



# LIGHT & LIFE

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## Tenacity with Tenderness

"[Our Lady's] requests were more like pleas than orders, and she gave me tenacity tempered with tenderness for the mission she entrusted to me." (St. Bernadette Soubirous, "My Name is Bernadette", available on <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/short-life-of-bernadette-5238>).

*Tenacity with tenderness.* I sometimes call this "holy stubbornness." It is about doing the right thing, fulfilling our mission, in spite of the difficulties that the world, or sometimes even our loved ones put in front of us. The quote above is taken from St. Bernadette attempting to convince her local priest, a Fr. Peyramele, to build a chapel in Our Lady's honor at the grotto. If you read her story, then to us, the priest might have seemed a little gruff, but it is important to note that supernatural visions must always be viewed with a higher degree of scrutiny and at least initial scepticism than many things. Even if we always presume the good of the visionary, but whether by self-deceit, imagination, poor mental health, or what have you, the vision needs to prove itself to the Church authorities, not the other way around. But, as the saint noted, "[Fr. Peyramele] was a man whose heart belonged to the poor. For years he paid the rents of 35 families in Lourdes to save them from eviction." And later, while still trying to discern if the vision was true, Fr. Peyramele, "in a tone so soft it surprised me [said], 'If I knew it was the Blessed Virgin, I would do all she desires.'" So again, the priest was a good man with good intentions.

St. Bernadette would obviously prevail over the parish priest, who was astounded that this little illiterate and poorly-educated child was told by the vision that she, the Virgin, was "The Immaculate Conception." But she would continue to face difficulties, from family, friends, townsfolk, and even the secular and police authorities.

Religious life would not shield her from the rougher parts of this life. Her novice mistress, Sr. Marie-Thérèse Vauzou, though having a certain fondness for her, thought of her as "vain and simple." This very same Sr. Marie-Thérèse would later become Mother Superior, and would block any process of canonization for St. Bernadette in her own lifetime.

This is not entirely surprising. Sister (later Mother) Marie-Thérèse Vauzou was, if not heretical, at least partly formed by Jansenism, which tended to have a rather dour view of the nature of man. We must remember that devotion to the Sacred Heart was in part an answer to the overly harsh piety of Jansenism, to assure the faithful that Our Lord indeed burned with a burning love for even sinful man. So, of course, Sr. Marie-Thérèse would not think of silly, ignorant St. Bernadette as "worthy" of such things as apparitions from the most pure and holy Mother of God.



Our Lady of the Rosary (window detail) Lourdes Basilica, France, Photo Fr. Lawrence Lew

But, we take Scripture and Our Blessed Mother at their word that God, "has shown the strength of His arm, He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly" (Lk 1:51-52).

This is why St. Bernadette, in that holy stubbornness of tenacity with tenderness, merely plodded along, always responding with the truth, and not taking the attacks so personally, as we are often wont to do in our days, when we are so worried about our public image or

reputation or feelings. Yes, we may be attacked, yes we may feel hurt, but we are to rely on Our Lord and Our Blessed Mother, not on our own strength. This is where even people who might start out with good and holy intentions fail – they depend on themselves, and end up falling, and perhaps causing more harm than they could

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## What are we Supposed to Believe?

By Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P.

10 Q. How shall we know the things which we are to believe? A. We shall know the things which we are to believe from the Catholic Church, through which God speaks to us.

"Catholic Church" in this answer means the Pope, councils, bishops, and priests who teach in the Church.

11 Q. Where shall we find the chief truths which the Catholic Church teaches? A. We shall find the chief truths which the Catholic Church teaches in the Apostles' Creed.

"Chief," because the Apostles' Creed does not contain in an explicit manner all the truths we must believe. For example, there is nothing in the Apostles' Creed about the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, about the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, or the infallibility of the Pope; and yet we must believe these and other articles of faith not in the Apostles' Creed. It contains only the "chief" and not all the truths.

12 Q. Say the Apostles' Creed. A. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into Hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

I think it is always good to read and know our Faith. Really, I do. However, I think that people are way too "plugged in" to every little opinion and spat online as well. To be honest, what our personal opinions are, as priests, theologians, and so forth, don't matter that much in the end. Note the word I used – opinion. Even the popes have opinions, sometimes wrong ones – the most famous case being of Pope John XXII.

Please note that I wrote Pope John XXII, *not* St. John XXIII. Pope John XXII expressed an opinion so wrong that he was publicly contradicted and corrected. This was considered so shameful an act for a pope that the until-then very popular papal name "John" was not used again until Pope St. John XXIII, for a period of over six centuries. Pope John XXII, as Holy Father, had failed in perhaps his most important job: to defend the Faith and Tradition handed on to him.

What was so controversial about him? Pope John XXII held the opinion that the souls of the just, whether they needed the purifying fires of Purgatory or not, did not have the Beatific Vision immediately, but *until after* the final Resurrection of the Body for all souls at the Last Judgment.

It is far too complicated a matter for our limited space here, but suffice it to say, it was a rather unholy mess. But Pope John XXII held this erroneous view, and taught it, at least for a period of time while holding the papacy. How do we reconcile these things?

Let us look at the Church's teaching itself:

[T]his infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining doctrine of faith and morals, extends as far as the deposit of Revelation extends, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded. And this is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith, by a definitive act he proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals. And therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable, since they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, promised to him in blessed Peter, and therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment. For then the Roman Pontiff is not pronouncing judgment as a private person, but as the supreme teacher of the universal Church, in whom the charism of infallibility of the Church itself is individually present, he is expounding or defending a doctrine of Catholic faith. The infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of Bishops, when that body exercises the supreme magisterium with the successor of Peter. To these definitions the assent of the Church can never be wanting, on account of the activity of that same Holy Spirit, by which the whole flock of Christ is preserved and progresses in unity of faith (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 25).

"Magisterium," in general, just means "teaching office" or teaching, broadly defined. It gets complicated, but as the holy patriarch Jacob wrestled with an angel (Gen 32:22-32), so too we must, as individuals, and as a Church, wrestle with theology. Even in an erroneous proposition, we owe the Holy Father and bishops in communion with him what is called "religious assent" or "religious submission." The same document above states:

Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. 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. This religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*; that is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking (*ibid*).

That last paragraph tells us, in short, to *please* avoid getting into "flame wars" online or in person about the Holy Father and the bishops. Rather, one may "respectfully disagree" or have concerns about certain teachings, but

must at least show proper respect in the way he or she addresses the issues.

The then-Congregation (now Dicastery) for the Doctrine of the Faith, under then-Cardinal Ratzinger, promulgated a document to help clarify how one must believe or assent to certain truths, and where one can legitimately dissent and *how* one can properly express concerns or difference of opinion, in the document *Donum Veritatis*, available online, which I always encourage people to read as a primary source in its entirety. Pertinent to our discussion is the following paragraphs:

When the Magisterium of the Church makes an infallible pronouncement and solemnly declares that a teaching is found in Revelation, the assent called for is that of theological faith. This kind of adherence is to be given even to the teaching of the ordinary and universal Magisterium when it proposes for belief a teaching of faith as divinely revealed.

When the Magisterium proposes "in a definitive way" truths concerning faith and morals, which, even if not divinely revealed, are nevertheless strictly and intimately connected with Revelation, these must be firmly accepted and held.

*When the Magisterium, not intending to act "definitively", teaches a doctrine to aid a better understanding of Revelation and make explicit its contents, or to recall how some teaching is in conformity with the truths of faith, or finally to guard against ideas that are incompatible with these truths, the response called for is that of the religious submission of will and intellect. This kind of response cannot be simply exterior or disciplinary but must be understood within the logic of faith and under the impulse of obedience to the faith. (Donum Veritatis, 23).*

What about the case of Pope John XXII? The same document from Cardinal Ratzinger teaches:

*It can happen, however, that a theologian may, according to the case, raise questions regarding the timeliness, the form, or even the contents of magisterial interventions. Here the theologian will need, first of all, to assess accurately the authoritativeness of the interventions which becomes clear from the nature of the documents, the insistence with which a teaching is repeated, and the very way in which it is expressed.*

When it comes to the question of interventions in the prudential order, *it could happen that some Magisterial documents might not be free from all deficiencies.* Bishops and their advisors have not always taken into immediate consideration every aspect or the entire complexity of a question. But it would be contrary to the truth, if, proceeding from some particular cases, one were to conclude that the Church's Magisterium can be habitually mistaken in its prudential judgments, or that it does not enjoy divine assistance in the integral exercise of its mission. In fact, the theologian, who cannot pursue his discipline well without a certain competence in history, is aware of the filtering which occurs with the passage of time. This is not to be understood in the sense of a relativization of the tenets of the faith. The theologian knows that some judgments of the Magisterium could be justified at the time in which they were made,

because while the pronouncements contained true assertions and others which were not sure, both types were inextricably connected. Only time has permitted discernment and, after deeper study, the attainment of true doctrinal progress.

*Even when collaboration takes place under the best conditions, the possibility cannot be excluded that tensions may arise between the theologian and the Magisterium. The meaning attributed to such tensions and the spirit with which they are faced are not matters of indifference. If tensions do not spring from hostile and contrary feelings, they can become a dynamic factor, a stimulus to both the Magisterium and theologians to fulfill their respective roles while practicing dialogue (Ibid, 24-25, emphases mine).*

The bishops and theologians at the time of Pope John XXII most assuredly raised the issue, hopefully respectfully, to the Holy Father. St. Paul writes that "But when Cephas was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed (or "condemned" in some translation)" (Gal 2:11). It sounds harsh, saying "to his face," but note that it was not "behind his back." It also does not hurt that he was St. Paul, not Father Dismas or some random cleric or person.

This leads us to the question, then: When is the Pope infallible? Our Baltimore Catechism teaches that:

When we say Church is infallible, we mean that it cannot make a mistake or err in what it teaches; that the Pope, the head of the Church, is infallible *when he teaches ex cathedra*—that is, as the successor of St. Peter, the vicar of Christ. Cathedra signifies a seat, ex stands for "out of"; therefore, ex cathedra means out of the chair or office of St. Peter, because chair is sometimes used for office. Thus we say the presidential chair is opposed to this or that, when we intend to say the president, or the one in that office, is opposed to it...

The Church teaches infallibly *when it speaks through the Pope and bishops united in general council, or through the Pope alone when he proclaims to all the faithful a doctrine of faith or morals.*

But how will we know when the Pope speaks ex cathedra, when he is speaking daily to people from all parts of the world? To speak ex cathedra or infallibly, three things are required:

(1) He must speak as the head of the whole Church, not as a private person; and in certain forms of words by which we know he is speaking ex cathedra.

(2) What he says must hold good for the whole Church—that is, for all the faithful, and not merely for this or that particular person or country.

(3) He must speak on matters of faith or morals—that is, when the Holy Father tells all the faithful that they are to believe a certain thing as a part of their faith; or when he tells them that certain things are sins, they must believe him and avoid what he declares to be sin. (Baltimore Catechism, no. 4, Q. 124-125, emphases mine).

Building on what the Baltimore Catechism teaches here, especially in the first point, the pope, the bishops, and anyone teaching the Catholic Faith all have the responsibility to make clear distinctions between what is universally and what is personally held and believed. Holding an acceptable

theological opinion where various opinions are allowed is not wrong, but teaching those opinions are held or defined by the whole Church can only cause confusion.

This is part of the reason that the Holy Father, even in these modern times, when popes have dropped the everyday usage of the “royal we” or “majestic we,” will still use it for such things as canonizations or, were it to have to come up again, an *ex cathedra* proclamation, because it is not “John Paul,” “Benedict,” or “Francis” that speaks, but the pope who speaks on behalf of and in union with the entire Church. You can see this sometimes in academic texts, when the author is speaking as if something is more of a generally accepted or taught concept, in addition to when something might be a group paper or project, of course, but the idea is roughly the same.

That said, the higher one is in the hierarchy, the greater the burden of service, *and* the greater one is bound to teach the fullness of truth, insofar as he is capable. So the Holy Father and his brother bishops are not to innovate when it comes to the content of the faith. Perhaps they may have some innovations when it comes to explaining or expounding on the truth, that may have developed in the heart of the Church, but they are the ones most tightly bound to the Word of God, the definitive decisions of the previous popes, along with what the Church has believed always and everywhere to have been revealed.

#### **Primacy, not Entirety or even Primarily when in Liturgy and Devotion**

One error people will often make is based on the fact that the Pope, as the head of the Church of Rome, is also at the same time the patriarch of the Latin Church. We have over *twenty* Churches in full communion with Rome, each with its own patriarch or head. So for many practical or liturgical matters, the pope speaks only for the *Latin* Church (also commonly called, “the Roman Catholic Church”), and not necessarily all others. The pope is not in the general business of meddling with the liturgies and practices of other Churches in communion with him – that’s not his job, and each Church’s liturgical practice has, at least in part, its own liturgical theology. The reform of the Latin Church’s liturgy does not imply errors or problems with the other Churches’ liturgies, which are to be respected and honored as equal to the Latin Church’s liturgy, likewise handed down from the Apostles:

The Catholic Church holds in high esteem the institutions, liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions and the established standards of the Christian life of the Eastern Churches, for in them, distinguished as they are for their venerable antiquity, there remains conspicuous the tradition that has been handed down from the Apostles through the Fathers and that forms part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church. (Vatican II, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*).

Ofentimes when we speak of liturgy, we are speaking more of a liturgical discipline, than something divinely revealed. We will often draw theology from our liturgy, as the liturgy is meant to teach, but again, even bishops are often mistaken when they draw universal principles from one particular Church’s liturgical norms. Each bishop has particular governance of the liturgy in his own dioceses, but these local norms should always be for the proper

discipline and teaching of the faithful, not so as to justify some personal vision or taste. Otherwise, the teaching of the Church would seem to vary from one border to the next, and cause endless confusion. The Second Vatican Council states, that, in general:

Among these principles and norms there are *some* which can and should be applied both to the Roman rite and also to all the other rites. The practical norms which follow, however, should be taken as applying *only* to the Roman rite, *except* for those which, in the very nature of things, affect other rites as well.

Lastly, in faithful obedience to tradition, the sacred Council declares that holy Mother Church holds all lawfully acknowledged rites *to be of equal right and dignity*; that she wishes to preserve them in the future and to foster them in every way. The Council also desires that, where necessary, the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times (Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 3-4, emphases mine).

#### **Final Words**

Again, I always, always, *always* encourage the reading of the primary documents themselves, and not the ponderings of individual theologians or persons alone. One very common and detrimental error that has caused so much pain and chaos in our beloved Church is assuming one’s opinion, because it comes *after* the Second Vatican Council, must necessarily *be* a proclamation of the Holy Spirit from the same Vatican Council, that is, that error commonly called “post hoc, ergo propter hoc” (“after that, therefore *because* of that”). For example, the idea that somehow Vatican II “got rid” of the Rosary is a common trope, even though the very opposite is true.

But here we can see that historically, after every major Ecumenical Council, it takes the Church decades, *if not longer*, to “wrestle” with the questions and definitions from the very same Council. Ecumenical Councils don’t always put an end to the battles – sometimes they draw *new* battlefronts among the People of God. So I always urge patience, and taking the long, historical view of the Church into account.

In the meantime, until that final day, when all is revealed, let us continue to move boldly forth, with all the tenacity and tenderness of St. Bernadette. I leave you with the words of the Apostle Jude: “*Dear beloved, taking all care to write unto you concerning your common salvation, I was under a necessity to write unto you: to beseech you to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*” (Jude 1:2).

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#### **(Continued from page 1)**

have possibly intended. It would have been better for them if they had remained quiet the whole time!

Let us have, then, that same spirit of tenacity with tenderness. Ask Our Lady to give you that beautiful gift, that holy stubbornness in defending our Faith, in promoting devotion to Our Lady, and in preaching the Rosary. The worldly powers are indeed formidable, but St. Bernadette eventually wore them all down, like a constant stream of small drops of grace that wore down even the toughest stone.

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