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St. Alban Theological Seminary

Catholic Identity

&

Basic Theological Method

LESSON 1

THE WORD “CHURCH”

Let us begin by saying that all good theology is rooted in experience. This applies especially to ecclesiology, which is the study of the nature and mission of the church. As we attempt to understand this, we must begin by understanding that we are actually trying to understand ourselves. After all, we are the church. Now, if our understanding is to be at all useful, we must be honest in our assessment. We cannot settle for some artificial image of ourselves and call it self-understanding. Nor can we come to this understanding by shopping among concepts imposed upon us by others. This would undermine our objectivity. Only honesty of insight, based upon the integrity of our research, can yield the desired results.

Let us begin with this question: How do we understand ourselves as the Church? Linguistic analysis, a favorite tool of philosophy, will be our starting point. We call ourselves members of the Catholic Church. If we are to intelligently get a handle on our identity as a Catholic Church, it is theologically respectable to analyze each of the terms which designate us. We should then examine both *Catholic* and *Church*.

Our starting point will be the word “church”. After all, we are in the Church before we are Catholic. Therefore we shall first examine experientially the content of the word, “church”. And, our experience as Christians must include all of our Christian yesterdays as well as the present. This makes necessary the use of scriptural, historical, and theological sources, as well as our own experiences. We are seeking to gain access to the “Mind of Christ” through ongoing guidance of the Spirit throughout the 2000 years of Church history. We must touch, in a responsible manner, the texture of that experience in an effort to determine what Christ intends the Church to be and if we are in accord with that definition. This will require more than lectures and reading assignments: we must also have insight and vision.

We begin with a theological examination of the word “church”. Those of us familiar with modern languages will recognize that there are two distinct word “families” which are translated as the single English word “church”. In the countries of northern Europe we find the English word “church”, in Scottish, the word “kirk”; in Dutch, “kerk”,; and in German, “kirche”. In the languages of southern Europe the word “church” is found as various derivatives of the French root “eglesia”. It is obvious from this that the various words come from different roots. The northern European words are derivatives of the Greek word “kuriakon” (pronounced koo-re-ah-khan) meaning “the Lord's house”...a building. It should be noted by the student that this word does not appear in this sense within scripture,

yet it has come to have that connotation, and in the northern European languages the words that were rooted in “kuriakon” reflect that understanding of the church as a “building”, as an “institution”. The southern European words are likewise derived from a Greek word, that word being “ekklesia” (pronounced ek-lay-see-ah). You recall that the word “kuriakon” is found nowhere in scripture in the sense of “the Lord's house”, but “ekklesia” was used in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, to translate Hebrew words, such as “edhah”, which has a theological significance. “Edhah” means “a company or body of people appointed to a mission by God.” It particularly designates the company of Israel in the time of the Exodus...a pilgrim people with a mission. The mind-set of the translators was very dynamic! It is also the antithesis of what we see signified by the word “kuriakon”. In addition to being used in the Septuagint, the word “ekklesia” is used three times in the Gospels. The citations are Matthew 16:18 and 18:17.

Matthew 16:18

And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my *ekklesia*, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 18:17

And if he will not hear them: tell the *ekklesia*. And if he will not hear the *ekklesia*, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican.

Even though the New Testament was written in Greek, the common Greek of the day, it was describing events among a people whose spoken language was Aramaic. The Aramaic term for the Greek word “ekklesia” was “kenushta” (pronounced ke-noosh-tah), and there is a great significance in this. If the Master Jesus viewed himself Messianically, in the sense of the seventh chapter of the Book of Daniel, “ekklesia” as a translation of the word “kenushta” takes on a meaning consonant with St. Paul's view of us as the Mystical Body of Christ. In this understanding, “ekklesia” is nothing less than Christ in the world. Take note of the radical difference between that dynamic, spiritual concept and the more static, institutional concept represented by the word “kuriakon”. And this is what we are striving to get to...an insight into the mind of Christ.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which the clergy alone form “the Church”. It is possible to have a “Church” without any congregation of lay members, while a body of lay members or congregation without a clergy is not a Church within the traditional meaning of the term in Catholic bodies.

The Book of Acts sees us as a continuation of the “edhah” along with the children of Israel:

Acts 7:38

This is he that was in the church in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received the words of life to give unto us.

We are, therefore, with the Hebrews, the People of the Covenant. “Ekklesia”, in the Book of Acts, also takes on an alternative meaning; it comes to apply to the local churches:

Acts 15:3

They therefore being brought on their way by the church, passed through Phenice, and Samaria, relating the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.

Acts 18:22

And going down to Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem, and saluted the church, and so came down to Antioch.

Acts 20:17

And sending from Miletus to Ephesus, he called the ancients of the church.

The self-same word, “ekklesia”, is used of the universal community of the People of the Covenant, those who are to be Christ in the world, and of the local manifestations of the single reality. The Church, made up of many churches, yet a single Church and people. The single reality: the pilgrim people commissioned by God to be Christ in the world is fully and completely found, not by adding up bits and pieces from around the world, but in each of those places.

To be part of this “ekklesia” several things were required. These conditions are laid out in Acts:

Acts 2:37-41

Now when they had heard these things, they had compunction in their heart, and said to Peter, and to the rest of the apostles: What shall we do, men and brethren? But Peter said to them: Do penance, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins: and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are far off, whomsoever the Lord our God shall call. And with very many other words did he testify and exhort them, saying: Save yourselves from this perverse generation. They therefore that received his word, were baptized; and there were added in that day about three thousand souls.

In order to be part of the worshiping community one had to be baptized and confirmed. One also had to indicate a willingness to change one's life in accordance with a growing spiritual knowledge; this was referred to as “repentance”. Yet another requirement was the reception of and participation in communion.

The Church is the sacrament of the intimate union with God. The Greek word, of which the Latin root for “sacrament” is a translation, is “mysterion”. This mystical, sacramental vision of the Church is the teaching of scripture, the fathers of the Church, and the Church today.

What is the Church? The Church is the People of God, or the Clergy of the People of God, called forth by the Holy Spirit to be the sacrament, the sign of the Mystical Body of Christ in the world.

LESSON 1

1. What three sources must we use in examination of the word “church”?
2. The languages of northern Europe tended to describe the Church as _____?
3. The languages of southern Europe tended to describe the church as _____?
4. What is the Greek word used in scripture to describe the church?
5. How would these two descriptions of the Church affect the Church's attitude toward itself and its mission?
6. The Church is the Sacrament of _____?

LESSON 2

FIVE THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

We will begin this lesson by briefly reflecting on method; on how we should go about theological inquiry. Please keep in mind that the purpose of this course is not to teach the student like a computer, but rather to teach the student to think theologically. We must constantly exercise this talent. And we must always remember that good theology is applied theology. Thus, knowing how to think theologically is equally as important as the bots and pieces of data which we work with in theology.

Good theology is also based on experience. In Lesson 1 we experienced that basic concept of “church” from a wide variety of sources. We even saw the tension built into the very concept of the word “church” itself, an extension between the dynamic “ekklesia” and the static “kuriakon”. All of that theological insight which bears direct and immediate application to real ministry today was locked in the mere linguistic analysis of the commonly used word “church” Therein lies a key to the theological method:

ALWAYS BEGIN WITH AN IN-DEPTH DEFINITION!

Define before you discuss! Much ecumenical effort has been wasted because of imprecise and sloppy thinking. This is not to say that truth is static or that there are some areas of theology which are not, by nature, vague. Nonetheless, this does not take away the fact that the Independent Catholic movement is plagued with poor thinking in the area of theology. Unless our Church wishes to join much of the rest of the Independent Catholic movement in outdated ignorance there must be a renaissance of theological inquiry. Never forget that theological thinking is all but impossible without the first step of “definition”. This should not be confused with imposing some convenient meaning on a term or concept. Many people go through life thinking that they know the meaning of the word “church”, and yet we have seen how rich and complex a word it is.

In seeking to define, to understand, to illuminate, or to expound, we must always employ every resource available. For the person trained to think theologically, there are five resources which are indispensable:

1. Scripture;
2. Tradition and History;
3. The Magisterium;
4. Your own experience and that of the leaders of the Church; and
5. The insights of other theologians, including those of other faiths.

All that you are to learn in this short course is based on these five resources. Examine them. What is the common thread running through each of them? Christian Experience. Scripture is the written experience of the dealings of the People of God with God. Tradition and history are

accumulations of experience, the experience of being the People of God. The Magisterium, or the authoritative teaching of the Church, is yet another articulation of Christian experience. Your own experience and the experiences of the leaders of your church recognize the fact that God is still manifesting to us today, and if we are to truly think theologically we must analyze and respect our own unique experience of God. Finally, we must take advantage of the research and insights of others who are not part of our tradition or even part of the Christian faith, since the experience of God is not limited by denominational or faith boundaries.

You have been given in this lesson five theological resources, and it is only natural that one should seek to apply them. As a working model for this lesson, we will apply them to the subject of Angelology, the study of angels. Of course, people in our day do not like to be told to look beyond the basic range of immediate experience. Our society is afflicted with a sense-oriented attitude which dictates that anything that exists beyond the scope of our limited senses is either a useless abstraction or a mere myth. Our society proclaims as non-existent whatever it cannot measure. With such an attitude being prevalent we must be well prepared in our knowledge of subjects theological. Our application of the five resources could be as follows:

1. Scripture:

John 12:31

Now is the judgment of the world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

John 16:11

And of judgment: because the prince of this world is already judged.

Matthew 18:10

See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

1 Corinthians 2:8

Which none of the princes of this world knew; for if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.

1 Corinthians 8:5

For although there be that are called gods, either in heaven or on earth (for there be gods many, and lords many)

1 Corinthians 15:24

Afterwards the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father, when he shall have brought to nought all principality, and power, and virtue.

Ephesians 2:2

Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of this air, of the spirit that now worketh on the children of unbelief:

Ephesians 6:12

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and power, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places

Colossians 2:8-23

Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy, and vain deceit; according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ: For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporeally; And you are filled in him, who is the head of all principality and power: In whom also you are circumcised with circumcision not made by hand, in despoiling of the body of the flesh, but in the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, in whom also you are risen again by the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him up from the dead. And you, when you were dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh; he hath quickened together with him, forgiving you all offenses: Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross: And despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open shew, triumphing over them in himself.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a festival day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths, Which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. Let no man seduce you, willing in humility, and religion of angels, walking in the things which he hath not seen, in vain puffed up by the sense of his flesh, And not holding the head, from which the whole body, by joints and bands, being supplied with nourishment and compacted, groweth unto the increase of God.

If then you be dead with Christ from the elements of this world, why do you yet decree as though living in the world? Touch not, taste not, handle not: Which all are unto destruction by the very use, according to the precepts and doctrines of men.

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in superstition and humility, and not sparing the body; not in any honour to the filling of the flesh.

2. History and Tradition: a working familiarity with this resource will reveal a belief in angels is part of the historic Judeo-Christian heritage. Recommended reading would be the works of the early Church Fathers.
3. The Magisterium: the writings of Ante-Nicene Fathers, particularly those of the East, such as John Chrysostom.
4. Your own experience and that of the leaders of the church: we are fortunate as regards this particular topic in the church as Catholic sacramental concepts are intimately tied to an understanding of angels. Such books as Leadbeater's *The Science of the Sacraments* and *The Inner Side of Church Worship* provide valuable information here.
5. Insights of other theologians: within the sphere of Christianity the writings of Karl Rahner are the most valuable. Likewise, the sacred writings of the Hindu and Zoroastrian faiths are replete with references to angelic beings.

Of course, the above is only one small example of how the five resources may be applied. In the above, our point cannot be overstated: Learning to think theologically is the key to applying theology to the needs and inquiries of people. Though the above is but a rough outline, the student can readily see that a wide variety of information is available.

We have taken this slight detour to demonstrate to the student how this course has been prepared and the method which underlies it. We want you to examine the basic inner mechanisms of theological thinking so that you will learn how to implement theology. As an exercise you will be asked to apply this five resource system to specific contemporary issues such as: abortion, drug use, sexual equality, and social justice.

The capacity to think theologically can only be fueled by having reliable and regular access to the necessary tools of theology. A good, working, and current theological library is a must. A library stocked with little more than generations-old tomes but totally devoid of current theological titles is nearly useless. The student should be seeking to build up a core library in each of the five areas we have discussed. Thinking theologically is impossible if the student is not steeped in the literature of theology. Just as in any profession, one must have at hand the tools of one's trade. The era of charming, innocent ignorance among clergy is long gone, especially within Independent Catholicism.

LESSON 2

1. All good theology is _____ theology.
2. When endeavoring to deal with theology, we must first learn to _____.
3. List the five theological resources.

4. What is the common thread running through these resources?
5. Choose one of the following and apply the five theological resources to it. Limit yourself to 500 words or less.
 - Heaven and Hell
 - Original Sin
 - One baptism
 - Mariology
 - Sanctifying Grace
 - The Trinity

LESSON 3

AN HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH

In Lesson 1, we began our semantic investigation of the word “church” and viewed it in a variety of dimensions. In Lesson 2, we took a slight detour to examine methodology and thinking based upon the five major theological resources. In this Lesson we return to the notion of “church”. As the student will see, this lesson will actually trace the abandonment by the Church institution of the Church's spirit.

Clearly, we had seen that the early Church's concept of itself as “ekklesia” was indeed what we now know to be a purely Catholic concept. The Church which emerged from the upper room at Pentecost was the one, undivided Catholic Church. The most authentic relation of the facts of history indicate that an undivided Catholic Church existed long before there was ever a Pope in Rome, before there was even one Eastern Orthodox Patriarch, before there was even one Bishop in Britain.

The toleration promised to Christianity in 313 A.D. developed, as we shall see, into a collaboration between Church and Empire. Constantine and his successors actively sought the unification of the Church and the solution of divisive doctrinal disputes often as a means to secure their internal political control and to strengthen the defense of the Empire. The above is historical fact. Recall that we pointed to Acts 2:37-42 for the requirements for membership in the “ekklesia”.

Acts 2:37-42

Now when they had heard these things, they had compunction in their heart, and said to Peter, and to the rest of the apostles: What shall we do, men and brethren? But Peter said to them: Do penance, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins: and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are far off, whomsoever the Lord our God shall call. And with very many other words did he testify and exhort them, saying: Save yourselves from this perverse generation. They therefore that received his word, were baptized; and there were added in that day about three thousand souls. And they were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

This is the pristinely minimal notion of what the Catholic Church is to be and what it is about. It was that self-understanding which the Church took with it in its ministry to the known world. But, as with many things, there was a moving away from that self-understanding.

We will begin by viewing briefly some written examples of the position of the early Church, such as the Epistle of Clement, the Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch, and the writings of St. Irenaeus. We will deal first with the Epistle of St. Clement, written around the year 96 A.D., in which he chastises the Church at Corinth for a number of internal problems. A cursory reading will reveal that a number of young men were attempting to take over the ministry of the church based on “charism” rather than office, for which they were promptly taken to task by Clement. The Church of Rome has

taken this letter as proof of Papal jurisdiction. This is a pleasant fiction at best. Judging from the letter itself and also from the previous internal evidence of the New Testament, Clement was more than likely the corresponding Elder of the Church of Rome. It was his duty to keep in contact, via correspondence, with the various churches and to express the various concerns which the Church of Rome felt regarding the polity and behavior of the other churches, based on Pauline precedent. St. Paul saw no obstacle to his correcting the conduct of other churches, even though he was not the Bishop of any of them. Was Clement the Bishop of Rome in the sense of being the Pope? Hardly. At this early period of history, the Church of Rome was governed by a Council of Bishops or Elders. Our point? At this date we have no indication of a divergence from the model of “church” as set down in the Book of Acts. We see a positive evolution of the understanding of the Church from Clement to Ignatius and to Irenaeus of Lyons. We do not, as late as Irenaeus (177 A.D.) see a marked divergence from the model in the Book of Acts. The view of these writers was consonant with the theological teaching of their day, for by the second century we see a monarchical episcopate in place, virtually around the globe, as it was outlined in the Epistles of Ignatius.

We must bear clearly in mind that the writings of the early Church fathers occasionally pointed to the Church of Rome as an example but never as a ruler. As we progress through this lesson this fact will assume greater importance. It is true that in the year 190 A.D., Victor, then Bishop of Rome, threatened excommunication of Christians in Asia Minor over the date of Easter. What is equally true is that his threat was ignored. This would hardly have been the case if the Christian churches recognized a universal jurisdiction by Rome. It was not until the year 256 A.D. that the stage was set by Stephen, Bishop of Rome, for the influx of teaching regarding Papal primacy by relating the authority of the Bishop of Rome to the statement of Christ found in Matthew 16:18-19.

Matthew 16:18-19

And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.

This was the beginning of the seeping in of Papalism.

In the latter part of the third century the Church began to undergo a severe persecution which continued with varying degrees of severity until the fourth century. By this time it can well be imagined that the Church was bone-weary of living in the shadows. There then came about a sequence of events which culminated in the Edict of Milan in the year 313 A.D. This may well have been the darkest day in the history of the Catholic faith. At this time Constantine was a competitor for the imperial crown of Rome. Legend says that in a vision on the eve of battle for that imperial rule he was shown a cross from the sky and a voice allegedly said, “In this sign you shall conquer.” On the morning of the battle he had his soldiers paint the cross on their shields and he did indeed win the battle. In gratitude for his visionary interpretation of this event, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan which made the Church a legal corporation, conferred upon the clergy tax and military exemptions, and gave to the Church at Rome the rights of property ownership. In the end, what did all this mean? The Edict ushered in, almost overnight, the gifts of power, possession, and permanent rule to the “ekklesia”. It was at this point that the Church began to cease evolution as the “ekklesia” and began to evolve as the “kuriakon”, an

institution.

Thus, by the year 434 A.D., we find a far different checklist to determine the catholicity of a church. The test for orthodoxy became known as the “Vincentian Formula”, after its compiler, Vincent of Lerins. It reads as follows: “The orthodox faith is that which everywhere, always, and by everyone has been believed.”

At first sight this may seem to be a very liberal formula, should we choose not to view it within the context of its background. Unfortunately, what Vincent was referring to was specifically the teachings promulgated by the Church of Rome. In actuality, what Vincent was stating was that the orthodox faith was that which was everywhere, always, and by everyone believed in the Church of Rome! This was a sad commentary on the concretization of thought within the Church's thinking. The Edict of Milan directly resulted in spiritual sterility, conformity, and single rule. With these were planted the seeds of schism.

Only a short time later, under the Emperor Theodosius and in the fourth century, the Catholic Church was accorded the status of state religion. It became the official religion of the Roman Empire. By this time the emperors had moved their seat of rule from Rome to Byzantium, today known as Istanbul, Turkey. This left a power-vacuum in Rome which was quickly filled by the papacy, with the “kuriakon” concept of the Church. This, of course, sowed even more seeds of fraction. In the ninth century pope Nicholas I surpassed all of his predecessors when he said that the Church was superior to all earthly powers, a pure example of papal arrogance and a claim to temporal authority which did not evaporate until the year 1870 when the papacy was stripped of its Papal States.

In the year 1054 A.D., the disintegration of the Church began in earnest as the pope in Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople mutually excommunicated each other. It was only under the rule of Pope Paul VI (1963 – 1978), in our day, that these excommunications were removed. What was the core of these problems within the Church? In a word: power. So awakened was the appetite for power that between the years 1095 and 1291 the Church as a military power became a reality. Of this the Crusades are a classic example. They were a hardly laudable and largely economic attempt to recapture the Holy Land. On a spiritual level, the arrogance of power reached its zenith in the year 1229, when the Roman Catholic Synod of Toulouse mandated that the laity could not own a Bible. Indeed, the Bible was forbidden to be translated into the language of the people for fear they would understand it.

From the above it is evident that over the course of years the Church of Rome managed to separate itself from the catholic faith in its head-long rush for power.

In the 11th century, the Orthodox churches severed all connections with the Roman Church. In the 16th century the rise of Protestantism spelled the end of what was left of Christian unity. The rancid Papalism of the period made the Protestant movement an inevitability. In the same century the Church of England likewise became a self-governing entity. Thus, by the end of the 16th century we see the results, the karma, if you will, of the Edict of Milan. The old maxim, “all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” would certainly seem to hold true in this case.

LESSON 3

1. In what book of the New Testament do we find the most information regarding the structure of

the Church?

2. During the time of St. Clement, how was the Church Governed?
3. Was the Church of Rome ever considered to be in primacy over the other churches by the Church Fathers?
4. In what year was the Edict of Milan decreed, and who was the Emperor who ordered it?
5. In what year did the Eastern and Western Churches divide?

LESSON 4

DEFINING CATHOLICISM

You will recall from our previous lessons on the concept of the word “church” that we had recourse to scripture to determine how the Church viewed and saw itself. In Acts 2:37-42 (pages 5 and 12) we saw that there were distinct membership requirements, not only for the individual members of the local churches but also for the membership of those churches in the Church universal. We should see those requirements as a measuring-rod for Catholicism. We will now look at each of those requirements and remark on their application for us, keeping in mind that all good theology is applied theology.

The first of these requirements is “repentance”. Over the course of your life how many times have you heard that word directed to you? One can recall, if one has been raised in Roman Catholicism, the yearly “missions” to parishes by visiting priests whose sole mission in life was to revive parishes. One might also recall that the “repentance” called for was usually very mechanistic. If one was reared or at least familiar with evangelical Protestantism, one would virtually be drowned in the word “repentance”. What actually does this elusive word mean? “Repentance” is the English translation of the Greek word “metanoia”. In its purest, classical Greek sense it means to turn about from a previously held position. We ask the student to firmly bear this in mind: True repentance has nothing to do with guilt-trips over past wrongs, or begging for forgiveness of wrong decisions which have already been forgiven by our loving God. Those notions are no more than a base perversion of the meaning of repentance. It does carry with it the implication that when one accepts a truth in one's life one must work toward conforming conduct with that truth. This rich and life-giving meaning has been narrowed and cheapened by fundamentalist interpretations which bear little or no resemblance to the actual concept. Repentance cannot be related to a checklist of “sins”. Thus, because the Church should be made up of individuals who are constantly undergoing spiritual evolution as a result of inner change (repentance), the church as a whole should be evolving. The implication is clear: Any church which takes a closed-end view of life, creation, morality, social mores, or doctrine is setting itself apart from normative catholic practice. We must not compromise our flexibility in searching for the truth or in implementing it (repenting). The history of the Church of Rome provides us with a classic example of what happens when a church falls into this mind-set. Any church which does not view itself as being flawed is in deep trouble.

The second of our requirements is baptism into Christ. At this point we are concerned with the spiritual concepts underlying this sacrament. We can enter here a definition of that much abused word “faith”. Faith is trust in a person, a set of principles, or a sequence of ideas – not a value system. In this case we refer to trust in God, specifically as manifested in the Christ. We do not refer to the notion of “accepting Christ as your personal Lord and Savior” as proclaimed by many fundamentalist sects. It is, after all, Christ who accepted us. Faith, to us, refers to the loving nature of a God who wants nothing but the best for humankind. Fear of “hell” or eternal separation from God plays no part in real theology.

Our third requirement is the sacrament of Confirmation, the reception of the Holy Spirit. The study of the nature and mission of the Holy Spirit is called “pneumatology”. This is based upon the Greek word “pneuma” which means spirit, breath, or wind. The early Christian community felt itself immediately guided, directed, and moved by the Holy Spirit. We must realize that the Church is

summoned to uniquely recognize the action of the Holy Spirit in life. What is this action? We saw from our definition of the word “ekklesia” that our representing Christ in the world is brought about by the action of the Spirit. The action of the Holy Spirit is directly related to how well the Church, as the Bride of Christ, brings Christ to the world.

Here we would put in a word of caution. We are familiar in our time with the rise of “charismatism” in both the Roman and Anglican communions. This phenomenon initially arose in the Pentecostal wing of evangelical Protestantism, and now it has steeped into the fabric of Catholicism as well. This elitist notion which lives out the idea that gifts of the Spirit are present in only certain Christian circles while being totally lacking elsewhere should never be confused with the actual movement of the Spirit in the Church. The gifts of the Spirit are meant for all the people of God, not just for those who choose to allegedly manifest certain ostentatious “gifts”.

Intimately tied to the movement of the Spirit within the Church is the building of “koinonia”, which is Greek for “community”. We read in the Book of Acts that community-building meant a great deal to the Apostolic Church. The first seven Deacons were ordained by the Apostles to tend to the urgent and immediate needs of the people; the very real needs of food, clothing, housing, and care, while the Apostles gave themselves to the proclamation of the Gospel and to prayer. Achieving community, therefore, requires more than merely tacking on programs or expanding the Church on paper. It implies the concerns of what we have come to know as the “social Gospel”. The church which is unconcerned with the poor, with minorities, with the hungry, and the homeless cannot call itself Catholic, in the fullest sense of that word. “Community” is a rich and complex concept. A parish which has truly come to know itself as a “community”, for instance, will have the same attendance rate in summer as it does in winter. The “Good News” and the living out of community must be proclaimed by deeds.

Our final requirement is participation in the Eucharist, the central act of catholic worship. The mandate to break the sacramental Bread was followed unerringly from the Church's earliest days. Where the Eucharist, as the Body and Blood of Christ, is absent, the sign-value of Catholicism, and indeed of Christianity, is gone. Any church claiming to be fully Christian must, by that definition, be a Eucharistic church that is fed, focused, and nourished on the Body and Blood of Christ.

The above are the pure, core identifiers of Catholicism. Without an active externalization of them no church or congregation can claim to be acting in the spirit of the Early church. Each and every person in Orders should be watchful in seeing that the church lives up to this mandate.

LESSON 4

1. In purely Catholic terms, describe the concept of repentance.
2. What is faith?
3. Describe the sacrament of Confirmation.
4. Define the meaning of Community.
5. What purposes are served by the Eucharist?

LESSON 5

MINISTRY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

In this lesson we will be looking back at the experience of the Catholic faith in the area of ministry. In the process of this, we will attempt to isolate those elements which are related to the ministry of the Church today.

As we begin it should be noted that no branch of the Holy Catholic Church has more interest in the topics of Holy Orders, apostolic succession, and validity than does the Independent Catholic movement. Unfortunately, a large part of that interest stems from an almost quaking insecurity on the part of many Independent Catholic communions. Informed theological training can, thankfully, spare the Church this fate.

If students are at all conversant with current writing on the subject of Holy Orders, they will be aware that there is a great deal of confusion about it. There are a number of theologians today, particularly within the Roman Church who, despite the emphasis of Vatican II on the role and ministry of Bishops, have alluded to the notion that the episcopate, for instance, is an historical accretion, rather than having anything to do with the early apostolic community. They point to the alternating use of the Greek word “presbyteros” meaning “elder” and the word “episcopos” meaning “overseer”. It is their claim that the original ministerial polity of the church was “presbyteral”. In fact, they would have us believe that all Holy Orders stem from the Priesthood. We will attempt in this lesson to clarify the actual situation regarding Holy Orders and their history.

In the earliest history of the church the designation of “presbyter” or elder was a generic term which likely had nothing to do with specific ministerial functions. The presbyters were actually those who were described in the epistles as “the first fruits of the Gospel”, those who are elders in the faith. This did not refer to chronological age but rather to age within the Catholic faith. There was no specific presbyteral order which had a ministerial function within the church at this time. From this pool of presbyters were drawn those who carried out a functional, ordained ministry, namely Bishops and Deacons. The essential and fundamental ministries of the Early Church were recognized in the episcopate and the diaconate. The Deacons served during and after the days of the Apostles as missionaries while the Bishops became successors to the Apostles as pastors of the Church. For scriptural support of this we can look to:

1 Timothy 5:17,19

Let the priests that rule well, be esteemed worthy of double honour: especially they who labour in the word and doctrine: Against a priest receive not an accusation, but under two or three witnesses.

Titus 1:5

For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and shouldest ordain priests in every city, as I also appointed thee:

It is quite clear that the presbyters are neither an additional category of ministers such as Bishops or Deacons, nor a governing council nor college, nor can we say that the use of “presbyter” in those texts is an alternate designation for Bishops. At this point we must note that ordained ministry has everything to do with function. It has never been viewed in the Catholic context as being a possession. This point should be kept clearly in the minds of the students. Those who are chosen for Holy Orders are chosen for a life of service. The Statement of Principles of the Liberal Catholic Church International makes this point clear under the heading of “Individual Liberty” when it states:

Stress is laid upon [the Clergy's] function as ministers of the Divine Sacraments, stewards of the Mysteries of God, ready to place themselves in all ways reasonably at the disposal of those who ask for their help.

As early as the Book of Acts the episcopate and the diaconate were described as ministerial offices within the Church. The Bishop's responsibilities included three major areas:

1. Overseeing and regulating the community's life. This might include correcting abuse and censuring offenders, as in Titus 1:9-11.

Titus 1:9-11

Embracing that faithful word which is according to doctrine, that he may be able to exhort in sound doctrine, and to convince the gainsayers. For there are also many disobedient, vain talkers, and seducers: especially they who are of the circumcision: Who must be reprov'd, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

2. Administering the fiscal resources of the primitive Christian community, from which comes the scriptural emphasis on good household management in 1 Timothy 3:3.

1 Tim 3:3

Not given to wine, no striker, but modest, not quarrelsome, not covetous.

3. The teaching of the Church's doctrine.

The specific ministerial function of the Deacons included missionary work in addition to seeing to the practical needs of the community. There is historical evidence that Deacons formed a special class of teachers who assisted the Apostles, and they were entitled to support from the local congregations for their work. The Deacon's work is, therefore, an extension of the work of the Bishops. It was only later in the history of the Church that the presbyterate emerged as having a specific function. The initial function served by them was as advisors to the Bishops. Later, as the Church began to grow beyond the confines of urban centers, the presbyterate became the functional extension of the Bishop's ministry, which had initially been the job of the Deacons. Within the Roman Church the role of Deacon was allowed to decline as a result of this; this decline has only recently been stopped.

Even within the Independent Catholic Movement, the office of Deacon, more often than not, is viewed as being little more than a stepping-stone to the Priesthood. This sad practice ignores that fact that the diaconate is a specific ministry, not just an office, and that some may be called to exercise that ministry.

From the writings of the Apostolic Fathers we see that there was, by their day, a distinctly three-fold Catholic ministry in place serving the People of God. It is interesting to note that even at this date the Fathers are somewhat vague as to the function of presbyters. These facts, which can be supported by much historical evidence, would seem to disperse the notions of the Roman theologians previously mentioned (page 18). History, tradition, and scripture bear out the fact that the essential ministerial function within the Catholic Church is that of the Bishop. Students should note that the preceding is in no way meant as derogatory to the Priesthood or Diaconate, but is simply meant to clarify the historical status of those offices.

From this study we are able to see that the existence of a three-fold Catholic ministry was indeed intelligible from a very early date. Recall, our whole enterprise involves getting as close as we can to the mind of Christ. We do so, in this case, by carefully picking our way back through time using reliable documentary evidence to see how the early Church understood itself to be living out the wishes and will of the Christ as expressed by them to the Apostles. By the end of this period, a turning-point in the evolution of the Christian ministry was reached, and there begins to emerge clear evidence for such things as fixed ordination liturgies and forms, specific ranks of Priesthood, and the consolidation of dioceses under the authority of Bishops.

LESSON 5

1. The primary clergy of the early Christian Church were _____ and _____.
2. List the responsibilities of a Bishop in the early Church.
3. What were the duties of the early Deacons?
4. Priests were originally known as _____.
5. The three Major Orders of the Church are _____, _____, and _____.

LESSON 6

“CATHOLIC”: THE MEANING

In this lesson we will be continuing our quest for our identity by studying the meaning of the term “catholic”. We might begin by saying that the word is very misunderstood. The student doubtless knows from experience in the contemporary church world that when one says the word “catholic” it has immediate connotations for the listeners. To the ordinary person, it is almost always connected with the Roman Catholic Church. That word has been almost ruthlessly twisted in use, not only in our own day but also commencing in the fourth century.

Earlier in our lessons we pointed to the events of 313 A.D. and the Edict of Milan, whereby the Church underwent a profoundly changed orientation from the pure outlook of the church as “koinonia” to a church comfortable with secular compromise, worldly power, possessions, and institutional emphasis. The church which emerged from this event immediately found itself in a dilemma. Prior to that time there seems to have been no great problem faced in the Church's task of defining itself. It did not undergo a corporate “identity crisis”. But the corrupting element of the marriage of Church and State brought a confusion in this area. With the touch of the imperial hand came the desire for conformity to the imperial will, not merely in externals but in the very content of the faith. Thus, from the outset of this union, the word “catholic” came to be defined as conforming in faith, worship, and polity with the wishes of the Church of Rome. It is not insignificant that but one year after the Edict of Milan - in 314 A.D.- there took place a synod which upheld the Roman date for Easter. On the surface this may seem an insignificant event if isolated by itself. It was hardly insignificant! It was the early and swift encroachment of Catholicism as conformity.

In the year 325 A.D. the first of the so-called “ecumenical” councils took place at Nicaea. In the year 381 A.D. the second council, held at Constantinople, took place. It should be noted that these councils were summoned not by the Church but by imperial authority. The Council of Constantinople was convened by the Emperor Theodosius but one year after declaring Christianity to be the official state religion. From these two councils came the Nicene Creed which is recited every time the Mass is said. Creedal agreement became necessary, codified, locked-in, and narrowed – not for the good of the Faith but to work out conformity throughout the Roman Empire.

The Councils had also been summoned to deal with certain so-called “heresies”, chiefly Arianism, which identified Christ as a created being, neither fully God nor fully man. The empire was less concerned with the theological implications of this than it was with the disquiet that it caused in the imperial harmony. It should be remembered that the Council on Nicaea was not ecumenical by any stretch of the imagination: for instance, no Bishop from the Church in India was present. To make matters worse, the Council was not presided over by a spiritual leader but by the Emperor! From the debates of this council a precise Greek term was settled upon to describe the Christ, “homoousion”, meaning “of one substance with the Father”. Even this precise definition did not end the debate, which continued well after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. Thus, the Council of Nicaea really settled nothing and in some ways simply fanned the flames of disagreement. It was for this reason the Council of Constantinople was summoned, to settle the same set of difficulties.

Catholicism defined as conformity continued to build its influence in the fifth century with the

summoning of the council of Ephesus in the year 431 A.D. and the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451 A.D. The Council of Ephesus undertook the task of attempting to correct Nestorianism and Pelagianism. It also coined the term “Theotokos” in reference to the Holy Lady Mary, meaning “God-bearer”. The Council of Chalcedon was not summoned by the emperor but by Leo I, Bishop of Rome. A question as food for thought: Are we now dealing with a new rise of the Papacy as a move to fill the power vacuum created by the move of the imperial seat from Rome? We will come back to this point later in the lesson. This council produced the “Chalcedonian Formula” which defines the nature of Christ. This formula was little more than patch-work on the formulas of the previous councils. All of this was done in the name of conformity. It is interesting to note that in spite of this, this same council elevated the See of Constantinople to the same level of honor as the See of Rome, precisely for the purpose of blunting the appetite of the Church of Rome for power. Needless to say, Leo I rejected this decision as soon as he became aware of it.

As was mentioned earlier in our lesson, the notion that these councils were “ecumenical”, i.e., universally representative of the whole Church is, at best, a pleasant fiction. We should not fall into the trap of viewing the world in this way, at least historically. There was, for instance, by the time of the Council of Chalcedon, a fully Catholic community functioning in the British Isles, notably in Ireland, predating even St. Patrick, which went unrepresented at these Councils. There is no record of the attendance of any Bishops from India, despite the huge numbers of Christians there. At best, the Councils must be viewed as Synods local to the core of the Roman Empire. The churches not represented, and others, took into consideration the findings of the Councils but hardly considered them normative or binding. It was not until the year 663 A.D. that the Synod of Whitby in England brought the British and Irish churches into conformity with the rest of Western Catholicism. Significantly, the Welsh Catholic Church held out in its full faith and freedom until the twelfth century. This brief history will give the student an understanding of just what the word “catholic” was understood as meaning throughout this period.

We shall now move on to actually defining the word “catholic”. More than once during the course of the student's ministry, the use of the word “catholic” will have to be defended. No word seems to rankle more, and defining the word in Catholic circles is a trying task. Some say that it merely means “universal”. The word has also come to mean the outlook and practice of the historical church as distinct from that of the later sects. The Holy Catholic church, in its many branches, is united in many ways that other branches are not. *Bear in mind that incense and vestments do not a Catholic make.* Catholicism is a theological outlook and philosophy which reflects itself through outward appearances.

The thrust of this lesson is that Catholicism has little to do with conformity and a great deal to do with embracing balance. That is the lesson which emerges from the early Church. The “creed-making” Church which was the product of the Councils said, in short, that Catholicism has more to do with lock-step, narrow-minded thinking. The Church which was most fully Catholic defined the word “catholic” as “embracing” - all embracing. In this the church is universal. What are we seeking to balance in all of this? Truth and Falsehood? Heresy and Orthodoxy? No. Rather, we speak of the balance between orthodoxy (right teaching) and orthopraxis (right practice). This definition insists upon a balance between what the Church says and what the Church does. Our beliefs are outwardly shown and taught through our Liturgy and our social actions both within and without the Church.

Perhaps now the horror of those events which transpired in the fourth century become clear.

The church went on preaching the Love of Christ, that all are equal in Christ; its orthodoxy remained sound with few exceptions. But, its orthopraxis was wildly out of balance. In the Name of Christ the Church of Rome conducted the Crusades and the Inquisition to kill and main fellow Christians...in the name of what? Conformity. Catholicism defined as conformity is antithetical to the balance between orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

Again, Catholicism is an attitude. Our heritage as Catholics is one of right teaching combined with right practice.

LESSON 6

1. After the union of Church and State under Constantine, the word “Catholic” came to mean what?
2. Were the first two Ecumenical Councils convened by the Church?
3. Briefly define the basic theology of Arianism.
4. _____ is the Greek word used to describe Mary, the “God-bearer”.
5. Why were the Ecumenical Councils not truly ecumenical?
6. In Catholicism, we must seek a balance between ortho_____ and ortho_____.

LESSON 7

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LIBERAL?

In this last lesson we will examine the meaning of the word “liberal” as it applies to the outlook of the Liberal Catholic Church. Perhaps a good beginning would be for us to define what is not meant. By “liberal” we do not mean “more liberal than”, for example, “more liberal than Roman Catholicism”, or “more liberal than Anglicanism”, or “more liberal than Eastern Orthodoxy”. While it is true that the Liberal Catholic Church is more liberal in policy and doctrine than all of the previously mentioned, this is only part of a much larger picture and philosophy. The student should bear this in mind: Liberalism is a philosophy and an attitude toward life; it is a way of living; it is a way of thinking; and it is a philosophy through which decisions are made and processes formed.

For a good beginning definition of what liberalism is to be within the Church, we may look to the Liturgy. Under the title of “General Information” we read:

The Liberal Catholic Church is a living Christian church – modernist in that it maintains that the form of religion should keep pace with human growth and enlightenment...

What this line indicates is that the Church is to be evolutionary in nature, not static, and not frozen in time. If a person in Orders claims to be liberal and yet pursues conservative goals within the Church, it should give us all pause to wonder. If the Church claims to be a liberal body, then it is the duty of the Clergy to see that it conducts itself as such.

The true liberal has an important task to accomplish. Because a Liberal Catholic does not view truth as being static, nor acceptance of it as something required, he or she must recreate and reenact a vision of the world. Therefore, a religious liberal must be a philosopher, a student, and a practical person whose faith must square with modern scholarship and personal insight.

Of course, this is never easy. Humans have an amazing tendency to cling to beliefs and societal mores no matter how outdated. Up to a certain point in our spiritual evolution, we seem to fear nothing more than something which appears to be new. These fears tend to shackle the intellect. A Liberal Catholic who truly desires the live the life of a Liberal Catholic must constantly probe, question, and search, discovering both new facts about spirituality and new ideas about old facts.

The liberalism of the Liberal Catholic Church is evident both from its history and also from the documents of the Church. However, it would be a grave error to assume that our liberalism is a product of, or in some way confined to, our “official documents”. Rather, such documents as the Statement of Principles, the Liturgy, and the various Canons and Constitutions of the Church proceed from an attitude of liberality regarding church-ship and theology. The liberalism and modernism of our founders predate any of the documents for which the Liberal catholic church is known. Our own liberalism, if it is to be truly consistent, must be implemented at many levels, both in the Church and in society. To do otherwise would make of the Church a contradiction. *A liberal in name does not a liberal make.* As students progress in their spiritual path, they should be seeking to attain a balance between inner liberality and outward expression.

The attitude of the Liberal Catholic Church extends even beyond the confines of personal life to an attitude toward the world and the cosmos itself. We are not aliens in a “vale of tears”, but are part and parcel of the Universe. Our world is a training ground in our spiritual evolution, not a homeless battlefield where God and Devil must struggle for control over humankind and nature. We must remember that human nature and the nature of the Universe are worthy of our confidence. This confidence allows us to have an open-minded, alert approach to the future. If this attitude ever ceases to exist, whether it be in an individual member, in the local parish, the diocese, the province, or the Church as a whole, then pure and true Liberal Catholicism will, to that extent, cease to exist.

LESSON 7

1. By liberal we do not mean _____.
2. Describe “liberalism” as it is defined in this lesson.
3. True or false: Liberalism in the Church is the product of our official documents. Explain.
4. In the context of the lessons from this book, explain how one may be both “liberal” and “catholic”.