

welcome into communion any corporate body or any particular individual who appears (or perhaps professes) to exhibit the signs of that union. Our efforts at fostering spiritual growth will make use of any means (or any rejection of means) that serve this purpose best. As evangelical and Orthodox Christians make authentic union with Christ our deepest common ground, differences between liturgical and institutional forms (though real) will take second place.

CHAPTER
TWO

"COME TO THE FATHER": THE FACT AT THE
FOUNDATION OF CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY

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My friends who aren't Catholic often think of the Catholic faith as monolithic. I used to imagine it that way myself. I was raised a Presbyterian and even served in the Presbyterian ministry until shortly before I became a Catholic in 1986.

Our impressions of Catholic spirituality come, perhaps, from the images we see most often on television, in novels, in the movies, or in the lives of our neighbors. We know the final scene of *The Godfather*, with its depiction of the rite of infant baptism. Maybe we've seen Catholics praying the prayers of the Rosary while fingering a string of beads at a vigil. Maybe we've seen Hispanic Catholics in procession with a banner that shows the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Maybe we've attended a wedding or funeral Mass.

We take this handful of phenomena and try to connect them somehow, and we come up with our idea of Catholic spirituality. This approach may work for defining the spirituality of some religious groups, but it breaks down when we apply it to the church that calls itself "Catholic."

The name itself hints at the problem we immediately encounter. *Catholic* means "universal," and if we're deriving spirituality from external phenomena, we have to process a world of religious phenomena and somehow find its common ground, common sense, or common thread.

Think about what must fall within the range of Catholic spirituality: the silence of the Trappists and the Pentecostal praise of the

Charismatic Renewal; the rarefied intellectual life of the Dominicans and the profound feeling of the Franciscans; the wealth of the Knights of Malta and the elected poverty of the Missionaries of Charity; the strict enclosure of the Carthusians and the world-loving secularity of Opus Dei; the bright colors of Central American devotional art and the austere blocks of the German cathedrals; the warrior spirit of the Templars and the serene *pax* of the Benedictines; Ignatian detachment and Marian warmth.

Catholic spirituality must encompass movements, schools, orders, and disciplines in every period of historical development: the desert fathers of the first millennium; the consecrated virgins and widows; the cenobites, anchorites, solitaries, brotherhoods, and the various syntheses in the rules of Basil, Augustine, and Benedict. Yet it must also include the rise of the friars of the Middle Ages; the mendicants, itinerant preachers, crusaders, reformers, founders, artists, and guilds of artisans; and the lay confraternities. Catholic spirituality must somehow also contain the rise of kaleidoscopically diverse lay movements in the twentieth century: Catholic Worker, Communion and Liberation, Cursillo, Focolare, L'Arche, Legion of Mary, Madonna House, Neocatechumenal Way, Sant'Egidio, Schoenstatt—a list alone could weigh down our discussion!

There are two main avenues of approach to spirituality. One considers the external phenomena of religions—prayer forms, disciplines, methods, devotions, and so on. The other approach focuses on interior phenomena—states of consciousness, emotion, mysticism (variously defined). The problem with these approaches is that they tend to boil spirituality down to a style of worship or a temperament.

Either way, Catholic spirituality presents a forest indiscernible because of the variety and number—and even the age—of its trees. In fact, if you look in older textbooks, you'll find that until recently (the last half century or so) "spirituality" didn't exist as a discipline within Catholic theology. The word *spirituality*, when it appeared at all, was defined simply as "the opposite of materiality."

I believe it is futile, then, to try to circumscribe Catholic spirituality by reducing it to a lifestyle or psychological profile. It is just too large. By necessity, it must contain multitudes.

What we can do, however—and what I hope to do in the course of this essay—is discern some basic points common to Catholics. Call

them facts, truths, or a basic orientation. They are doctrines, yes, but they are more than doctrines. They are certainly more elemental and primal than style or temperament; they must accommodate every Christian style and temperament. Moreover, they must be catholic not only in spatial terms, uniting believers of India's Malabar Rite with Latin Rite Americans; they must be catholic also in temporal terms, uniting the great saints of the apostolic and patristic generations with their coreligionists in the Middle Ages, the Counter-Reformation, and the wake of the Second Vatican Council.

Saving Grace and Sonship

At the foundation of Catholic spirituality is an idea we find poetically expressed in the first postapostolic generation by Ignatius of Antioch: "My love has been crucified, and there is no fire in me desiring to be fed; but there is within me a water that lives and speaks, saying to me inwardly, 'Come to the Father.'"¹

As Ignatius wrote those lines, he was en route from Syria, where he had served as bishop, to Rome, where he would be executed for his Christian faith. Deprived of everything he could love in the world—his home, his congregation, his title—he found that he still had all he needed. He rested upon the divine sonship he had received in baptism. This he depicts as a current of living water that speaks to him as it bears him home. His statement is a compact poetic image, compressing so many New Testament motifs: living water (John 4:10; Revelation 7:17), a voice that calls *Abba* (Romans 8:16; Galatians 4:6), participation in the cross (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20), but most importantly divine sonship (Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 3:26–27).

This "divine filiation" is the foundation of Catholic spirituality. In the Western church it is often called the *life of grace*. In the East it is called *deification*, *divinization*, or *theosis*. It is, quite simply, the fact of salvation—encompassing everything that goes with that fact: justification, sanctification, the remission of sin, the infusion of grace, and spiritual regeneration.

It describes the life that begins when a believer is baptized and receives the redeeming grace of Jesus' cross and resurrection. In the Catholic view,

1. Ignatius of Antioch, *The Letter to the Romans* 7.

we are not merely saved *from* something, but *for* something. We are saved *from* our sin, but *for* sonship. Freed from bondage to sin, we may at last enjoy “the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

This life of grace is a life of growth that will be complete only when its earthly phase is complete. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! . . . Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:1–2). If we can describe Catholic spirituality at all, we must begin by examining this life and this process of growth.

Sharing God’s Life

Come to the Father! At the heart of the gospel is the revelation of God’s fatherhood. Christians accept this today as part of the standard vocabulary of received religion, of revelation. In the first century, however, it represented a revolution. That message was reason enough to get a person killed. In John’s gospel we learn: “For this reason [the Jewish leaders] tried all the more to kill [Jesus]; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

It was customary for Jews to call on God as Father of their nation (see John 8:41), but not as Father to an individual. To make such a claim, they rightly assumed, was in some way to make oneself “equal with God,” for earthly children always share a common (human) nature with their earthly fathers.

Jesus spoke of his own sonship in unique terms. He alone was the eternal Son of God. Yet he also encouraged everyone to consider God a Father. Consider the words that he held up as the model prayer: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name” (Matthew 6:9). God’s fatherhood extended to each and to all; that motif recurs throughout the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), which we can call a compact summary of Jesus’ teaching. The Sermon is thick with father-child language, and most of it refers to God’s relationship with each individual in the crowd of Jesus’ listeners.

How could human beings—persons possessing *human* nature—come to be children of a *divine* person who possesses *divine* nature? It’s

impossible. A father must share a common nature with the child he calls his “son” or “daughter.” I may feel strong affection for my dogs or cats, but I cannot legally adopt them.

The shocking truth is that Jesus wants human beings to share God’s life: “he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:4). Jesus empowers us to *escape corruption* so that we may *participate in the divine nature*. As we noted earlier, salvation is not merely *from* sin, but *for* sonship—for the sake of divine adoption.

Through baptism, we have come to share in Christ’s eternal relation with the Father. Paul speaks of us repeatedly as living “in Christ” (see Romans 8:1). He also speaks of Christ as living in us (Galatians 2:20 and elsewhere).

In love, God “predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will” (Ephesians 1:5). “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith” (Galatians 3:26). Though Christ had the “very nature of God” (Philippians 2:6), he poured himself out to take on “human likeness” (2:7). He took on our poverty so that we might assume his riches (see 2 Corinthians 8:9).

We are sons and daughters *in* the eternal Son of God. To use the formula favored by the early church fathers, we have become “sons in the Son”—“children in the Son.” We possess by grace—the grace of adoption—the life that the divine Word has by nature. We have by gift what is his by right.

All Catholic spirituality proceeds from this fact. In the words of the twentieth-century abbot and spiritual writer Columba Marmion, “Just as the whole of Christ Jesus can be summed up by his Divine Sonship, so the whole of a Christian can be summed up by participation in this Sonship, through Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ.”²

Or better yet, in the words of St. Paul, “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:14–16).

2. Blessed Columba Marmion, *Christ, the Life of the Soul* (Bethesda, Md.: Zaccheus, 2005), 28.

Life in the Trinity

Salvation creates a family bond—which in biblical terms is a covenant bond—a new relation between two formerly unrelated parties. That is the key to understanding Catholic spirituality. Christ has given his Father to be our Father. Thus, in Christ all Christians are truly brothers and sisters, inhabiting “[God’s] household” (Ephesians 2:19).

Salvation for a Catholic is “a translation from that state in which a man is born a child of the first Adam to the state of grace and of the ‘adoption of the sons’ [Romans 8:15] of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior.”³

If we understand the gift of divine adoption, we can begin to see the sense of many Catholic customs and practices: for example, addressing Mary as “Mother,” calling nuns “Sister,” speaking of baptism as a “rebirth,” and gathering together on Sundays for a solemn ritual meal. Moreover, if Christ is our brother, then *bis* Father is *our* Father; *bis* home is *our* home; *bis* table is *our* table; *bis* mother is *our* mother.

It all comes down (or goes up) to living the family life of God himself. For Christianity is the only religion whose one God is a family. Pope John Paul II put it memorably: “God in his deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love.”⁴

God is not *like* a family; he *is* a family. From eternity, God alone possesses the essential attributes of a family, and the Trinity alone possesses them in their perfection. Earthly households have these attributes, but only imperfectly.

Of course, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not “gender” terms, but relational terms. The language of the divine family is theological, not biological. The terms describe the eternal relations of the divine persons who dwell in communion.

The Trinity is who God eternally is. It is his personal identity, which does not depend on creation. Other titles—such as Lord, Lawgiver, Creator, Architect, and Physician—are metaphorical terms, describing his relationship to creatures. Only the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—describes God in metaphysical terms.

Yet because the Trinity reveals the deepest mystery of who God is, it also reveals the deepest meaning of what God does. “The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life,” states the Catechism of the Catholic Church.⁵ “It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them.” Thus, our understanding of God as family should also profoundly affect our understanding of all his works—of creation, redemption, and sanctification.

In short, in everything that exists, we may discern with the eyes of faith a familial purpose, what Catholic tradition calls “the footprints of the Trinity” (*vestigia Trinitatis*).

Reflection on the mystery of God and the mysteries of creation, then, becomes mutually enhancing. Declares the Catechism, “God’s works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works. So it is, analogously, among human persons. A person discloses himself in his actions, and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions.”⁶

And furthermore, “God has left traces of his Trinitarian being in his work of creation and in his revelation throughout the Old Testament.”⁷ The whole of the Scriptures, in fact, can be viewed as the story of how God repeatedly strove, as Father, to invite people into his household, to keep his family together, and to draw his wayward children home.

God’s relationship with Israel was defined by a *covenant*, the ritual, legal means by which ancient peoples created family bonds. God made covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. With each succeeding covenant, God opened membership in his covenant family to ever more people: first to a married couple, then to a household,

3. Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, quoted in Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (Fitzwilliam, N.H.: Loreto, 2002), 811.

4. Pope John Paul II, *Puebla: A Pilgrimage of Faith* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1979), 86; see also Bertrand de Margerie, S.J., *The Christian Trinity in History* (Still River, Mass.: St. Bede’s, 1982), xix: “The directive idea, underlying our Trinitarian analysis and synthesis is this: in the created world the total, though not adequate nor still less exhaustive, image of the Trinitarian mystery is man, personal and familial.” And see my book-length study, *First Comes Love: Finding Your Family in the Church and the Trinity* (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

5. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), par. 234, p. 69.

6. *Ibid.*, par. 236, p. 70.

7. *Ibid.*, par. 237, p. 70.

then to a tribe, then to a nation, then to a kingdom—until finally the invitation was made universal with Jesus. Christ's "true family" consists of those who receive new birth as children of God through baptism (John 3:3–8) and who do the will of the Father in heaven (see Matthew 12:49). They become his younger brothers (see Romans 8:14–15, 29).

Baptism and Eucharist are now the means by which men and women are incorporated into God's covenant family. They mark the Christian's covenant oath, common meal, and sacrifice. The word *sacrament* itself witnesses to this truth. *Sacrament* comes from the Latin *sacramentum*, which means "oath," and the word was applied to baptism and the Eucharist from the earliest days of the church. The pagan Roman historian Pliny the Younger recorded that, in his time (the end of the first century), Christians would gather before sunrise to sing hymns to Christ, after which they would "bind themselves by oath."⁸ This is the *sacramentum*, the "oath," that seals the covenant: the Holy Eucharist. Jesus himself described his relationship with the church in explicitly covenantal terms. At the Last Supper, he blessed the cup of the "new covenant" in his blood (see Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

This makes a profound difference in a Christian's life, for now he can call God "*Abba*, Father" (Galatians 4:6). Christians are truly children of God (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1–2), brothers and sisters and mothers of Christ (Mark 3:35), who is the "firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Romans 8:29). Christians are "members of [God's] household" (Ephesians 2:19), which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17).

The book of Revelation (19:9) makes clear that this new covenant is the closest, most ecstatic, and most intimate of family bonds. John's vision concludes with the marriage supper of the Lamb (Jesus) and the Lamb's bride (the church). With this event—which tradition has understood as the Eucharist—Christians seal and renew their family relationship with God. With this sacrament—which is at once an oath, a sacrifice, and a covenant meal—they call God himself their true Brother, Father, and Spouse.

8. Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10:96–97, www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pliny1.html (accessed July 29, 2011).

Church: Hierarchy and Home

The family theme that dominates Scripture continues through the earliest centuries of the church. St. Polycarp of Smyrna, in the generation immediately after the apostles, wrote, "For if we continue to love one another and to join in praising the Most Holy Trinity—all of us who are sons of God and form one family in Christ—we will be faithful to the deepest vocation of the Church."⁹

Even before St. Polycarp, St. Ignatius of Antioch had set forth the divine family, the Trinity, as the model of concord in the church: "Be obedient to your bishop and to one another, as Jesus Christ in his human nature was subject to the Father and as the apostles were to Christ and the Father. In this way there will be union of body and spirit."¹⁰ And again, "As the Lord was united to the Father and did nothing without him . . . so neither should you do anything without the bishop and priests."¹¹

St. Irenaeus emphasized the fatherly role of the hierarchy and of teachers. Tertullian developed the notion of ecclesial motherhood, calling the church "Lady Mother Church."¹² For Tertullian, the church on earth reflects the family model that is implicit in the Trinity: "Not even the mother, the Church, is passed by—that is, if in the Son and Father is recognized the mother, by whom the names of both father and son exist."¹³ Elsewhere he exhorted candidates for baptism to pray to the Father "in the house of your Mother . . . with your brethren." St. Cyprian of Carthage summarized this line of thinking with his famous aphorism: "He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother."¹⁴

Thus the teaching continues throughout the patristic era. It is no exaggeration to say that family imagery saturates the teachings of the fathers of the church. Indeed, the very title "fathers" flows from a

9. *Catechism*, par. 959, p. 272.

10. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians*, 13.2.

11. *Ibid.* 7.

12. Tertullian, *Ad Martyras*, 1. See J. C. Plümpe, *Mater Ecclesiae: An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church as Mother in Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1943).

13. Tertullian, *On Prayer*, 2.

14. Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church*, 5.

familial understanding of the church! In the fifth century, St. Augustine wrote, "The apostles were sent as fathers [see 1 Corinthians 4:15]; to replace those apostles, sons were born to you who were constituted bishops . . . The Church calls them Fathers, she who gave birth to them, who placed them in the sees of their Fathers . . . Such is the Catholic Church. She has given birth to sons who, through all the earth, continue the work of her first Fathers."¹⁵

God is a family, and Christians are his. By establishing the new covenant, Christ founded one church—his body—as an extension of his incarnation. By taking on flesh, Christ divinized flesh, and he extended the Trinity's life to all humanity through the church, his body (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12). Incorporated into the body of Christ, Christians become "sons in the Son."¹⁶ They become children in the eternal household of God. They share in the very life of the Trinity.

The earthly household of the Trinity is the church. This is a dominant motif in recent documents of the Catholic Church, especially the Catechism of the Catholic Church, whose opening paragraph states that God "calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church." Elsewhere, the Catechism states, "The Church is nothing other than 'the family of God.'"¹⁷

The Catholic Church is the universal family of God. Non-Catholic Christians are, however, considered "separated brethren," united to the family by the sacrament of baptism. The Catechism declares this truth in moving terms: "All who have been justified by faith in baptism . . . are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church."¹⁷

Within the church, as within the family, there are clearly defined roles. From the time of the apostles, the Christian faithful have viewed the clergy as spiritual fathers. Indeed, even in the Old Testament, priests were identified this way. In the book of Judges, when the Levite appears at Micah's door, Micah pleads, "Live with me and be my father

and priest" (Judges 17:10). In the New Testament, St. Paul clearly sees his role as paternal: "For in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). And this attitude would continue in the early church. St. Jerome wrote: "Be obedient to your bishop and welcome him as the father of your soul." The great earthly father of the church is, of course, the "Holy Father," the Pope.

Yet the family is not only global. It is also supremely local. Pope John Paul II wrote, "The great family which is the Church . . . finds concrete expression in the diocesan and the parish family . . . No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone."¹⁸

From Heaven to Hearth

The "family of God" model offers a more intimate experience of the communion of saints—as the church's covenant family extends through time as well as space. "Becoming a disciple of Jesus means accepting the invitation to belong to *God's family*."¹⁹ In this context we can understand the solicitude of the saints in heaven for the church on earth, and we can understand the care of the church on earth for the souls in purgatory. For the members of the church—militant, triumphant, and suffering—are siblings in a close-knit family. Even in Christianity's first generation, St. Paul expressed his kinship with the saints on earth—for example, in the church at Colossae (Colossians 1:2, 4)—as well as with the saints in heaven, "in the kingdom of light," as he put it in the same chapter (Colossians 1:12).

In the supernatural family of the saints, Mary, the Mother of God, holds an eminent place. Of all creatures, Mary is directly related to God by a natural bond of covenant kinship. She is the mother of Jesus, to whom she gave her own flesh and blood. This bond enabled mankind to share in the grace of Christ by adoption. Thus, as brothers and sisters of Christ, Christians are also children of Mary, and so are bound to honor her as their mother. Indeed, Jesus himself is legally bound by his father's law ("Honor your father and mother") to share his honor with

18. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*: On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, November 22, 1981, n. 85.

19. *Catechism*, par. 2233, p. 597 (original emphasis).

15. Quoted in Henri Cardinal de Lubac, S.J., *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 90. De Lubac (*ibid.*, 105) also shows how, in the early church fathers, "the authority of the bishop has an essentially paternal character. If he is the head, it is because he is father."

16. *Catechism*, par. 1655, p. 461.

17. *Ibid.*, par. 818, p. 235.

Mary. And he fulfilled this law more perfectly than any son has ever done, by bestowing the gift of his glory on Mary. Christians, then, are called to imitate him in this way, as in all other ways.

The church and the family are more than "communities"; each is, like the Trinity, a *communio* of persons. And so they also bear a family resemblance to one another. As the church is a universal family, the family constitutes an "*ecclesia domestica*" (domestic church).²⁰

Through marriage, which is a sacrament of the new covenant, a household receives a new family resemblance to God. St. Paul wrote, "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name" (Ephesians 3:14–15). Earthly families, then, receive their "name," their identity, from God himself.

In his "Letter to Families," Pope John Paul II wrote, "The primordial model of the family is to be sought in God himself, in the Trinitarian mystery of his life. The divine 'We' is the eternal pattern of the human 'we,' especially of that 'we' formed by the man and the woman created in the divine image and likeness."²¹

The Catechism further reflects this understanding: "The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ."²²

Thus, as an image of God who is faithful and who is One, the family bond between husband and wife must be permanent and indissoluble. Thus, too, as God is fecund and generous, a married couple must be open to life, willing to cooperate with the Father in the conception of children. In this context, it should be clear why the Catholic Church forbids acts of contraception, abortion, homosexuality, and adultery—all acts that distort the sanctity of marriage and the divine image in the family.

Within the domestic church, all members, but especially fathers, exercise the "priesthood of the baptized" and evangelize "by word and example."²³ Further, the family is holy because Christ himself lived in a

family. The Catechism teaches that "Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. *The Church is nothing other than 'the family of God.'* From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers 'together with all [their] household' . . . These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world."²⁴

This understanding of God, church, and family has profound implications for the inner life of the Christian. Grace, which by definition is "a *participation in the life of God,*" is suddenly revealed as family life because grace "introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ . . . As an 'adopted son' he can henceforth call God 'Father,' in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church."²⁵

By baptism, we are "co-heirs" with Christ and so, in the words of St. Augustine, "Grace has gone before us; now we are given what is due . . . Our merits are God's gifts."²⁶

Among these gifts of grace is prayer, and this, too—with all its varieties, methods, and phenomena—we may understand in a familial way. No less an authority than the Catechism presents prayer in the context of covenant, communion, and family resemblance: "Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ . . . In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The grace of the kingdom is 'the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity . . . with the whole human spirit.' Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him."²⁷

Even in its highest expressions, prayer remains, essentially, a family matter: "Contemplative prayer is the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gift, a grace; it can be accepted only in humility and poverty. Contemplative prayer is a covenant relationship established by

24. *Ibid.*, par. 1655, p. 461, emphasis added.

25. *Ibid.*, par. 1997, p. 538.

26. *Ibid.*, par. 2009, p. 541.

27. *Ibid.*, par. 2565, p. 675.

20. *Catechism*, par. 1656, p. 461.

21. Pope John Paul II, "Letter to Families," February 2, 1994, n. 6.

22. *Catechism*, par. 2205, p. 589.

23. *Ibid.*, pars. 1656–57, p. 461–62.

God within our hearts. Contemplative prayer is a communion in which the Holy Trinity conforms man, the image of God, 'to His likeness.'²⁸

Doctrinal Applications

The notion of the family of God can be applied to doctrine as well. Consider three very broad categories.

Creator and Creation

"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26). Christian commentators have always drawn out the Trinitarian implications of the divine "us" in the book of Genesis. Seeing creation as the work of the Trinity enables us to see the world differently. God is more than our Creator; he is our Father by grace. We are more than mere creatures; we have a "family resemblance." We are made in his image and likeness to live as his sons and daughters. Instead of inhabiting a vast impersonal cosmos, we live in a world that the Father has fashioned to be our inheritance—a royal palace and a holy temple.

The church does not despise the world. In fact, traditional Catholic blessings and prayers often end, in Latin, with the phrase *per omnia saecula saeculorum*, meaning simultaneously "throughout the entire world" and "through all the ages of ages." Thus, an ordinary blessing consecrates the world and all that is in it. This is the extension in history of that most famous of gospel passages: "God so loved the world... For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16–17).

Lay Catholics are called to sanctify the world from within. They need not leave the things of time in order to find the things of eternity. The temporal order is God's domain, and so it is the domain of his children as well. The Catechism cites the Second Vatican Council in this regard: "By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will."²⁹ The church's Code of Canon Law lays

down that the laity's mission is "to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things with the spirit of the Gospel" (canon 225).

Monks and nuns, for their part, are called to renounce the world, but they do so precisely because the world is so good! They prefer God the giver to the exclusion of all his gifts—even the greatest, such as marriage and family. Their sacrifice makes no sense if they are offering up something valueless or evil.

Law and Morals

More than a legal contract, a covenant is a sacred family bond. So God's covenants in salvation history (with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus) reveal how he fathers his ever-expanding family and maintains its unity and solidarity.³⁰ Accordingly, the laws of the covenant are not arbitrary stipulations forcefully imposed by a superior power, but rather expressions of God's fatherly wisdom, goodness, and love. We obey them in order to mature, so that we can love as God loves. When God makes and keeps covenants with his people, he is just being true to himself; for the Trinity is a covenantal being—three persons living in eternal communion. Covenant is what God does because covenant is who God is.

Sin and Judgment

More than broken laws, sin means broken lives and broken homes. At root, sin comes from our refusal to keep to the covenant that binds our family. Thus, through sin we lose the grace of divine sonship. We sin because we do not want to love as much as God loves us. Yet sin is absurd and deadly, for in sinning, we stupidly prefer something other than the life and love to which our Father calls us. God punishes sin with death because sin is what kills his life in us. Judgment is not an impersonal legal process; nor are the covenant curses enactments of God's vindictive wrath. Like God's covenant law, the curses are expressions not of hatred but of fatherly love and discipline. They impose suffering that is intended to be remedial, restorative, and redemptive. God's wrath is not opposed to his love; it is an expression of his love. God is love (1 John

28. *Ibid.*, par. 2713, p. 715.

29. *Ibid.*, par. 898, p. 258.

30. See *Catechism*, par. 759, p. 217.

4:8), but his love is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). This fiery love reflects the inner life of the Trinity. Sinners do not escape God's love; they get burned by it, unless and until they reopen themselves to it. This is what repentance achieves, and this is what God's wrath is for. Seeing God as Father does not lessen the severity of his wrath, nor is a lower standard of justice implied. On the contrary, a good father requires more from his sons and daughters than judges require from defendants. And a good father also shows greater mercy.

Suffering and Death

These are particularly challenging and profound mysteries. We know they entered the world because of sin (Romans 5:12). We also believe that Christ has set us free from the power of sin and death (Romans 8:2). Yet if this is so, why must we still suffer and die? Catholics believe that Jesus Christ suffered, not merely as a substitute for sinful humanity, but as our representative. Thus, Christ's saving passion did not exempt us from suffering, but rather endowed our suffering with divine power and redemptive value.

St. Paul could even "rejoice" in his troubles, "knowing that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:3-5). He concluded, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Roman 8:18).

God gives his children everything he has, sharing even his divine nature. Nevertheless, he did not spare his eternal Son from suffering. Suffering was central to Jesus' mission as redeemer. And so it is part of our share in his life and mission. Thus, suffering is not an optional component of Christian life. St. Paul tells us, "We are God's children ... co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Romans 8:16-17, emphasis added). So—no suffering, no glory.

Catholics, moreover, do not merely endure suffering; they "offer it up." For Christlike suffering has redemptive power. Christ offered his sufferings as a priestly sacrifice for the sake of others, and so should Christians. That is true love. Here is Paul again: "Now I rejoice in what I am suffering *for you*, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking

in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24, emphasis added).

A Sacramental Worldview

Sacramentality and sacraments are such important aspects of Catholic life that we should spend a moment examining them more closely. Sacraments are outward signs instituted by Christ and entrusted to the church. The church observes seven of them: baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, penance, anointing of the sick, matrimony, and holy orders (the ordination of deacons, priests, and bishops).

Apart from sacraments, church custom has hallowed many *sacramentals*: the wearing of devotional medals and scapulars, the use of holy water, the veneration of sacred images and books, and so on. Sacramentals dispose believers to receive grace from God and provide an occasion for such graces.

But the sacramental principle really applies to all of creation. It is evident from the biblical testimony that God's way of dealing with his people is profoundly sacramental. Even in the Old Testament, the chosen people spoke of creation in sacramental terms:

The heavens declare the glory of God,
the skies proclaim the work of his hands ...
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the end of the world.

Psalm 19:1, 3-4

God tends not to work in abstractions. His Word is not mere words; it is creative, living, and active. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it well: "God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man's intelligence that he can read there traces of its Creator. Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolize both his greatness and his nearness."³¹

31. *Catechism*, par. 1147, p. 324.

God created the physical universe. He made it good, and he did not hesitate to use its most commonplace items to manifest his glory. Sometimes, too, he would even elevate those commonplace items for uncommon purposes, as channels of divine power.

The early Christians saw this clearly. In AD 383, St. Gregory of Nyssa preached a sermon in which he cited many sacramental uses of nature in the Old Testament:

Moses' rod was a hazel switch—common wood that any hands might cut and carry and use as they please before tossing it into the fire. But God purposed to work miracles through that rod—great miracles beyond the power of words to express [see Exodus 4–14] ... Likewise, the mantle of one of the prophets, a simple goatskin, made Elisha famous throughout the whole world [see 2 Kings 2:8] ... A bramble bush showed the presence of God to Moses [see Exodus 3:2]. The remains of Elisha raised a dead man to life [see 2 Kings 13:21].³²

St. John of Damascus added, "I do not worship matter; I worship the creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take his abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation!... God has filled it with his grace and power. Through it my salvation has come to me."³³

Creation, then—even in the old covenant—could serve as a natural sacrament. Nature itself was a sign, but God showed it capable of conveying supernatural power as well. It was not in nature, however, that St. Paul found the preeminent sacraments of the Old Testament. He looked instead to the ritual worship of ancient Israel. Abraham and all of his male descendants had "cut" their covenant with God by the rite of circumcision. The New Testament even identifies the old covenant with its sacramental sign when Stephen refers to "the covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8).

We learn from St. Paul that the old covenant and the old sacrament—great as they were—foreshadowed something still greater:

"You were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism" (Colossians 2:11–12). The circumcision of infants prefigured the baptism of those who would be "newborn" in Christ. The old rite marked a child's "birth" as a son of Abraham; the new rite marks the still greater birth of a child of God.

We saw, with St. Paul, that the ancient Passover meal served as the renewal of the old covenant. Israelites sacrificed the Paschal lamb so that their firstborn children would be spared the plague of death. In the New Testament, it was at a Passover meal that Jesus established the new covenant in his blood (1 Corinthians 11:25). With the traditional unleavened bread and cups of wine, Jesus offered the first Mass at the Passover Seder on the night he was betrayed.³⁴

In baptism and Eucharist, Christ's action was "new" in the sense of a renewal, but it was not a novelty. It did not abolish the Old Testament but fulfilled it and renewed it in a transformative way. The same could be said of all the sacraments.³⁵ They had been implicit in all God's dealings with his beloved Israel and with all of mankind. They would be explicit with the revelation of the church.

In the old covenant (as St. Augustine explained), the sacraments—the rituals of the law of Moses—had been many, weak, and difficult. In the new covenant, they are few, powerful, and simple. In the pages of the New Testament, we see the apostles practicing these rites frequently—baptizing, forgiving sins, breaking the bread, laying on hands to ordain the clergy, and anointing the sick.

Thus, the sacraments do not somehow demote the New Testament but rather bring it into sharper focus. Indeed, the New Testament was, in the generation of the apostles, not a book but a rite. It was the Eucharist, which Jesus himself had called the "new testament" (or "new covenant") in his blood (see Luke 22:20). He established the New Testament when he instituted the Eucharist and said, "Do this in remembrance of me"—not "read this" or "write this," but "*do this*." And the apostles went forth and celebrated the New Testament everywhere

32. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ*.

33. John of Damascus, *On Holy Images*, 1.16.

34. See Luke 22:15; *Catechism*, par. 1340, p. 373.

35. See *Catechism*, par. 1150, p. 325.

they went. Very few of them wrote books; but all of them went forth and celebrated the Eucharist.

The Eucharist was the defining action of the primitive church: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship [Greek, *koinonia*], to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). It is in the Mass that those actions come together, as they did in the generation before the New Testament documents were complete and the centuries before they were definitively compiled.

The documents weren't complete until the end of the first century, and even then they were not called the "New Testament" until the end of the second century. The documents only gradually took that name, again because of their liturgical proximity to the Eucharist, the original "New Testament" in Christ's blood. They were the *only* books approved for proclamation in the Mass, and they were "canonized" for that very reason. The New Testament was a sacrament at least a generation before it was a document.

The Bible as the Measure

One of the great modern scholars of Catholic spirituality was Father Jordan Aumann, O.P. In one of his greatest works, he wrote, "If Christian spirituality signifies a participation in the mystery of Christ, our first task is to contemplate that mystery with the help of the New Testament and then to discover how we share in it."³⁶

The Bible does not stand apart from the church's life, but at the heart of it. Scripture is the content and the context of all the church's ritual and devotion. At every Mass, at least three extensive readings are proclaimed and preached on, drawn from the Old and New Testaments. The readings change every day, so that over the course of the three-year cycle worshippers will hear most of the Bible.

This is the way most Christians have received God's word throughout most of history, from the days before there was a canon of Scripture and the days before the printing press and widespread distribution of books and the days before literacy was widespread. It is the way we see congregations receiving the word in the Bible's own narratives—in the assembly gathered

in ritual public worship. Worship is the natural and supernatural habitat of Scripture. Liturgy is both the content and the proper context of Scripture. Catholic life and practice are steeped in Scripture and answerable to it. Father Aumann writes the following:

Everything must be understood and evaluated in the light of Scripture, and the closer any spirituality is to the Bible, the more authentic it is. This does not mean that the application of biblical teaching to the spiritual life does not admit of any variety whatever, but it does mean that Sacred Scripture ever remains the unifying factor and the ultimate standard. It transcends all diversity . . .

What we should seek in the New Testament is a spirituality that is valid for all persons everywhere and in every age, whether it be the twentieth century, the Middle Ages or the primitive church. But Christ lived within a particular historical context; the New Testament represents a variety of viewpoints, such as that of St. Matthew or St. Luke as compared with that of St. John or St. Paul; in primitive Christianity there was a Jewish-Palestinian and a Jewish-Hellenistic trend. Consequently, it is not always easy to abstract the essential and perennial elements of gospel spirituality from the New Testament writings or from the life of Christians in apostolic times. Further, gospel spirituality must be lived by particular persons at a particular time and in a particular place. In other words, the gospel must be constantly inserted into the historical situation; that is why there is a history of spirituality and schools of spirituality.³⁷

Within Catholicism, then, there are schools of spirituality that are all imbued with a Catholic spirit, which is the spirit of adoption—which is the Spirit crying out, *Abba, Father!*

Home to the Father

So we return to Ignatius of Antioch and the summons he heard from the echoes of his baptismal waters: *Come to the Father*. So much about who we are as Catholics is packed into those words. Not just, "Come to God," but "Come to the Father." We're more than God's creatures; we're God's children.

36. Jordan Aumann, O.P., *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985), 10.

37. *Ibid.*, 3, 10.

It is Ignatius, too, who provides us the earliest surviving reference to the "catholic church," though he treats the phrase as an already established term: "Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful to baptize or give communion without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God. Thus, whatever is done will be safe and valid."³⁸

Ignatius wrote in AD 107. He resounded with a voice that is the first echo of the apostles. Yet he described a catholic church recognizable to any Catholic in the twenty-first century—whether Byzantine, Chaldean, or Coptic; monastic or charismatic; Thomist, Scotist, or personalist; Carmelite, Carthusian, or Augustinian.

Ignatius proclaimed a church reborn through baptism and a church that feeds on the Eucharist, which he calls "the sacrifice" of "the blood of God" and "the flesh of Christ." He proclaims a church that is hierarchical, a church that shuns doctrinal aberration, a church that finds its earthly center of gravity in Rome.

In that Catholic Church, Christians still hear the call that welled up within Ignatius, and they answer. That is Catholic spirituality.

RESPONSE TO SCOTT HAHN

BRADLEY MASSIF

It was enriching to read Scott Hahn's essay. It reflects integrity to the Church of Rome and an ecumenical openness that extends the spirit of Vatican II. In his section titled "Church: Hierarchy and Home," he roots Catholic spirituality in patristic ecclesiology and affirms that "the great earthly father of the church is, of course, the 'Holy Father,' the Pope." Since Vatican II, there has been a series of important Catholic encounters with Orthodoxy that shape Orthodox perspectives. For example, in 1964, the churches of Rome and Constantinople officially lifted the "anathemas of 1054" (the date of the "Great Schism" between Orthodoxy and Rome). This act did not put an end to the schism because the mutual excommunications of 1054 were canonically doubtful and were followed by many other excommunications that were never "lifted." Nevertheless, it was symbolically significant and followed by many meetings between representatives of Rome and Constantinople, as well as among other Orthodox leaders, including the patriarchates of Moscow and Antioch. In more recent times, the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches have formed official theological dialogues at both the national and international levels, culminating in position papers and consensus documents.

Both sides recognize that Orthodoxy and Rome are the two major branches of historic Christianity and, in that sense, can be seen as "sister churches."³⁹ However, theological differences still separate us. Our known and continuing differences center on the particular issues of papal infallibility, universal jurisdiction, and the use of the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed, to which other Orthodox would add purgatory and the immaculate conception of Mary. Because our subject is

39. See Avery Dulles, S.J., "The Church as Communion," in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Massif (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 125–39.

38. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 8.

Christian spirituality, I cannot expound on these complex issues here but instead will focus on the overarching vision of Catholic spirituality as Hahn has presented it: the centrality of Trinitarian theology, sacramental theology, Marian piety, and the role of Scripture.

Key Emphases and Goals of Catholic Spirituality

Regarding the role of the Trinity in Christian spirituality, Hahn quotes the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which states, "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them."⁴⁰ His exposition of this central mystery for Christian spirituality is masterful. It illustrates just how united Orthodox and Catholic theology are in this central dogma of the Christian faith (the *filioque* notwithstanding). We fully agree on the dogmas of the Trinity and Christology as expounded by the ecumenical councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451). As I explained in my essay, these councils bear witness to the ontological foundations for what the Greek Fathers called "deification" (*theosis*). Hahn concurs: "This 'divine filiation' [in the Trinity] is the foundation of Catholic spirituality. In the Western church it is often called the *life of grace*. In the East it is called *deification, divinization, or theosis*."

How, then, does the process of Catholic spiritual growth occur within this Trinitarian framework? Hahn answers:

Come to the Father! At the heart of the gospel is the revelation of God's fatherhood . . .

The shocking truth is that Jesus wants human beings to share God's life: "he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:4). Jesus empowers us to *escape corruption* so that we may *participate in the divine nature*. As we noted earlier, salvation is not merely from sin, but for sonship—for the sake of divine adoption.

All Catholic spirituality proceeds from this fact.

We agree, once again. This comports well with the teaching of Orthodox spirituality as expressed by St. Athanasius: "God became humanized so that humans might become divinized." Orthodox and Catholic teaching concurs that by virtue of the incarnation and "communication of idioms" (*communicatio idiomatum*) between Christ's divine and human natures, believers may participate in the deified humanity of Christ. We are called not merely to imitate Jesus' moral example, but to partake of Christ himself through the sacramental life of the church.

Disciplines for Implementing Spirituality

This leads to Hahn's following comments about Catholic sacramental theology:

Baptism and Eucharist are now the means by which men and women are incorporated into God's covenant family . . . The word *sacrament* itself witnesses to this truth. Sacrament comes from the Latin *sacramentum*, which means "oath," and the word was applied to baptism and the Eucharist from the earliest days of the church . . . This is the *sacramentum*, the "oath," that seals the covenant: the Holy Eucharist.

We, of course, want to avoid magnifying minor disagreements. But it is worth observing that there is a different spiritual "ethos" that pervades the liturgical atmosphere in our two traditions. Catholic liturgical life describes the sacraments mainly in terms of Latin liturgical categories, such as "oaths," compared with the Greek Fathers, who viewed the sacraments as "mysteries." The numbering of "seven sacraments" in Catholicism also reflects a difference in theological methodology and mind-set that seems to rely more heavily on scholastic reasoning. Without wishing to overstate the case, in Orthodox the sacraments are seen more as relational gifts than rational realities. As the late Orthodox liturgical scholar Fr. Alexander Schmemmann observed, Eastern Christians used the terminology of "mystery" because it communicates the *gospel story* of Jesus. Hahn recognizes these problems (numbering and scholasticizing the sacraments) by adding, "But the sacramental principle really applies to all of creation."

40. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), par. 234, p. 69.

Yet there remains a certain rigidity in Catholic ecclesiology that seems to carry over to Catholic spirituality. This rigidity seems endemic not only to the vocabulary and structure of the "seven" sacraments, but also to the church's posture toward the papacy and hierarchical orders (matters beyond the scope of this response). Church order and sacramental life give the impression that the church has been overly defined and military-like in the way its life is lived out. It has become an institution with sacraments. But again, as Schmemmann once said, the church is a sacrament with institutions, not an institution with sacraments. At one time, I believed this perspective to be a false characterization of Catholicism. But that viewpoint was actually reinforced recently when I heard a prominent Catholic bishop tell the story of how he was once asked by an evangelical Christian if was "saved." He replied, "Yes, but only within a sacramental *system* (his emphasis)." As an Orthodox, I can't help but quietly wonder if the "relational" life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit still needs to be more fully integrated into the Catholic sacramental vision. Surely the sacraments are understood better as "healing mysteries of the gospel" than they are as "systems" or "institutions" of salvation. God's Trinitarian love is more relational than legal. Herein lies an experiential difference between Catholic and Orthodox sacramental theology.

A similar sort of "agreement but with different emphases" arises over Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary. Hahn asserts that Jesus "shared his honor with Mary." The Orthodox would largely agree with this, but only with extensive Christological qualifications. It is certainly true that the Orthodox and Catholic traditions share a common devotion to Mary as the God-bearer or Mother of God (*theotokos*), as she is called. The ecumenical councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) recognize Mary as the *theotokos* and solemnly declare the title to be a church dogma. But Marian devotion is noticeably different in Orthodox and Catholic piety. On the devotional level, there seems in Catholicism to be an excessive and sentimental veneration of Mary in and of herself, which causes an observer to think of Mary apart from her Son (contrary to official Catholic dogma). This de facto elevation of Mary apart from Christ is no doubt partly due to the legacy of geographical location, in which the theological teachings about the *theotokos* were originally hammered out in the eastern part of the Roman Empire,

where the Greek Orthodox Churches flourished, rather than in the Christian West. It was among the Greek-speaking churches of the East where the Christological debates in the fourth and fifth centuries formed the context for understanding Mary's relation to Christ in the incarnation. The Latin West took part in these debates, but not to the same extent as the Eastern churches.⁴¹ The tendency to honor Mary apart from Christ may also be a consequence of the Catholic emphasis on the "immaculate conception," promulgated by Pope Pius IX in 1854, according to which Mary, from the moment she was conceived by her mother, was delivered from all the stain of original sin—a dogma not shared by the Orthodox.

Regarding our approach to the role of Scripture, Hahn expresses a similarity in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions: "Liturgy is both the content and proper context of Scripture. Catholic [and Orthodox, I might add] life and practice are steeped in Scripture and answerable to it." Our common convictions confess that the church is answerable to Scripture, yet the Bible is still a liturgical book. The Word of God and the people of God are inseparably united.

But what have we to say about average laypeople in our parishes? Can we honestly say they know the Bible well? Or even as proficiently as evangelical Protestants do today? I don't think so. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. Orthodox Christians in America probably know the Bible better than their counterparts outside the continent due to the positive influence of evangelicalism on Orthodox parishioners. Likewise, Catholic laypeople in North America probably know the Bible better than their counterparts outside America for the same reason. The growth of Catholic biblical scholarship over the past thirty years has provided Catholic Christians with more books on the Bible than at any other time in history. We must admit that Catholic scholarship has directly impacted Catholic spirituality in a way that Orthodox biblical scholarship has yet to do.

In closing, I congratulate Scott Hahn for writing this beautiful and winsome essay on Catholic spirituality. I hope this brief analysis above will serve to further our dialogue and engender greater appreciation

41. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996).

for each other's tradition. Of all the essays in this volume, Hahn's is the closest to the Orthodox because it is the most "catholic" (small *c*, meaning "full, complete"). Metropolitan Kallistos Ware summarizes it best: "Among Western Christians, it is the Anglicans with whom Orthodoxy has enjoyed the most cordial relationship during the last hundred years, *but it is the Roman Catholics with whom we have by far the more in common.*"⁴²

RESPONSE TO SCOTT HAHN

JOSEPH DRISKILL

Scott Hahn has provided a description of Roman Catholic spirituality that sets out clearly the theological consistency of its doctrines of the Trinity, Christ, God, and the church, as well as the theological foundation for its stance on such issues as contraception, abortion, and gay marriage. By using the Catechism as the touchstone for that which shapes the "lived experience of faith" for Roman Catholics, Hahn focuses on key elements of Roman Catholic spirituality and demonstrates the way in which the church nurtures this spirituality.

The Role of Christ and the Holy Spirit

Hahn notes that "divine filiation," the sonship of Jesus Christ, is the foundation of Roman Catholic spirituality, and he establishes the metaphor of the family as the lens through which the many and diverse expressions of Catholic spirituality find their unity. The language of "sonship" in the Trinity makes Jesus "equal" with God in something of the way an earthly child shares a common human nature with his or her earthly father. Hahn notes, however, that the relationships within the Trinity are metaphysical and theological realities rather than biological or metaphorical realities. God is not like a family; God is a family—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christ has given his Father to be our Father. Thus, with Christ as our brother, we become adopted sons of God. Through baptism we are united with the family. Mary becomes our mother; nuns are sisters; priests are fathers; the church is the household of God; the Eucharist is the holy meal through which commitment to Christ is affirmed. God's covenant is a family bond.

We see here that as with Orthodox spirituality, Roman Catholic spirituality posits a worldview in which a supernatural realm claims a metaphysical reality reserved for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that is qualitatively different from earthly realities. Hahn points out that

42. Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 314, emphasis mine.

metaphorical terms that describe God's relationship with creatures—for example, Creator and Architect—do not have the status of the metaphysical terms of the Trinity. As a Protestant, I sense that this reliance on the theological notion of the Trinity to ground so much of one's spirituality is misplaced. Protestants have often been quick to point out that the word *Trinity* does not appear in the Bible. And while much is said about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the early church's faith emerged without an articulated, consistent understanding of the internal relations of the Trinity. Therefore, to use patristic understandings of the internal relations of Trinity as the foundation for pastoral offices, such as marriage, which were deeply influenced by the cultural customs of their respective social locations, strikes mainline Protestants as anomalous.

The Function of the Institutional Church

Participation in the Christian family through baptism and membership in the church requires viewing earthly institutions as models of the divine relations. Marriage between a man and a woman is patterned on the marriage between Christ and his church. Thus, earthly marriage is perforce indissoluble. The purpose of marriage includes the act of procreating, mirroring the creative actions of God. Thus, contraception and abortion are wrong because they thwart the creative process. From my vantage point as a mainline Protestant, I find it difficult to accept what seems to be an idealized sense of the human condition. For example, the notion that the marriage vow between a man and a woman cannot be broken because it mirrors the internal relations of the Trinity seems implausible in the contemporary world. Marriage tribunals that decide if a "true marriage" ever existed when legal marriages blessed in the church break down after a number of years of shared companionship and the birth of children seems especially problematic. I understand that if one believes that the marriage covenant is not dissoluble, then a humane way to negotiate the brokenness of the human condition may be to determine that a true marriage never existed. Alternatively, the reality of the human finitude and humane requirements of the pastoral situation could result in other just and compassionate theological solutions. Both mainline and more theologically conservative Protestant churches have found more compassionate and humane theological ways to understand human brokenness. To use patristic understandings of

these internal relations, whether they are Eastern or Western, as a justification for a belief that marriages cannot be dissolved is problematic for many mainline Protestants.

The church is understood as the household of God. God not only invites people into the church but through the discipline of the church brings the "wayward" home. Hahn's discussion of the role of sin and judgment in Roman Catholic spirituality also draws on the metaphor of the family. Here God's wrath is seen as not opposed to God's love, but as an expression of it. Hebrews 12:29 speaks of a fiery love that Hahn notes not only reflects the inner life of the Trinity but also burns those who sin. Thus, fatherly love and discipline impose a suffering that is "remedial, restorative, and redemptive." From this theological departure, God's wrath is understood as bringing about repentance in the life of the sinner. This focus on the judgment and wrath of God stands in contrast to the emphasis on God's love common in mainline Protestant traditions. Those who do pastoral or family counseling are well aware of the frequency with which child abuse is justified by the offending parent on religious grounds. Many mainline congregations have become havens for or gained members from those who have been judged and condemned by their religious community. Focusing on personal sins is not the agenda of mainline Protestant faith communities in which the emphasis is on the power of God's transforming love.

Some years ago, I attended an ecumenical gathering in which the panel included a Roman Catholic bishop. The bishop was speaking about the nature of judgment and mercy as applied in pastoral situations. In the course of the discussion, he noted that a priest who was his personal friend believed that God's mercy always exceeds or extends beyond his judgment. The bishop, a deeply caring and compassionate person, took exception to this and said that while it might be true of God, the church at times had to exercise judgment and that carrying out the judgment was a sign of mercy because only through this process could the sinner become reconciled to God. Personally, I agree with the priest, not the bishop, and I think most progressive Protestants when dealing with personal sin believe that ultimately God's love exceeds God's judgment and that the church should mirror this grace.

Not only does the metaphor of the family illuminate the Roman Catholic understanding of the church; it also addresses the nature of

episcopal authority. Hahn quotes St. Cyprian of Carthage—"He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother"—and Ignatius of Antioch's admonition to be obedient to the bishop. Apostolic succession is affirmed by noting in 1 Corinthians 4:15 that apostles were sent as fathers. Sons were then born who became bishops, and bishops continue the work of the first fathers. As a result, a male hierarchy is established during the early centuries of the church that is eventually centralized in the authority of the office of the bishop of Rome. Mainline Protestants' views of authority and the role of women are at variance with the Roman Catholic position. Clearly, the patriarchal authority of Roman Catholic spirituality reflects an institutionalization of gender roles dating to the early centuries of the church. One of the cultural shifts of the late modern world has been an increasing appreciation of the gifts and talents of women and an awareness of the injustices done to women not only by patriarchal attitudes but also by patriarchal institutions. These injustices are perpetuated by custom and tradition rather than on theological grounds. As Hahn notes, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not 'gender' terms, but relationship terms." Mainline Protestants in the United States began to ordain women in the nineteenth century and gradually recognized over the last half century that the opposition to women's ordination reflected outdated social mores rather than sound theological arguments.

Mainline Protestant approaches to ecclesiastical authority differ sharply from Roman Catholic views. Hahn quotes Ignatius of Antioch to provide theological justification for obedience to a bishop. Members of the church, the family of God, are to be obedient to their bishop as Jesus in his human nature was to God and as the apostles were to Christ and God. In this ecclesiastical context, obedience to the bishop—and more generally to religious authority—results in an ethos and spirituality in which congregants are more deferential to clerical policies and power than in mainline Protestant contexts. Even in Protestant denominations where the office of bishop was retained following the Reformation, the nature of authority and obedience has a less hierarchical ethos than in the Roman Catholic Church.

The rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century resulted from major challenges to clerical abuses of the time and to the authority of Rome. By concentrating power in the male hierarchical authority—

with few avenues for review and oversight by the wider church—there was little recognition that power itself easily corrupts those who are entrusted with authority. Sinfulness afflicts clerics and laity alike. While the correction of abuses by the Counter-Reformation restored the integrity of the Roman Catholic Church, it did not result in the profound structural change evidenced by the ecclesiastical structures of the emerging Protestant faith communities. Increasingly the laity was given a role in the decision-making processes of the Protestant Church. The rise of the Enlightenment and its accompanying modern worldview fostered an attitude toward critical thinking that abandoned unquestioned obedience and doubted ecclesiastical authority. The voice, influence, and vote that laypersons exercise in most mainline Protestant denominational structures reflects a post-Enlightenment approach to authority in which clerical power and influence are either subject to review or integrated into the decision-making process. This affords mainline Protestant laity a major role in the shaping of their religious institutions.

I have seen these contrasting approaches to authority exhibited in the ecumenical conferences and committees in which I have participated over the years, including my role as a faculty member at the Graduate Theological Union. My Roman Catholic colleagues have a respect for an ecclesiastical "office," even when they disagree with or hold strong opinions contrary to those providing leadership. Protestants, on the other hand, tend to have only modest respect for an ecclesiastical office *per se* and are most willing to be led when they respect the person holding the office. The Protestant views that any authority can be corrupted and that laity as members of the community of faith are called to provide leadership at all levels of church life place limits on clerical authority and affirm the vitality of lay leadership.

When Protestants at the time of the Reformation sought to escape what they viewed as the chains of church tradition, they turned to the Bible. Here especially in the New Testament they encountered the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, as the source of revelation. This dependence on the Bible as the source of revelation was made possible, at least in part, because of the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century. People now had access to the Bible in a way not previously possible. The seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church were reduced to two—baptism and Eucharist. These two sacraments were

accepted because of their centrality in the biblical witness and not primarily because of their role in the traditions of the church. The tendency to see all of life as having a sacramental nature, that is, as having the potential to reveal in an outward way the working of God's grace, was de-emphasized by Protestants. With the focus on the Word, the role of God in the realm of nature was largely ignored. Hearing and reading the Word were emphasized as a means to guide ethical actions in the world. Discerning God's activity in the realm of nature or in the mundane activities of daily life was not an interest of mainline Disciples until their more recent liberation from modernity. Discovering spiritual practices kept alive in the Roman Catholic tradition after the Protestant Reformation has been a gift to many Protestants.

As a mainline Protestant clergyperson, I have over the years found Roman Catholic social teachings on economic justice and world peace—as delineated in pastoral letters from the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and from liberation theologians in South America—a place of common ground between Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant spiritualities. As the Roman Catholic Church has in many quarters become more conservative during the last two pontificates, this voice seems to have been muted. As a result, a strong voice for economic justice and world peace has been diminished, and we are all the poorer for it.

Conclusion

Hahn demonstrates that Roman Catholic spirituality is grounded by an orderly view of the world whose foundation is the sonship of Jesus Christ. The picture created has such internal coherence that I found it quite compelling. However, the stumbling block preventing my acceptance comes both from my own life experience and from the brokenness I have encountered in the pastoral situations of those with whom I have ministered over the years. On the one hand, I wish my own faith were as systematic, logical, and all-encompassing as Roman Catholic spirituality; on the other, I am thankful that my church has allowed me to wrestle with profound theological questions—for example, ecclesiastical authority—without the fear that critiquing the church's position could have deleterious consequences.

RESPONSE TO SCOTT HAHN

EVAN HOWARD

Though Scott Hahn has written many books and articles, this essay was my first exposure to his work. I found him to be the quintessential catholicist. Hahn's teaching is both accessible and winsome. He presents the biblical and theological foundations of the Roman Catholic faith and life in a way that not only educates but inspires. He shies from detailed analysis and draws his readers to the Scriptures. No wonder he has been such a gift to the church. I felt, as I read his essay, a bit of his passion for the new evangelization in the Roman Catholic Church, a passion that he suggests "is going to take place in conversation with evangelicals."⁴³ My hope is that his conversation with *this* evangelical facilitates not only the new evangelization encouraged by Pope John Paul II in 1992 but also the fulfilling of the Great Commission encouraged by Jesus Christ in AD 33.

My comments on Hahn's essay will take the form of brief reflections on a couple of the core issues listed by Bruce Demarest in his introduction. I will respond to Hahn's comments regarding the term *spirituality* and then address a few of the doctrinal points he mentions insofar as they relate to our approach to Christian spirituality. After this, I will comment on a couple of core issues less addressed in his essay.

The Definition of Spirituality and Catholicism

Hahn rejects in his essay some common approaches to spirituality because "they tend to boil spirituality down to a style of worship or a temperament." He finds it futile to "reduce spirituality to a lifestyle or a psychological profile." Indeed, Hahn argues that "until recently (the last half-century ago) 'spirituality' didn't exist as a discipline within

43. "A Conversation with Scott Hahn," recorded in Vancouver, B.C., www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifDRq01kEw&noredirect=1 (accessed October 14, 2011).

Catholic theology. The word *spirituality*, when it appeared at all, was defined simply as 'the opposite of materiality.'" For these reasons, Hahn chooses to approach the topic by discerning a few basic points that he identifies as doctrines. Nevertheless, before I respond to his doctrinal points, it might be valuable to comment on what he rejects.

The history of the term *spirituality* is well-known, and its relationship to particular Roman Catholic disciplines of theology is significant. The term *spirituality* in European languages has been used in a variety of ways—in the modern period, to emphasize interiority and devotion. It was this modern use that facilitated the connection of the term *spirituality* with a particular branch of Catholic theology. By the end of the medieval period, separate branches of dogmatic and moral theology had developed in the Roman Catholic community. Most of the matters regarding Christian life were understood to be a part of moral theology. Furthermore, some aspects of moral theology (namely, how we mature and experience growth in relationship with God) were eventually identified as *ascetical* and *mystical* theology, which in turn led to the development of "spiritual theology." Dogmatic theology established the first principles of the faith. Moral theology explored the nature of the obligations of this faith. Spiritual theology discussed "additional" material regarding spiritual maturity, religious experience, and the like. Particularly after the Second Vatican Council—in light of new biblical concerns, new liturgical developments, and new interests in recovering the original charisms of religious life—an emphasis was given to a more descriptive approach to spiritual development. Thus the theological discipline of Christian "spirituality" was born. Here the term was used not to distinguish immaterial from material but precisely to give room for the exploration of relationship with God insofar as it is embodied in the *whole* of life. Bruce Demarest has given us excellent representative definitions of this kind of approach to the term in his introduction (p. 18).

Thus, systematic reflection on the maturing experience of the Christian life has been a formal part of Roman Catholic theology in one form or another throughout its history. There are dictionaries of Catholic spirituality that summarize the state of research in this field. There are many volumes of classics that speak of Roman Catholic spiritual life, experience, and growth. There are manuals of Catholic spiritual direction, histories of the mystical experience of the Western church up to

the Reformation, and societies and journals specifically specializing in reflection on the matters of the "scientific investigation of the spiritual life." None of these materials or approaches are represented in Hahn's essay on the Roman Catholic view(s) of Christian spirituality. Indeed, Hahn cites no source between John of Damascus (676–749) and J. C. Plümpe (1943).

Next, as a non-Catholic responding to Hahn's essay, it may be appropriate to share something of the "handful of phenomena" from which I gain my own perspectives on Roman Catholicism. After coming to personal faith in Christ through the ministry of the Jesus Movement in 1971, I found myself regularly seeking a place of private prayer after school. The nearby Catholic church building was open, and I enjoyed having devotional time there regularly. While attending an evangelical seminary, I went through what I call my "contemplative conversion." During this period, my wife and I monthly visited a monastery for a day of silent retreat and spiritual direction (offered by one of the nuns). This was a life-changing season for me. I went on to pursue graduate studies in Christian spirituality at a Roman Catholic university. I received a PhD in this field, studying under a wide range of Roman Catholic scholars. I have attended many Catholic services of various sorts and have—for years at a time—enjoyed spiritual direction from Roman Catholics. This past year, I traveled to Rome, where my wife and I attended more than one service each day in a different magnificent location, and to Assisi, where I taught on the history and significance of the Franciscan tradition. Although I have not joined a Roman Catholic church (we did flirt with the possibility of becoming Protestant Third Order Franciscans back in the early 1980s), I have received bountifully from the riches of the Roman Catholic community. It is out of this context that I write my response.

Key Emphases

What Scott Hahn has chosen to do in his essay is to discern a few points for reflection. He states, "They are doctrines, yes." So what we have in his essay is a reflection on the doctrinal prolegomena to spiritual theology, something generally covered in the first chapters of a manual of ascetical and mystical theology. In these chapters, a spiritual theologian generally lays out the principles of dogmatic theology insofar