.

"Seems right to him..." We must seek the truth. We do not determine the rightness or wrongness of contraception, sterilization, homosexual acts, fornication or adultery. Only

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God determines moral principles. Where there is clear teaching by the Church, we must accept that teaching and inform our conscience with that teaching. It is only in gray areas, where there is no clear position taken by the Church, that we must honestly choose the course which seems right, as best we can determine the right.

The way #26 reads, anyone can decide for himself the morality of an act, and then do the act in good conscience. This is not following a well-informed conscience. This is making up my own mind and telling the conscience to accept my decision and come along. This is what Adam and Eve did.

Unfortunately, the ideas contained in the Winnipeg Statement were heard by millions of ears eager to embrace them, in Canada, the U.S. and around the world. The damage done was enormous.

The essence of Conscience

“Conscience is never a teacher; it is always a pupil.” - Cardinal Newman. This short sweet sentence says it all!

An erroneous conscience is an erroneous conscience. It is not a correct conscience. There is no moral equivalence between the two. There is no moral equivalence between truth and error, good and evil. A willfully erroneous conscience, where ignorance is not invincible, is objectively wrong and culpable.

If a person tries to keep a moral principle, or moral norm, but fails because of human weakness, we can praise his efforts to keep the moral principle. But we cannot praise his failing, or his offending against the moral principle. Murder is always wrong. Fornication is always wrong. Homosexual acts are always wrong. Contraception is also always wrong. We do not help a person by attempting to change the moral principles. Rather than lowering the bar of moral standards, we are to encourage others, and ourselves, to measure up to the standard. Moral standards are good for us, not harmful. Physical exercise may be painful and vexing; but it is objectively good for us. Similarly, all moral standards are good for us; troublesome, yes; sometimes difficult, but always good for us.

Follow-up Statement on Conscience by Canadian Bishops

On 12 December 1973 the Canadian Catholic Conference issued their “Statement on the Formation of Conscience,” a good document. They gave clarifications and, in effect, moved away from the Winnipeg Statement. However, they have not formally rejected the Winnipeg Statement. A few excerpts of the 1973 document will illustrate their distancing themselves from their 1968 document.

In section #8 there is a recognition of God as a law-giver: “For anyone to accept the idea of conscience, as we here present it, he must begin by agreeing that man is not lord of the universe and that man is subject to a law-giver who is greater than he is. In a word, we must begin with that very first basis of any moral life ... the acceptance of God.”

The document is helpful by listing three types of conscience: 1) complacent, or lazy in seeking the reasons behind moral norms; 2) excessively dynamic and revolutionary and 3)

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the Christian conscience. The excessively dynamic conscience is described as “the person who has totally misread the idea that everyone must ultimately be the judge, before God, of his actions and that in the ultimate decision he must make up his own mind. The persons in this category have distorted an appeal to intelligent decision into a destruction of law, objective structures, and have arrived at the conclusion that no one can tell them what to do, including the Church. It is seldom stated this way but it is where this type of exaggerated subjectivism necessarily leads” (# 21).

The ideal Christian conscience “leads us to have a responsible attitude to someone, to Jesus, to the community, to the Church, etc. Every person who fits into this category feels a responsibility for a progressive search and striving to live out a life ideal according to the mind of Christ” (#22).

With regard to the Magisterium, “to ‘follow one’s conscience’ and to remain a Catholic, one must take into account first and foremost the teaching of the Magisterium. When doubt arises due to a conflict of ‘my’ views and those of the Magisterium, the presumption of truth lies on the part of the Magisterium. ‘In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul. This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*’ (Lumen Gentium 25). And this must be carefully distinguished from the teaching of individual theologians or individual priests, however intelligent or persuasive” (# 41).

Source: *Statement on the FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE*, issued by the Canadian Bishops (Daughters of St. Paul: 1974).

God Decides What Is Right and Wrong (*Veritatis Splendor*)

We began this chapter with an explanation of what Adam and Eve did when they ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Here we return to the same subject in a little more detail. Human freedom is recognized as vitally important for human dignity and human acts. But there are limits to freedom, and these limits are set by the truth. *Veritatis splendor* explains certain novel interpretations of the relationship of freedom to the moral law, to human nature and to conscience. In the section “Freedom and Law” we find the teaching that only God determines what is right and wrong.

“In the Book of Genesis we read: ‘The Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may eat freely of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die ‘ (Gen 2:16-17).

“With this imagery, Revelation teaches that the *power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man, but to God alone*. The man is certainly free, inasmuch as he can understand and accept God’s commands. And he possesses an extremely far-reaching freedom, since he can eat ‘of every tree of the garden.’ But his freedom is not unlimited: it must halt before the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil,’ for it is called to accept the moral law given by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance of that law. God, who alone is good,

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knows perfectly what is good for man, and by virtue of his very love proposes this good to man in the commandments" (Veritatis Splendor 35).

"In fact, genuine understanding and compassion must mean love for the person, for his true good, for his authentic freedom. And this does not result, certainly, from concealing or weakening moral truth, but rather from proposing it in its most profound meaning as an outpouring of God's eternal Wisdom, which we have received in Christ, and as a service to man, to the growth of his freedom and to the attainment of his happiness (cf. Familiaris Consortio 33-4)" (Veritatis Splendor 95b).

God Gives Moral Law to the Church

Christ established the Church to continue his work. The Church is a "sacrament (sign and instrument) of intimate communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race" (Lumen Gentium 1). The Church is both a mother and a teacher.

"As Teacher, she never tires of proclaiming the moral norm that must guide the responsible transmission of life. The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection" (Familiaris Consortio 33a).

"As Mother, the Church is close to the many married couples who find themselves in difficulty over this important point of the moral life: she knows well their situation, which is often very arduous and at times truly tormented by difficulties of every kind, not only individual difficulties but social ones as well. She knows that many couples encounter difficulties not only in the concrete fulfillment of the moral norm but even in understanding its inherent values" (Familiaris Consortio 33b).

"But it is one and the same Church that is both Teacher and Mother. And so the Church never ceases to exhort and encourage all to resolve whatever conjugal difficulties may arise without ever falsifying or compromising the truth. She is convinced that there can be no true contradiction between the divine law on transmitting life and that on fostering authentic married love (Gaudium et Spes 51). Accordingly, the concrete pedagogy of the Church must always remain linked with her doctrine and never be separated from it. With the same conviction as my predecessor, I therefore repeat: 'To diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls' (Humanae Vitae 29)" (Familiaris Consortio 33c).

Pastoral Obligation to Preach the Truth

"It is your great and manifest mission, and we address especially those of you who are moral theologians – to promote completely and clearly the teachings of the Church concerning marriage. ... It is of the utmost importance for safeguarding the peace of souls and the unity of the Christian people, that in moral as in dogmatic matters, all should obey the Magisterium of the Church and should speak with one voice. ... We call upon you again with whole heart: 'I beg you brothers through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: that you

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might all speak as one and that there might be no division among you: that you may be united in the same mind and the same judgment' (1 Cor 1:10)" (*Humanae Vitae* 28a).

"Refusal to compromise anything concerning the saving doctrine of Christ is an outstanding act of charity to souls; yet at the same time it is necessary always to combine this with tolerance and charity. ... Therefore, let spouses in their times of trouble find in the speech and hearts of their priests the image of the voice and love of our Redeemer" (*Humanae Vitae* 29a).

"So, beloved Sons, preach with full confidence and be certain that the Holy Spirit of God, who guides the Magisterium in its teaching, will illuminate the hearts of the faithful and invite them to give their assent. Teach spouses the indispensability of prayer; instruct them properly so that they may come regularly and with great faith to the sacraments of the Eucharist and of penance and that they may never become discouraged because of their weakness" (*Humanae Vitae* 29c).

Papal Directives to Do More

On 2 October 1999 Pope John Paul II addressed U.S. Bishops from California, Nevada and Hawaii who were making their visit to Rome which they do every five years. He encouraged them in these words: **"As bishops, together with your priests, deacons, seminarians and other pastoral personnel, you must find the right language and imagery to present the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* in a comprehensive and compelling way."**

The context of this statement is the following: "Give couples the Church's full teaching on procreation."

Vatican Newspaper Editorial

"We are coming to the end of a century which began with confidence in humanity's prospects of almost unlimited progress, but which is now ending in widespread fear and moral confusion. If we want a springtime of the human spirit, we must rediscover the foundations of hope. Above all, society must learn to embrace once more the great gift of life, to cherish it, to protect it and to defend it against the culture of death, itself an expression of the great fear that stalks our times. One of your most noble tasks as Bishops is *to stand firmly on the side of life, encouraging those who defend it and building with them a genuine culture of life.*"

"The Second Vatican Council was quite aware of the forces shaping contemporary society when it spoke out clearly in defense of human life against the many threats facing it (cf. GS 27). The Council also made a priceless contribution to the culture of life by its eloquent presentation of the full meaning of married love (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 48-51). Following the lead of the Council and expounding its teaching, Pope Paul VI wrote the prophetic encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, in which he addressed the moral implications of the *power to co-operate with the Creator in bringing new life into the world*. The Creator has made man and woman to complement one another in love, and their union is no less a sharing in the creative power of God himself. Conjugal love serves life not only insofar as it generates new life but also because, rightly understood as *the total gift of spouses to one another*, it

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shapes the loving and caring context in which new life is wholeheartedly welcomed as a gift of incomparable value.”

“Thirty six years after *Humanae Vitae*, we see that mistaken ideas about the individual's moral autonomy continue to inflict wounds on the consciences of many people and on the life of society. Paul VI pointed out some of the consequences of separating the unitive aspect of conjugal love from its procreative dimension: a gradual weakening of moral discipline; a trivialization of human sexuality; the demeaning of women; marital infidelity, often leading to broken families; State sponsored programs of population control based on imposed contraception and sterilization (*Humanae Vitae* 17); the introduction of legalized abortion and euthanasia, ever increasing recourse to *in vitro* fertilization, and certain forms of genetic manipulation and embryo experimentation are also closely related in law and public policy, as well as in contemporary culture, to the idea of unlimited dominion over one's body and life.”

“The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* honors married love, promotes the dignity of women and helps couples grow in understanding the truth of their particular path to holiness. It is also a response to contemporary society's temptation to reduce life to a commodity. As bishops, together with your priests, deacons, seminarians and other pastoral personnel, you must find the right language and imagery to present the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* in a comprehensive and compelling way. Marriage preparation programs should include an honest and complete presentation of the Church's teaching on responsible procreation, and should explain the natural methods of regulating fertility, the legitimacy of which is based on respect for the human meaning of sexual intimacy. Couples who have embraced the teaching of Pope Paul VI have discovered that it is truly a source of profound unity and joy, nourished by their increased mutual understanding and respect; they should be invited to share their experience with engaged couples taking part in marriage preparation programs.”

L'Osservatore Romano, English Edition, 7 October 1998, p.5

Of all the arguments that people offer to contradict God's plan for life and the Church's moral teaching about marriage and procreation, I believe that the most common one is economic. Everyone in this world suffers economic stress of one form or another. So the arguments commonly heard are:

- "We cannot afford to have more children."
- "College education is extremely expensive."
- "Housing is extremely expensive and houses do not have many bedrooms."
- "It takes two people's incomes to make it through."
- "My husband already has two jobs. We simply cannot accept any more burdens."
- "My husband and I are still going to college."
- "God will understand the special economic hardships that we are experiencing."

The strange thing about all of these arguments is that they come from western society, supposedly the wealthiest and most prosperous in the world. They are rarely mentioned in the "poorer" countries of the Third World. That should immediately suggest that they come from a convulsion of values. Indeed, they come largely from a materialistic mindset that places more value on the comforts of life than life itself. We not only live in a culture of death. We live in a culture of economic complaints.

The most dangerous argument is the "God will understand..." True, God is infinitely merciful. Yet, it is a very risky proposition to presume his mercy. The devil tempts us to the sin of presumption in two ways. He does it either by suggesting that God's mercy will easily spare us from the punishment due to your sins, or by convincing us that we are strong enough to face any temptation. He is the father of lies and the arch-deceiver. God's mercy is infinite, but it does not destroy his justice.

[Great as his mercy is his punishment; he judges men, each according to his deeds.]
Sirach 16:12

In all of the chatter about economic hardships, I believe that there is a widespread lack of understanding of economics. What causes poverty? Before one can understand what causes poverty, one must understand what causes prosperity. The fundamental causes of poverty and prosperity are not taught in economic classes. Economic theory deals with laws of supply and demand but those laws are not the root cause of either prosperity or poverty. Economic laws regulate prosperity and poverty but are not the underlying cause. So to understand prosperity, one must go a little deeper. First, we have to define prosperity. The kind of prosperity that I am talking about is not extravagant wealth. Prosperity is the sufficiency of food, shelter and clothing for all the citizens of the community or nation. I propose that there are three basic ingredients that are required for prosperity. If I were to ask you to guess, you would probably have difficulty. You might say "natural resources." No. Japan and Hong Kong don't have any. You might say "a good education system with colleges and universities." No. Many older societies were largely illiterate – the Roman Empire, the Incas, the American Indian tribes. Many older communities provided food, shelter and clothing for all of its members without our modern

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education system. That is not to say that education is not important. I am simply saying that the requirements for prosperity can be reduced to more fundamental elements. I propose that there are three fundamental things that are needed for prosperity.

1. Prosperity requires a majority of people healed by the Spirit of God so that they stop stealing from one another and stop killing one another.
2. Prosperity requires free markets. People must be free to buy and sell. Prosperity requires markets that are not dominated and oppressed by the excessive rules of government, false religions or the bribery and corruption of gangsters.
3. Prosperity requires large populations. One person, living by himself in the wilderness, separated from any modern assistance, has a tough time surviving by himself, especially in winter. Even a tough American Indian would have a difficult time. A large tribe provided him with shelter, a variety of tools for hunting and different kinds of foods.

Tribal members support each other. As tribes grow into nations, interdependencies increase. In the modern world, think about how many people are required to produce a glass of purified drinking water from a tap. Think of the pumps, the copper wire for the motors, the mines for the copper, the pipes, the filtration plant, the electricity to power the plant and finally the glass factory. It takes at least 500,000 people and probably many more to produce a glass of purified drinking water. An isolated village in Africa, cut off from a nearby city, cannot do it. They must draw water from a well, if there is one.

Population growth brings new kinds of prosperity! Children do not cause poverty! Children become adults to produce more goods and services for others.

In those places of the world where there are large populations, you may find a lot of prosperity or you may find a substantial amount of poverty. North America has a large population and comparatively little poverty. If a country has a large population and a lot of poverty, the poverty is not because of the large population. It is because principle number 1 or 2 above has not been met. For example, India is often thought of as a country with a large population and a comparatively high level of poverty. Many friends of mine from India have told me that the economic system is infested with bribery and corruption. Bribery and corruption destroy free markets and cause businesses to collapse. In every country of the world, bribery and corruption takes its toll on the prosperity and well-being of the populace of that country, some countries more than others. The large populations of China and India and their growing reliance on free markets are gradually turning those countries into economic power houses. They have already eliminated widespread famine. Their future is steadily looking brighter.

Once one understands that co-operation and mutual respect between human beings made in the image of God leads to prosperity, one can find it easier to understand the root causes of poverty. The number one cause of poverty is war. That one is easy and does not require further explanation. The number two cause of poverty is lack of chastity, which leads to prostitution, AIDS, divorce, single mothers and destruction of the family unit. The family is the energy supply of every good economy. Sixty percent of the poor in the United States are single mothers, an important statistic that speaks volumes about the underlying cause of poverty. In Third World countries, single mothers are not just poor; they are destitute. Of course, the mother may not be at any fault for being single. Blame is not the

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issue here. The point is that destruction of the family unit causes poverty. The number one destroyer of the family unit is lack of chastity. The impact of lack of chastity is sorely underestimated by modern sociologists and economists who rarely mention the need for healed human beings. There are many other causes of poverty such as individual or corporate greed, the arms race and political domination. All of these divert resources towards waste, distort the market of useful goods and services and destroy man's basic freedom to buy and sell at a reasonable fair price. Free markets are a poor farmer's best friend. However, if he takes his crop of rice to the city to be sold and discovers that the prices are rigged by bribery and corruption, he will suffer accordingly. Free markets of course have to be refereed under a system of rules backed by law. Otherwise, they tend not to remain free.

Those who preach the Gospel are waging war on poverty. Preaching the Gospel and bringing souls to Christ leads to all three conditions required for prosperity to be met. When St. Patrick went to Ireland, his number one task was to preach the Gospel so that the tribes would stop killing each other. His success in this major accomplishment is what made him famous and Ireland prospered, at least until new wars came.

The three requirements for prosperity are part of God's plan for life. He wants healed human beings that don't kill, steal and violate chastity. He wants men to be free to buy and sell at a fair and reasonable price. He wants blossoming communities and wants us to fill the Earth and subdue it with large populations.

Now, let's take a look at the economic arguments used to justify small families that are usually rendered small by the immoral use of contraception.

- "We cannot afford to have more children." This is strange because children are quite cheap to feed and clothe, at least for the first 12 years. Usually by that time, the family, if it has stayed together, has made a substantial amount of economic progress. Admittedly, college is very expensive and quite daunting for a large family. However, the concern for college should not overshadow the joy of having children. Daunting as it is, God provides. In the United States there are innumerable stories of students from very poor families that have found a way to obtain a college education. Success in this area usually has a lot to do with the perseverance of the parents to stick together and to lead the family toward resourceful and productive activities. Very few families have the resources to send even one child to college at the time that the child is born. By God's generosity, those resources come later. So, if one only looks at one's present economic condition without any faith in a loving God to provide for the future when the future comes, one could easily rationalize not having any children. That would bring on a poverty of a different kind!
- "Housing is extremely expensive and houses do not have many bedrooms." Houses reflect market demand. Currently there is a great demand for houses with expensive amenities that are not really necessary – pools, spas, marble flooring, large crown molding etc and there are not many bedrooms because there are not many families that need them. The market would be quick to respond to the needs of large families for more bedrooms, but the culture has to change first toward larger families. Christians should be brave enough to lead the trend.

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- “It takes two people’s incomes to make it through.” Well, since the fall of Adam and Eve, both husband and wife have had to work under duress to provide for their families. There is nothing new here. In olden days, women spun, weaved and sewed and sold their wares on the market for a profit, while the husband worked in the fields. There were always two incomes. What is new is women working outside the home. This does present new difficulties and many stresses, but they are not insurmountable. If there were more large families, necessitating that more mothers stayed home, the market would adjust accordingly, perhaps by reducing the demand for expensive houses and cars, thereby bringing prices downward.
- “My husband already has two jobs. We simply cannot accept any more burdens.” Maybe if the husband cut back to one job, he would have time to look or train for a better job.
- “My husband and I are still going to college.” I can personally refute this one. My wife and I obtained a Masters degree and one Ph.D. each while having children at the same time. My wife turned in her Ph.D. thesis and delivered our third child a week later. It was not easy, but quite possible when you work together and cut out unnecessary time wasters. Alternatively, if the circumstances make it impossible to have children, one should probably not get married.

Our economic condition is directly linked with the market which is driven by the culture. A society’s cultural and moral values will have an enormous impact on the market. If the moral values are leading a nation toward physical and spiritual destruction, the downward spiral will continue until there is repentance or some calamity that wakes people up. Christians should recognize this and then show by example the willingness to make radical decisions in favor of obedience to the moral law. The market, in time will then follow. The market will not lead them by making it easy for them. When the complaint “we cannot afford to have children” comes from a citizen of a wealthy nation, it has a hollow ring.

Some people erroneously believe that there are exceptions to the Church's moral teaching, as exemplified in certain difficult circumstances or "hard cases." We will review the principles and examine some of the hard cases.

Contraception is a serious matter. The papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, Section 12 states: "There is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the conjugal act, and both are inherent in the conjugal act. This connection was established by God, and Man is not permitted to break it through his own volition."

Humanae Vitae, Section 14 states: "Thus, relying on these first principles of human and Christian doctrine concerning marriage, we must again insist that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun must be totally rejected as a legitimate means of regulating the number of children. Especially to be rejected is direct abortion -- even if done for reasons of health.

"Furthermore, as the Magisterium of the Church has taught repeatedly, direct sterilization of the male or female, whether permanent or temporary, is equally to be condemned."

"Similarly there must be a rejection of all acts that attempt to impede procreation, both those chosen as means to an end and those chosen as ends. This includes acts that precede intercourse, acts that accompany intercourse, and acts that are directed to the natural consequences of intercourse."

These moral principles invariably lead to some difficult struggles, which we will discuss as "hard cases."

1. One spouse pursues virtue while the other chooses the sin of contraception.

The spouse (husband or wife) who wishes to pursue virtue by following the teaching of the Church regarding the evil of contraception has an obligation to firmly, clearly and consistently communicate to their spouse that contraception is wrong. The moral principle is that one must not do evil to achieve good. The virtuous spouse must not accept the evil of contraception in order to achieve the survival of the marriage. If the sinful spouse persists in contraception, the virtuous spouse must remain engaged in the struggle, through prayer and concrete acts of objection, which may be vocal acts or acts of refusal to engage in conjugal relations. If the spouse desiring contraception insists on using it, the virtuous spouse should consider total abstinence from sexual relations to show unwillingness to condone or cooperate with evil and to clearly communicate objection.

If it becomes apparent that total abstinence may lead to serious consequences such as adultery or marital separation, the virtuous spouse may reluctantly tolerate sexual acts that involve contraception but must never come to accept contraception as a good. Sexual acts involving contraception imposed by one spouse on the other is sexual abuse. In tolerating such acts, the virtuous spouse has agreed to accept sexual abuse, for the sake of Christ

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who was abused. These abusive acts may be tolerated while the virtuous spouse works to prayerfully educate and convert the sinful spouse to accept the truth about God's plan for life, love marriage and family. The couple's conscience must not be numbed, callused, or deadened by repeated acts of contraception. The sinful spouse must change, not the virtuous one. Only when the sin is denounced and repented of, can the couple again enjoy the flow of God's graces, which come from their sacrament of marriage.

If a marriage separation does occur because the sinful spouse cannot see that the abstinence is a call to repentance and the sinful spouse seeks sexual pleasure outside of the marriage or the virtuous spouse can no longer tolerate the abuse of sexual acts that are perverted with contraception, the virtuous person is not responsible for the separation. Rather, the virtuous person has rightfully chosen a value that is higher than the marriage – honor and obedience to God. Contraception is a serious matter and should be treated as such.

2. The wife is told by her doctor that if she has another child, she would likely die.

The husband decides that the noble thing for him to do is to endure the pain and suffering of a vasectomy, rather than risk getting his wife pregnant. There is a serious flaw in this reasoning, which stems from the view of man that his passions cannot be controlled. The true noble thing for the husband to do is to totally abstain from intercourse.

There are several aspects of this case that demand close scrutiny. Many, many women have been told by their doctor that they would die if they have another child and then have subsequently gone on to have one or more children. Therefore, the truth about the medical situation needs to be closely examined and appraised with the help of second opinions. While death in child-birth is possible, it is highly unlikely, given that medical care since the 1950's has been capable of dealing with almost any gynecological emergency.

If the risk of death in child-birth is a real concern, Natural Family Planning (NFP) offers another legitimate, precise and reliable means of postponing pregnancy indefinitely.

There are two noble paths – abstention and NFP.

3. A family with three children happens to be very poor. Both spouses struggle for survival. They are very worried about having a fourth child, so one or both approach their pastor asking for advice regarding contraception. What should that advice be?

A well-trained pastor will understand that the quickest path to poverty and destitution is to become a single mother. He will understand that the quickest way to become a single mother is to become separated or divorced. Sixty percent of all those who live in poverty are single mothers. The quickest way to become separated or divorced is to be caught in a cycle of dis-ordered conjugal relations. The quickest way to be caught in a cycle of disordered conjugal relations is to be trapped in the sin of contraception, which selfishly expects the marital act to occur, whether the time is right or not. Therefore, to advise such a couple that "God will understand their predicament" if they contracept, is to potentially send them to a worse poverty than the one that they are already experiencing. The correct advice is to provide them with the fullness of the moral teaching of the Church in all of its

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truth and beauty. God will provide for their needs, especially if they stick together and persevere together in their pursuit of holiness as well as financial well-being.

4. A young couple discovers that they are infertile. They love God, love children and want very badly to have a child of their own. They choose artificial insemination and have a normal healthy child, which they raise to adulthood. Is their anything wrong with their action?

Let's look at related in vitro fertilization cases to see where this idea can lead us. How about the case of twins, who because of an error, were born to different parents? How about the case of a mother- grandmother? How about the case (in Tennessee, USA) where a marriage broke up after in vitro fertilization and the mother claimed rights of ownership of the frozen embryos to gestate them but the Supreme Court determined that a man cannot be forced to become a father if he does not want to so they ordered that the embryos be kept frozen or destroyed. Also, let's talk about the case of France, which has seventy thousand frozen embryos. Among those who survive (fifty to seventy percent), not knowing each other's identity, brothers and sisters could marry each other. How about the case of the surrogate mother who surrenders the child to the biological mother who is now separated from her husband and no longer wants the child, leaving the child with no parent who wants it?

It would be good to recall that we are talking about human beings that are being manipulated. We are talking about embryos that die when they are implanted. It would be good to recall that we are talking about innocent human life. When we talk about gamete donation, this means that the baby will be the child of a third party, yet to be selected. It would be good to recall that all this resembles what happens during slavery as well as with manipulative and racist theories that have all supposedly been rejected by society at large. When we talk about marriages that want but cannot have children, it would be good to recall that the ends do not justify the means and that science must be bounded by morality. Would be parents can adopt an orphan. In doing so, they fulfill God's call for justice, compensate for a past societal evil and at the same time are rewarded with the joy of a child. Every child has the right to be born normally of a father and a mother. The Church proclaims God's plan for life and rejects without exception all artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization of human beings. The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is quite applicable. While contraception breaks the procreative element of the marital act, in vitro fertilization breaks the unitive element. *Humanae Vitae* teaches that the two can never be separated. In vitro fertilization is immoral and inconsistent with the dignity of human beings made in the image of God. *Adapted from "¿Casos?"* by Julia Elena Gómez Caride de Mouriño.

Chapter 16
Following God's Plan For Life

Following God's plan for life will be difficult.

[Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.] Matt 7:13

Following God's plan requires a good dose of religious fervor. One must make God number one priority in one's life. Moses said it clearly:

[Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.] Deut 6:4-5

Jesus re-enforced what Moses said:

[One of the scribes, when he came forward and heard them disputing and saw how well he had answered them, asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.]" Mark 12:28-31

Not enough can be said of the importance of daily prayer. There should be spontaneous prayer and the daily Rosary or the Divine Chaplet. Without the spiritual insight gained from prayer, we are prone to distorting the truths, no matter how hard we may study them.

God's plan for life calls us to love:

[If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophecy partially; but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present, we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to

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face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.] I Cor 13

Following God's plan for life certainly means choosing to accept his gifts and choosing to avoid entirely the other plans that are offered to us as counterfeits. The table below summarizes some of our choices. It describes behaviors that especially occur in a family. For those who are not married, community replaces family and your "spouse" is the Lord.

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Good Behavior	Bad Behavior
Friendly, romantic	Cranky, dull
Neat and tidy	Messy
Polite	Rude or vulgar
Serve other	Serve self
Responsible	Irresponsible
Hard working	Lazy
Surrendering	Domineering
Peaceful	Quarrelsome, angry or violent
Mindful	Careless
Kind and considerate	Selfish
Sacrificing	Resisting and escaping
Family focus	Selfish interests
Seeks pleasure for spouse	Seeks own pleasure
Forgiving	Accusing
Generous	Stingy
Sober, temperate	Over indulges, eating , drinking
Honest	Dishonest, deceiver, stealer
Chaste	Unchaste
Love God	Love money and evil
Prayerful	Not prayerful
Read good things	Read bad things (porn, romance)
Totally give of self	Partially give of self
Responsible parenthood	Irresponsible parenthood
Procreate generously	Contracept
Pure	Masturbate, Oral sex
Faithful in love	Lust
Faithful to spouse 100%	Adulterous, depraved
Take care of children	Neglect children
Worship God	Worship idols
Give alms	\$, TV, Horoscopes
Build church	Excessive sports
Sacraments	Excessive entertainment
Build community	Gangs, community destruction
Care for Others	Care for Self
The strong take care of the weak	The strong get rid of the weak
Wash each other's feet	Euthanasia, assisted suicide
Repent and become a saint	Rebel and become lost forever

It is quite obvious that what we do with our bodies is extremely important. Our bodies are made in the image of God. They are made to serve like God and to love like God. Even body language and bodily gestures are important. Our body language can lie and deceive. A good example of this is when Judas went up to Jesus and kissed him in order to signal to his collaborators who Jesus was so that they could arrest him. This Judas kiss was a bodily lie. It was such a serious betrayal that Jesus remarked:

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[...but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.] Mark 14:21

If we fall into depraved bodily behavior, we can be sure that we are on the wrong track. Jesus was very explicit about the great importance of what we do with our bodies:

[If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'] Mark 9:43-48

Following God's plan invariably leads to some kind of struggle. By entering into the struggle with prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit, we will become victorious. The Apostle Paul entered into this struggle:

[Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church,] Col 1:24

Now what could possibly be lacking in the sufferings of Christ? The answer is our participation. Following God's plan for life takes us toward the cross. Through his mercy, most of us do not have to receive the nails. However, we are all invited to take up our cross and follow him. In my worst moments of suffering, I frequently ask myself, "would I prefer the nails?" The answer is always "no."

God's hope is infinite. He hopes that we will choose his plan. God's mercy is infinite. If we chose the wrong plan, we can repent and choose his plan. Then, he will forgive us, heal us and lead us to abundant life.

["Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God."] Rev 2:7

["...God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them (as their God). He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away." The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true." He said to me, "They are accomplished. I (am) the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water. The victor will inherit these gifts, and I shall be his God, and he will be my son. But as for cowards, the unfaithful, the depraved, murderers, the unchaste, sorcerers, idol-worshippers, and deceivers of every sort, their lot is in the burning pool of fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Rev 21:3-8

God's plan for life is a loving plan. It is not only a good plan, it is a perfect plan. There is no better plan to replace it. Therefore, all men of good will would be well advised to seek it out in the Bible and in the teachings of the Church, to understand it and to make it their personal plan for life.

About the Author

Brian Murphy, Ph.D. was born in Montreal, Canada in 1943. He holds an electrical engineering degree, a master's degree in experimental medicine and a doctorate degree in physiology from McGill University. Brian served in the Peace Corps in the Amazon Jungle of Peru where he learned Spanish and worked in a Franciscan Mission post in a small village. In addition to maintaining the mission radio station, he confronted issues of local business development and co-founded a food store cooperative run by the local villagers. After returning to Canada, he married and continued post-graduate research, authoring and co-authoring numerous scientific publications. He and his wife, Louise have lived in Southern California since 1979 where they raised five children and both have taught NFP. Together, they founded ClinDatrix, Inc., a business that services the biotech industry, where Brian is active in everyday affairs besides being CFO and Chairman of the Board. Brian is founder and Chairman of God's Plan For Life, a nonprofit religious organization through which he has conducted Humanae Vitae conferences for clergy and laity in Chicago, IL, Belleville, IL, Atlanta, GA, Los Angeles, CA, Oceanside, CA, Manchester, NH, Bend, OR, Mexicali and Ensenada, Mexico. Throughout his life, Brian has served the Catholic community as a prayer group leader, catechist, usher and lector. He was a regular host with Gospel of Life issues on St. Joseph Radio Presents, a call-in talk show broadcast from Orange, CA, worldwide via EWTN. His many experiences of both a physical and spiritual nature, combined with sound doctrinal formation through personal study and interaction with great teachers, were a source of inspiration for writing this book.