

Ambling with Magistra
Article 1, August 2020

(Based on the Prologue to the *Catechism of Catholic Church*, §§1-25)

Can you really say that you love someone if you do not know them? Men are usually first seized by the physical beauty of a woman: the color of her hair, her style of clothing and the expressions of her face. The man in love is fascinated about the woman he is in love with and seeks to plumb more deeply into her personality: what books or movies she likes, her dreams or desires in life and what she wishes for in a husband. The heart and the mind are connected, where knowledge increases so does the possibility for love, and where love increases so does the passion to know that person more profoundly.

The same holds true in the Faith. Through the virtue of Faith, the mind is raised to a true and certain understanding of God, which is then completed in the virtue of Charity. The deeper our understanding of God in Faith, the more likely Charity is to grow, since we grow more in awe of the grandeur and goodness of God, while the augmentation of Charity continuously impels the search for deeper knowledge of God and His Creation. Charity is not content merely with knowing but also brings forth the desire to do what is pleasing to God. Thus, although Faith is intimately tied to the mind, it also leads to deeds and actions in harmony with belief.

Doctrine is an authoritative formulation of the relationship of Faith, whereby certain aspects of the Deposit of Faith are clarified in order to assist the soul in growing closer to God while also protecting it from erroneous ideas that could sever the relationship entirely. Hence, doctrine is similar to an artist attempting to paint a portrait of a loved one; it is a conscious and purposeful reflection intended to clearly describe and portray God so that others may be drawn to Him, either for the first time or with more intimacy. A child could create a drawing with colored pencils that accurately depicts a figure, though there would be many details that are muddled or entirely missed. Yet the child's drawing could be more true to reality than the work of a master, especially if he alters the painting until the person is unrecognizable. In the same way, even those who do not know each and every doctrine might still have a deep and true life of Faith while those who have more clarity in their concepts could completely mistake what god they worship. But to those who have a choice, the more accurate and detailed representation would be more true and beautiful than an obscure one.

The Church has given us many catechisms throughout the ages that compile doctrine and attempt to express it in a clear and concise way for the use of those teaching or learning about the Faith. These articles will slowly present the basic ideas of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and elaborate on some of them, in keeping with the exhortation of Saint Paul: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things".

A final note, the Church describes the Catechism as “presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's Tradition. Its principal sources are the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and the Church's Magisterium” (CCC §11). That being said, there are different levels of authority with which the Church proposes the various statements of doctrine, which thus must be accepted by the Faithful with varying degrees of assent. Although the Catechism does not explicitly go into this, it does generally cite the authoritative documents from which the teachings come from, thus allowing some investigation into the matter. I will attempt to examine these matters throughout this series, so that we may clearly distinguish what must be believed and where there is room for diverse opinion.

Ambling with Magistra
Article 2, September 2020

(*“Man’s Capacity to Know God” §§26-49 the Catechism of Catholic Church*)

Man is made by God for communion, or living, with Himself. Thus man has a natural desire and capacity to know and love God, whereby that communion is established (as mentioned in the previous article, knowledge and love increase together and draw the knowers and lovers together). Yet, despite this capability, man does not always seek to know God, for man's fallen nature darkens the mind from seeing the truth and inclines him to sin. In spite of all the obstacles thrown up by His creatures, God continues to call and draw man to live in Him through Grace.

In His wisdom and mercy, God created human reason so that, even unaided by the Faith, it is capable of learning that God exists and even some aspects of His Nature. Some of these paths prove God’s existence with an absolute certainty similar to that of a mathematical equation ($a^2+b^2=c^2$), whereas other ones focus on the convergence of many different truths that indicate His Presence (the testimony of family or the coincidences of history). These arguments will be more or less persuasive to different people at different times of their lives although, even if accepted as valid, none of them can cause a conversion to the Faith without the gift of Grace given by God. These proofs bring about knowledge of a God Who is personal rather than a universal force. These proofs may also incline the soul towards belief and remove obstacles that might otherwise be in the way (those that arise from the bias of upbringing in another religion or bad experiences with believers).

Not everyone needs to learn these proofs, whether perfectly or imperfectly, for we also know by Faith all that these arguments can show and even more. Further, arguments from natural reason alone always spring from creation and creatures convey truth about God because they reflect in some finite way aspects of His infinity (God is like the mountains, firm and unshakable). Even so, the language we use to speak about God never fully expresses Him because He is infinitely greater than any creature (God is not a mountain but so much greater than one), which is why we constantly seek to purify our conception of Him by looking at Him from different angles and arguments. Although refinement of these concepts is properly the purview of theologians, everyone should seek to know God more intimately and well, especially by spending time in prayer and reading the Scriptures.

Regarding this part of the Catechism, the Church has defined three teachings through declarations in ecumenical councils, which is one of the highest levels of Church authority. In these Constitutions, erroneous opinions have been condemned with an anathema, which is a formal declaration that a person or idea is not of the Faith and is outside communion with the Church. Thus, working by the *via negativa*, the way of negation, these formulations deny certain propositions and thus point more fully to the truth by stating what cannot be said or believed about God.

The First Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, declared that, “If anyone says that the one, true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of reason: let him be anathema.” As mentioned previously, these declarations safeguard the ability of man through his reason to come to the certainty that God exists and also certain truths about Him. The Faith teaches us that reason is one of the most powerful faculties we possess and through it we can even attain to some knowledge of the highest Being from Whom we come. The Council Fathers continue, “If anyone says that it is impossible, or not expedient, that human beings should be taught by means of divine revelation about God and the worship that should be shown him: let him be anathema”. This statement, however, humbles anyone who might be tempted by the previous assertion to assume that man does not need God or the Faith, that he could create his own religion by thinking about God and what He would want, by reminding us that He had to reveal truths that we could not know merely through natural reason. Even those things that can be gained by mere human reason without the light of Grace are difficult for many people to discover and hence are proclaimed to many more by divine revelation. Further, the congruence of Faith and reason is wonderfully illustrated when the highest objects of reason are confirmed by God Himself through the Faith.

Another statement of an Ecumenical Council declares that Theology can and should be done but also that it cannot, of itself, grant union with God. The Fourth Lateran Council declared in its condemnation of the Abbot Joachim: “For between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them. If anyone therefore ventures to defend or approve the opinion or doctrine of the aforesaid Joachim on this matter, let him be refuted by all as a heretic.” This statement both protects the very possibility of thinking and speaking about God but also circumscribes it in its proper sphere so that our relationship with God does not suffer from error. In the next article, I will discuss God's revelation of Himself through Faith.

Ambling with Magistra
Article 3, October 2020

(“The Revelation of God” §§50-73 the *Catechism of Catholic Church*)

God freely chose to reveal Himself to man so that we might come to full knowledge of the Godhead and be united to Him in love. Since man could not come to Him through his natural powers, God gave to man the truth of Who He is, the Grace needed to assent to it with the mind, and the heart to live according to it. This revelation was made gradually over the course of salvation history so that man might be transformed slowly until he could receive and accept a gift that far surpasses anything he could ever have imagined or hoped for.

Our first parents were given preeminent gifts above that of nature so that they might choose to trust God and learn more about Him. Although they sinned and lost the Graces they had been given, God gave them a promise that sin would not have the last word and that their descendants would be redeemed. Throughout time, God entered into covenants with some men (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) until he formed and chose a people to be His own. Although His people were often unfaithful to the law given through Moses, God remained faithful to them by sending leaders and prophets to further manifest His plan of redemption and reconciliation.

Finally, in the fullness of time and to fulfill all that was said in the Scriptures, the Son became man to heal sinful humanity, to fully reveal the Father, and to bestow upon mankind the means to be united to God forever. Christ is the one, perfect Word and Image of the Father, and He is the fullness of revelation beyond which nothing can be said. All revelation points to Him and is perfectly fulfilled in Him; what has been established by Him will never pass away. Although Christ perfectly shows us the Father, there is much that pertains to God that is not explicitly stated in Sacred Scripture or even the teachings of the Magisterium. Thus, we seek to realize more fully Who Christ is not just in documents and theology but primarily in the living Faith of the Church.

These three statements are made by the Church’s highest authority, an Ecumenical Council called together under the leadership of the Pope. Each statement in every papal or conciliar document does not hold the same weight, as every document has a different intention and, consequently, authority. These particular statements generally reaffirm what has always been believed, though the Council Fathers decided there was good reason to make it explicit so that there would be no question about whether the Faithful must hold this as a truth revealed by God. In a later article, we will ponder the relation between the different truths proclaimed by the Church, as those further from the central mysteries of Faith must be held on account of those closer to it.

These sections of the Catechism primarily cite two documents from the Vatican Councils. In the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, the First Vatican Council declared that, “It is indeed thanks to this divine revelation, that those matters concerning God which are not of themselves

beyond the scope of human reason, can, even in the present state of the human race, be known by everyone without difficulty, with firm certitude and with no intermingling of error.” Thus, Faith is an even more precious gift than the conclusions of reason, since many people would not come to knowledge of God without it, or their idea of God would be flawed. They further stated that, “It is not because of this that one must hold revelation to be absolutely necessary; the reason is that God directed human beings to a supernatural end, that is a sharing in the good things of God that utterly surpasses the understanding of the human mind; indeed eye has not seen, neither has ear heard, nor has it come into our hearts to conceive what things God has prepared for those who love him.” Although the truths that reason can attain about God are awesome and beautiful, they pale in comparison to the truths that only Faith can reveal. Believing in one God and Creator is essential to the Faith but without the Incarnation and Passion we would not know the Holy Trinity nor have a relationship with God through prayer and the Sacraments. The Second Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, explains that, “By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.” This is a reminder to the Faithful that statements and declarations only are beneficial insofar as they introduce men to Christ in a personal relationship, for that is how they come to know God intimately.

Ambling with Magistra
Article 4, November 2020

("The Transmission of Divine Revelation" §§74-100 the Catechism of Catholic Church)

Part 1

Christ chose the Apostles to live with Him during His ministry and entrusted to them the truths necessary for Salvation, which they were to faithfully pass on through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the apostles and their successors have handed on without error the Divine Word, Jesus Christ, through the Sacraments, Tradition and Holy Scripture. All the Faithful have the duty to contemplate and come to know the Deposit of Faith more deeply, for in it and through the virtue of Faith they are united to the Holy Trinity. The authentic Magisterium of the Church, the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him, has the duty to teach and correct while those subject to them are to receive their teaching with docility, for through their teaching Christ is made more clearly apparent to the Faithful.

The authority of the Magisterium, or teaching office, extends as far as the proper description of the Word, or second person of the Blessed Trinity, does. The Magisterium of the Church is a servant of the Word and is bound by Him to describe only Himself, both in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. If we return to the analogy of the painter from the first article, Christ is the model being painted, the Bible and Tradition are the paints and the canvas, while the Magisterium is the artist. In human terms, the artist could make a mistake or not truly convey what the model looks like, but this artist is guided and kept "within the lines" by the Holy Spirit. Even so, the Magisterium is to guard the Deposit of Faith and make sure that it is communicated to the Faithful in its purity. Those proclamations made by the Magisterium with proper intention and explicitly commanding the acceptance of the Faithful regarding the object of our Faith, God, are the highest and most certain declarations, while those only distantly related are to be held by the Faithful in different ways. Theologians categorize these statements as "notes" which should elicit different levels of consent, though we will discuss these levels in the next article.

This part of the Catechism cites two sections of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*. The Fathers declared, "Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence." Here, the Fathers proclaim that there is no contradiction between the Bible and Tradition, rather they,

along with the Magisterium, are moved by the Holy Spirit in order to show forth God to the nations.

To prevent any individual member of the Magisterium from attempting to go beyond what has been handed down to them from Christ and the Apostles, the Fathers wrote, “But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed. It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”

Ambling with Magistra
Article 5, December 2020

(“The Transmission of Divine Revelation” §§74-100 the *Catechism of Catholic Church*)

Part 2

In *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council stated that, “The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name. The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when ‘from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful’ they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.” Thus, the whole body of the Faithful has a sense of the Faith, insofar as they see by Grace with God’s eyes what is of Him and what is not, always in agreement with the authentic Magisterium, as both are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Further, the People of God are moved by Grace to assent to those statements that are in harmony with the Faith, seeing how each relates to Christ. Thus, we must examine what kinds of assent we must give to various declarations.

Catholics ought to keep in mind the saying, *In essentiis, unitas; in dubiis, libertas; in omnibus, caritas* [In essential things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity]. Thus, we must know what sort of declaration commands what sort of assent. Although theologians have given different ways to categorize these, Cardinal Ratzinger [Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI] more recently described the levels of Magisterial teachings and in what way the Faithful are obliged to respond to them.

The Cardinal distinguishes between four levels of teaching, the first three of which bind the Faithful in some way to assent or strive to come to the point where they can accept it, while the fourth one is less weighty: (1) Divinely revealed truths (2) Definitively proposed statements on matters closely and logically related to revealed truth (3) Ordinary teaching on Faith and Morals (4) Ordinary disciplinary teaching on prudential matters.

The first level are those statements which are contained in the Word of God and are declared to be Divinely revealed by the Magisterium. These are infallible and must be assented to with Divine and Catholic Faith. The second level are truths that flow from those of the first level and are needed to expound them faithfully. They are infallibly declared by the Magisterium and must be received with a firm and definitive assent. The Magisterium can define both of these kinds of statements through a solemn declaration (extraordinary) or through repeated teaching by

the entirety of faithful Bishops throughout time (and the acceptance of the body of the Faithful). The third category is to be received with religious assent as it is assisted by the Holy Spirit and definitively pronounced to be held by the Faithful. Again, such statements elucidate or flow from the first two categories. Although Magisterial, these teachings may be inquired into by theologians regarding their timeliness, form or even content, so long as they are docile to proper authority. The last level is prudential and disciplinary, thus they should not be dissented to publicly unless for a very grave reason.

The following examples of various statements are given by Cardinal Ratzinger: (1) The articles of the creed, the Christological dogmas, the Marian dogmas, Christ's institution of the sacraments and their efficacy to impart grace, the Real Presence, the sacrificial nature of the Mass, the divine foundation of the Church, the primacy and infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, the existence of original sin, the immortality of the human soul, the immediate recompense after death, the inerrancy of Holy Scripture, and the grave immorality of murder (2) The teaching of the illicitness of prostitution and fornication, of the election of the Supreme Pontiff or of the celebration of an ecumenical council, the canonizations of saints (dogmatic facts), the declaration of Pope Leo XIII in the Apostolic Letter *Apostolicae Curae* on the invalidity of Anglican ordinations (3) The statements of the Popes during the last century on religious freedom as well as the anti-modernistic decisions at the beginning of this century, especially the decisions of the Biblical Commission of that time. (4) This category would include any of the routine publications of the various organs of the Holy See or the bishops in their dioceses.

Ambling with Magistra
Article 6, January 2021

(“Sacred Scripture” §§101-141 the *Catechism of Catholic Church*)

This section of the Catechism treats of how Catholics should approach Sacred Scripture. Along with Tradition and the Magisterium, Sacred Scripture is part of God’s plan to reveal Himself to mankind. The entirety of the Bible is one book because it speaks of Christ and is fulfilled in Christ. Saint Augustine wrote, “You recall that the one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time.”

God is truly the author of Scripture and gives it His authority while preserving it from error, yet without taking away the freedom and authentic action of the human authors. In a manner analogous to the way we might use an ox to plow a field, God used human authors to write the Bible. The ox remains a true agent and does what oxen naturally have power to do, in this case pulling a great deal of weight, yet the human driving them directs that power to a higher end of his choosing. In a similar manner, God directs, assumes and takes up the written words that the human author inscribes so that He may reveal Himself.

Scripture is venerated in a special way because it is a written word in imitation of the Divine Word, which truly portrays what God wishes to communicate in a manner familiar to mankind yet transcendent and inexhaustible in its depth. In order to understand what God wishes to communicate, the Faithful must pay attention to the rule of Faith as expressed through Tradition and the Magisterium, as well as to what the Sacred authors intend through their writings. As all three are ways to bring Christ to the minds and hearts of men, they agree with each other and aid in unveiling more about Him. Everything that is necessary to be believed for our salvation is found both in Scripture and the teachings of the Church, for God freely gives His salvation to those who search for it.

The Church has defended the inspired writings from the beginning and passed on faithfully the Canon of Scripture in spite of heretics throughout the ages attempting to excise parts of it or add to it alien ideas. Even those who do not accept the Catholic Church as the true Church of Christ accept all or part of the Bible that was preserved and passed on by Holy Mother Church. In order to see Christ fully, the Faithful must see Christ through the lens of the Old and New Testaments together, for the Old reveals the New and the New fulfills the Old. The soul that is deeply imbued with Scripture begins to know Christ more and more.

There are two central doctrines regarding Scripture (both taught with the highest level of authority about Divinely revealed truths): Biblical inspiration and inerrancy. Inspiration, as we have already discussed, is the teaching that God is the true and chief author of Scripture. Biblical inerrancy declares that there is no error in Scripture, as all falsehood is contrary to God Who is Truth. What God, and the Sacred authors, intended to communicate is in the Sacred text, which

includes historical truths among more theological ones, all of which must be interpreted according to three criteria: (1) the content and unity of the entirety of Scripture, (2) Sacred Tradition, and (3) the analogy of Faith (looking to the explicit teachings of the Church to illuminate the text).

The Church has traditionally taught that there are four senses of any reality or event in Scripture: the literal sense and the spiritual sense which itself is divided into the allegorical sense, the moral sense and the anagogical sense. The literal sense describes what words convey as words, as all other texts do. The spiritual sense is the meaning that God applies to the realities described in the Bible, in addition to the literal, so that Christ may be better known. The allegorical sense points to Christ, as the Passover Lamb foretells His Sacrifice. The moral sense prescribes how to act in order to be like Christ, e.g. revealing the necessity of the Seven Sacraments. Lastly, the anagogical sense foretells the endtimes and the four last things. The Church Fathers are our most proficient teachers in learning how to read Scripture through these senses while remaining in the mind and heart of the Church.

Ambling with Magistra
Article 7, February 2021

(“Man’s Response to God” §§141-184 in the *Catechism of Catholic Church*)

This portion of the Catechism treats of Faith as man’s response to Divine Revelation. Whereas previously I wrote about the proper response to the Church definitively proposing a teaching, this section speaks more broadly about how an individual responds to God’s invitation to believe.

When anyone hears a statement concerning something that is not known either partially or fully, he is faced with the choice of believing or assenting to what has been said. There are two factors to weigh in believing or not: the person who proposes something for belief and the reality behind the statement itself. If my best friend tells me that he wants to go to get ice cream, then both his character and what he says agrees with my sense of what is true and worthy of belief. If a known liar declares to me that aliens built the pyramids, then both his character and the reality that he is asserting bring forth incredulity.

In Divine Revelation, both the character and the reality proposed for belief are of the highest order of truth, for God Himself is Truth and that is precisely what He speaks about. Thus, Faith is more certain than any other knowledge that man possesses in this life. Faith is, however, beyond the faculty of man, for the truths that are Divinely revealed are, on the whole, beyond reason’s capacity to comprehend fully. Therefore, Faith is a grace that God alone can give, though it does not destroy the human act of belief but rather elevates it to a supernatural level. When we hear the truths of the Faith, our will, moved by the Holy Spirit, commands the intellect to accept them as spoken by God Himself.

Although the act of Faith can only be brought about through Grace, the intellect does not silently accept these truths but rather continuously probes them to understand them better and to see how they accord with the other truths that are held therein. In a similar way, God provides motives of credibility, such as the miracles and manner of life of the Prophets and the Saints, that what He revealed through Scripture and the Church are true. Through apologetics and a fruitful dialogue with science and philosophy, obstacles that appear to contradict the veracity of the Faith may be removed so that it may more easily be accepted.

Faith is necessary for salvation, for the Lord declares that, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). By Charity, we are united with God but Charity can only be given to someone we know; Faith is how we know God. Moreover, Faith is a foretaste of Heaven. For we now see by Faith only dimly and as in a dark mirror but in Heaven we will be in the Presence of God Himself Who will be the light of all the Saints. We must strive to grow in our Faith and to root out those vices and doubts that weaken it, for the world and the Devil use many means to draw us away from God and towards damnation.

God grants the Grace of Faith, but He ordinarily uses human agents to bring it forth, so that they too may share in the glory of saving souls. For the Apostle writes, “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Romans 14-15). The Church has been commissioned by the Lord Himself to preach the Gospel. She fulfills this mission through evangelizing, teaching and nourishing the Faith. The Church preserves the memory of Christ and the teachings of the Apostles as She hands down to each new generation the truths of the Faith without dilution or error. The act of Faith can only be in and through the Church, for God has given Her to us as a Mother and only through Her do we receive the Sacraments. In Baptism, the catechumen is asked what he seeks from God’s Church, to which he answers that he desires Faith through which he may obtain salvation.

Ambling with Magistra
Article 8, March 2021

(“The Creeds” §§185-197 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church)

As previous articles have stated, we must know someone in order to love them. One of the most precise and concise ways to express the tenets of the Faith are the Creeds, *symbolon* in Greek, particularly those sanctioned by Ecumenical Councils or Tradition. In the ancient world, a *symbolon* was usually a half of a broken object which could be put together with the other half in order to verify the identity of someone. In a similar way, our Creeds make sure that we actually believe the same thing and are saying the same thing about that which is most dear to us, namely God.

The Creeds are summaries of the central truths of the Faith, from which the entirety of Revelation and the teachings of the Church can be drawn out, even though all of it may not be explicitly stated. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem taught his catechumens that, “This synthesis of faith was not made to accord with human opinions, but rather what was of the greatest importance was gathered from all the Scriptures, to present the one teaching of the faith in its entirety. And just as the mustard seed contains a great number of branches in a tiny grain, so too this summary of faith encompassed in a few words the whole knowledge of the true religion contained in the Old and the New Testaments.” The Creeds are an accurate portrayal of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thus they present the essence of the Faith and encourage meditation on its various aspects. Although the words of the Creeds are not always directly taken from Sacred Scripture, they are expressions of it and are inspired and preserved by the Divine Author.

The most famous Creeds are the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Apostles’ Creed and the Creed of the Council of Trent. No official Creed of the Catholic Church can be considered irrelevant or in error, for what is true of God in one age is true through all ages, as He is without change. In general, the Roman Catechism states that the Creeds are laid out as follows: “The first part speaks of the first divine Person and the wonderful work of creation; the next speaks of the second divine Person and the mystery of his redemption of men; the final part speaks of the third divine Person, the origin and source of our sanctification.”

The Creeds express the union of the mind with God through Grace because it describes Who God is and what He is doing to bring about our salvation. Instead of an amorphous blob of emotion and safety, the Creeds help refine the Faith of the believer into a beautiful description of the Face of the Beloved. When we understand and accept the Creeds, our vision of God is clarified just as if we adjusted the prescription of eyeglasses until the image becomes crisp and clear.

Not only are we united to God but we also enter into Communion with the whole Church. We realize that there are others who love the God that we love and in the same way that we do. We no longer are mute but we can speak to one another in order to bring forth more love. When there are disagreements about Who God is and what He desires, the Creeds act as judge so that

we may always be united to God and not to some figment of our imagination. Saint Ambrose summarizes all of this well when he says, “This Creed is the spiritual seal, our heart's meditation and an ever-present guardian; it is, unquestionably, the treasure of our soul.”

Ambling with Magistra
Article 9, April 2021

(“I Believe in God the Father” §§198267 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church)

The Creed centers around God: Who He is and His action in creation, for He is the source of everything as well as its goal. Of the Persons of the Trinity, the Father has a certain priority, though not in time or being, for from eternity He begets the Son and the Holy Spirit proceeds from them both. The Persons of the Trinity cannot be separated, and each act that One does the Others do as well, since they share equally in the same Divine nature. As mentioned before, the entirety of the Faith is about God, for in Him is found life and salvation. In a similar manner, the Creed is just an elaboration of Who God is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The first statement of the Creed is “Credo in unum Deum” [I believe in one God]. Although we believe in a Trinity of Divine Persons, there is only one God. This statement shows that we deny what most other religions claim, namely that there is a multiplicity of gods. There is only one God, and He is also one in substance, nature and essence. These three terms, although they have slightly different connotations in philosophy and theology, express the truth that God is one in what He is.

Although there are three Divine Persons, each are the one God and have the same Divine nature. This is different than the way that one man shares in human nature. Each human person partakes of the same humanity but on the level of a distinct individual being, whereas the three Persons of the Trinity are one God. One should note that human terms and concepts have a great difficulty in expressing the truth about God; He far surpasses anything we can know completely, whether through our senses--through which we naturally gain knowledge--or even through reason. This displays the importance of the Creed as a way to examine the accuracy and truth of whatever theological statements are made.

Even so, God reveals to us Who He is by giving us names we can call Him. This shows us that He is a personal God rather than some impersonal force. A name reveals what a thing is, and a personal name manifests, to some extent, who a person is.

Throughout Scripture, God calls Himself different names (the names of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity are particular to each and thus will be treated of later); among them are “The Living God,” “I Am Who I Am,” “Truth” and “Love.” The first name reminds us that all those who are with the Lord are alive. The second declares that God has no cause of His Being, He exists of Himself and is the source of all Being. Everything that comes from God points to Him by being created; only He Himself is uncreated and existing of Himself. The third proclaims that God cannot lie or go back on His promises, for He is always faithful. Finally, the last of these names conveys to some extent the depth of God: His interior life, His motive for creation and salvation. Although the mere word cannot fully express transcendence of God, it points out Who He is in one of the most efficacious way possible. Further, the name of Love demands that we return that love, in order to be more like Him.

To return His love, we must serve Him and Him alone, for He made us and gave us everything that is good. Again, we know that man was made in His image and likeness and thus we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are not to be distracted by His creatures, even those that are good and can be licitly used, but rather see how they can be used to give honor and glory to Him and for the salvation of souls.