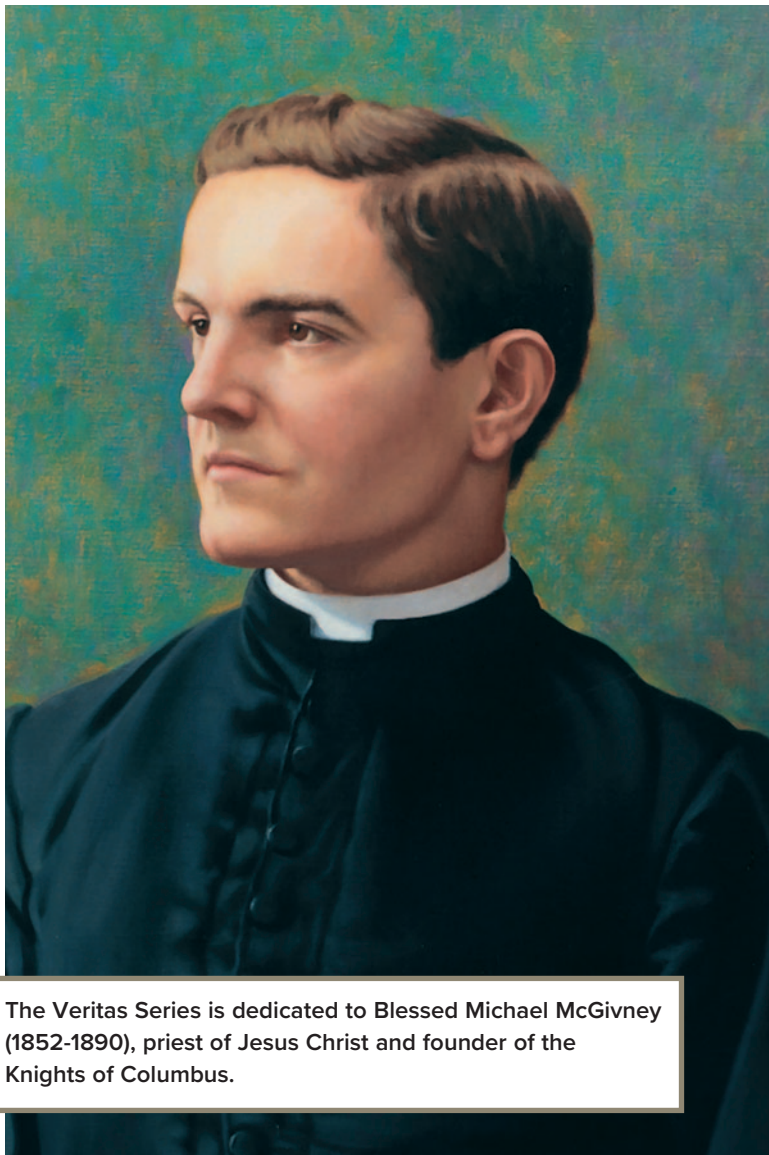




The Risk of Faith

Father Dwight Longenecker



The Veritas Series is dedicated to Blessed Michael McGivney (1852-1890), priest of Jesus Christ and founder of the Knights of Columbus.

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The Veritas Series
“Proclaiming the Faith in the Third Millennium”

The Risk of Faith

BY
FATHER DWIGHT LONGENECKER

General Editor
Father Juan-Diego Brunetta, O.P.
Catholic Information Service
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council

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Write:

Catholic Information Service
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council
PO Box 1971
New Haven CT 06521-1971

www.kofc.org/cis
cis@kofc.org
203-752-4267
800-735-4605 fax

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Jerry's Story

Jerry, the oldest of five children, was brought up in the Catholic faith, and his parents took the family to church every Sunday. He went to a Catholic high school, completed a couple of years at Catholic college in the 1970s and then left to get married and start work. He and his wife, Sally, had three kids, and their home in the suburbs was normal and happy. They brought the children up in the Catholic faith, but were disappointed when, one by one, the kids decided against Catholicism.

The oldest son married a Baptist girl and they started to attend a large community church. Bill, their second son, was in his late twenties and did not seem interested in dating. He held a job as an engineer and never went to church. Their daughter, Tammy, worked with an advertising company and was living with her boyfriend.

Jerry began to wonder what went wrong. He had never questioned the Faith, and simply accepted what he had been taught. Why did all of his kids decide to leave the Catholic faith? They had not forced Catholicism on their children, but neither had they neglected their duty to bring them up in the Faith. Jerry remembered when the boys were in their late teens, and had been going through a rebellious stage and challenging Jerry about the Catholic faith. He had been forced to admit that he did not have all the answers. He simply repeated what his Dad had told him: "Being a Catholic means obeying and submitting to the Church. It's not right to doubt the Faith. Start doubting and you'll end up with no faith at all."

Mike's Story

Mike's family had no faith at all. His parents split up when he was eight, and he was brought up by his mom. When he met Gwen at college, he was impressed with her devout Catholicism. He was bowled over when he met her family. He had never encountered such love, unity, laughter and joy, and he recognized that it was their shared Catholic faith that gave such depth to their lives. Gwen had no trouble convincing him to join the Catholic Church. He went through a course before they got married, and he remained faithful to the Church for their whole married life.

Fifteen years into the marriage, Mike and Gwen started having problems. They had been unable to have children, and when Gwen was diagnosed with cancer, Mike's world started to fall apart. He turned to God for help, but felt that God was not there for him. Just when he needed help from his Faith, he felt abandoned. Gwen's illness lasted two years, and when she finally died, Mike discovered that the Catholic faith he had always practiced with Gwen suddenly meant nothing to him at all.

Tony's Story

For Tony Cataldi, being a Catholic was the same as being a Cataldi. He was Catholic because his entire family was Catholic. He married a good, Italian Catholic girl, and they brought up their children in the Catholic faith. His kids were good kids. They got into some trouble like most, but three out of four of them still went to Mass with him and Frances when they came home for Christmas.

Tony was an usher, belonged to the Knights of Columbus and gave money to the Church whenever Father asked. He and Frances were at Mass every Sunday. His problems began when a colleague at work invited him to his own church one Sunday. Tony put Charley off, but Charley was persistent. He said, "Just come with me one Sunday and give it a try, then come back to our place for Sunday dinner afterwards." Finally Tony gave in, and he and Frances visited the Evangelical Church. Frances actually liked it, and said it was a lot more interesting and friendly than Mass.

Tony was not so sure. He liked the quiet parts of the early morning Mass, and thought all the friendliness at the community church was false. He decided not to return. The problems began when Frances said she wanted to visit the community church again. At work, Charley was beginning to challenge him about the Catholic faith, and he seemed to have some good points. Charley sounded pretty convincing when he said that Catholics worshipped Mary and prayed to saints, but were supposed to pray to God alone. Tony had never thought of it like that, and he had to admit that the pedophile priests and corrupt popes from the past were also pretty tough to defend.

Eventually, Tony and Frances joined a Wednesday night Bible study at the community church. The friendly atmosphere grew on Tony, and he and Frances began to learn more about the Bible than they ever had before. It was Frances who decided that she had had enough of the Catholic Church. She was “re-baptized,” and together they joined the community church, where they had discovered a faith that made a difference in their lives.

The Church in Transition

The Catholic Church is going through a radical transition and the old ways of being a Catholic no longer work for many people, because society has changed. Attitudes have changed; educational styles have changed; our understanding of what the Faith is, and what it should do for us, has changed. Individuals, married couples, schools, parishes and families need to understand this transition the Church is experiencing in order to be able to adapt. First, it must be made clear: the Faith has not changed. The Catholic Church continues to teach the Truth that has come to us from the apostles. What has changed is the fabric of a society where it was once assumed that everyone was Christian, to the society of today, in which many different religions, and many different forms of Christianity, exist side by side. What was once a society where religious affiliation was largely determined by ethnic and social background has become a society where individuals shop for a religion that “works for them.”

Furthermore, today's society has become very skeptical and relativistic. In other words, nobody takes anybody's word for anything. One must question authority, test every theory and make decisions based on first-hand experience. It is because of this trend that people no longer blindly accept the teachings of the Catholic Church, and want to think things through for themselves.

Catholicism has always demanded a high level of commitment from the faithful, but that commitment now needs to be even more informed, positive and involved. Increasingly, cultural Catholicism (Catholicism based upon one's ethnicity) and cafeteria Catholicism (Catholicism where people pick and choose which of the Church teachings they will follow) will not work. They are being replaced by an informed and involved religion of "committed Catholicism." Those who are really committed to the Catholic faith often choose to explore it in new and exciting ways, and are willing to take the "risk of faith." Taking the "risk of faith," however, is demanding and requires some thought about what faith is and how it works.

The Work and Witness of Luigi Giussani

Does "faith" mean simply suspending doubts and questions and blindly accepting propositions one might otherwise reject? An Italian priest named Luigi Giussani struggled with this question as he ministered to college and high school students.

Giussani was born near Milan in Northern Italy. He entered seminary at a young age, and was ordained in 1945. In the early 1950s he requested permission to work in high schools, and taught at the high school level for ten years. During this time he was involved in Student Youth—an arm of Catholic Action. In his booklets, *Christian Life and Presence in the World* and *Experience* he outlined his ideas on the formation of young people. After studying in the United States, in 1969 he returned to Italy to head up a student group which became *Communion and Liberation*. The group became one of the "new ecclesial movements," and he headed the group until his death in 2005.

In his book, entitled *The Risk of Education*, Giussani outlined the problem that existed in Italy in the 1950s. On the surface, the situation for the Church in Italy appeared positive: parishes were efficiently run, there were a good number of priests, religious and sisters, religious traditions were kept alive in the family, religion was required in the schools, and attendance at Sunday Mass held up fairly well. The same situation existed throughout most of the Catholic world. In the United States, strong Catholic communities existed in the old industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Large parish churches served different Catholic ethnic communities—each with their own schools, convents, presbyteries and traditions.

In Italy, Giussani observed that beneath this apparently healthy, Catholic, post-war culture, there was a problem. He saw among his high school students other, more worrying, conditions. His high school students observed the outward forms of the Catholic faith, but he sensed that there was no profound motivation for belief. There were habits and conventional commitment, but no real awareness of the realities of the Faith. Secondly, Giussani noticed that the Faith did not affect the behavior of the high school students. There did not seem to be a real connection between what they believed and how they lived. Third, there was a general atmosphere of skepticism. Beneath the outward conformity there was a growing distrust of all authority—including religious authority. To summarize, Catholic young people regarded the Faith, at best, to be an irrelevant tradition and, at worst, a dangerously outmoded superstition.

Giussani concluded that the problem was in the transmission of the Christian faith. Before higher education became widespread, the Faith was simply passed on to the next generation by reliable authority figures. “Father knows best” was the attitude. Giussani sensed that this was no longer enough. The Faith had to be communicated, not merely as a tradition handed on by the authority figures, but as a reasonable and relevant proposal for life. Giussani recognized that it is natural to question the Faith, and that for the Faith to become real in the lives of its followers, it had to be verified, put into action and experienced.

Rebellion

In learning the truths of the Christian faith, high school students respond in one of three different ways: rebellion, polite conformity, or personal verification. What Giussani discovered about high school students' reactions applies to adults as well. The responses in high school students are more raw, obvious and blatant, but the same three responses can also be traced in the reactions of adults to a faith which they have not made their own.

In the early stages of education, a child has to take things on authority. The elementary school student does not have the mental and social equipment to successfully evaluate and analyze what he is being taught. As a result, elementary educators teach from a position of strong authority. The Faith is taught to young students as something to memorize and accept. To use one of Giussani's images, the teacher is packing a backpack for the child's journey through life. The teacher knows what is best for the journey, and the child simply accepts the loaded backpack.

However, the educational process that works for young children does not work for adolescents. When faced with the claims of Jesus Christ and the demands of the Church, young students sometimes rebel. First of all, the rebellious student reacts against the religious formation that is dished out by the authority figures in an instinctively critical manner. He is faced with the challenge of life and wants to open up the backpack to see if what is inside is reliable. Often this instinct to question and challenge is expressed in a negative way. Instead of encouraging the proper kind of criticism, the educator views the criticism as a threat, and quashes both the question and the questioner. The student then reacts with rebellion.

The student's inner logic responds in this way: "I've been given this religion which I've been told is the greatest thing in the universe, but when I try to question it, I'm told to be quiet and simply accept. If the adults can't take a little criticism, they either can't defend their beliefs, or they must be scared that it's all hogwash. I have to find a philosophy for

life which works, and if this one can't take a little criticism it must be wrong." To extend the metaphor, the teenager fears that his backpack is full of second rate equipment. He needs some serious rock climbing gear for the challenge of life, and he feels as though he has been given string and picture hangers. The rebellious teenager is desperate for security, for sure guidance and a reliable guide for life. The practical result of this thought process is teenage rebellion in belief and in behavior.

When faced with the claims of the Christian faith, adults often respond in the same critical way, but because they have more power and independence, their rebellion simply takes the form of opting out of religion. The teenager is often expected to stay with his religion, and open rebellion is the only way he has of expressing his displeasure, while the adult who doubts the Faith can simply walk away.

Polite Conformity

On the surface, the second response to the critical instinct appears to be more positive. When faced with the instinct to unpack the backpack and see if the contents are reliable, the student declines the process. He decides to accept without criticism everything the adults have said, in a way that could be called "polite conformity." The student does not engage his critical facilities at all, and merely takes the path of least resistance. He or she conforms outwardly to the Faith, but does not engage with it in any real or practical manner. Unfortunately, most religious educators have not only been perfectly content with "polite conformity," but have positively encouraged that response.

The problem with "polite conformity" is that it is superficial. The student becomes the typical religious hypocrite—putting on a false front to please the authority figures while either excusing his own faults, or secretly behaving in an unchristian manner. This reaction to the Faith is actually worse than open rebellion because the student is often fooled by his own façade. He comes to believe that lip service and outward conformity is all that is required, and if he is never challenged to engage his critical instinct in a positive manner, his religious development will

either be stunted or retrograde. Teenagers who behave in this manner often share their parents' superficial commitment to the Church. Seeing them nod to Church teaching, and then simply do as they please, begets the same polite disregard.

Because many religious educators were content with polite conformity, they brought forth a generation of people who kept the outward forms of faith but never made it their own. In their own ways, Jerry, Mike and Tony are good examples of men who accepted the Catholic faith and conformed, but never examined it on a deeper level. They put it on like a garment which they shed once it was no longer needed. Polite conformity may have been enough for a time, but when the challenges of life tested their faith, polite conformity failed them.

Personal Verification

Before the 1960s, the basic thinking about education was that children, and those being instructed in the Faith, should simply accept the truths as presented by the authority figures. The Church, the government, the educators and parents knew best, and education simply consisted of learning facts and learning how to conform and obey. However, in the 1960s, the hallmark of a good education changed to include the processes of critical thinking, experimentation and testing the truth. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church was very slow to pick up on the new educational theories when, for many people, polite conformity to the establishment authority structures no longer worked. People wanted to ask questions and explore the Truths of the Faith for themselves, but too often the Church authorities were not ready for such questioning.

People knew that rebellion was not the answer, but suddenly polite conformity was not the answer either. A third way had to be pioneered. This third way, of personal verification, is the most difficult, but also the most authentic, because it encourages the student's critical instinct. In this response, the critical instinct is seen as positive, and the student is encouraged to rummage through the backpack which he has been given

for the journey of life, and to test the contents to see if they are true and reliable.

What Jerry, Mike and Tony really needed was to find a way to dig deeper into their faith with an open curiosity. They needed to embark on an honest quest for the truth. This process would have helped them deepen their faith, and prepared them for the tests that life inevitably brings. If this quest for the truth is taken, religious education becomes an adventure of faith rather than simply the rote acceptance of religious dogma and practice. For Giussani, religious education is an exciting quest in which the educator and student embark together into the mystery of God.

The Adventure of Faith

The reason most Catholics leave the Church is that they, or their Catholic educators, equate “polite conformity” with the fullness of the Catholic faith. What Monsignor Giussani discovered to be true for high school students applies to Christians at every level of faith. Throughout our lives, Jesus Christ calls us to step out of our comfort zones, to leave the ordinary world of our “fishing nets” and to follow Him. This personal commitment to Christ requires continual risk. Within each one of us there is a deep instinct to learn more about the mysteries of our Faith. Too often, those who settled for “polite conformity” themselves went on to suppress the questioning instinct in their own children, and unwittingly drove them from the Faith. At the heart of the gospel is a radical message that overturns respectable and polite expectations. For the Faith to be real, each disciple has to hear Christ’s call and leave everything to follow Him. Each disciple has to “step out into the deep” and confront the realities of the Faith.

The Religious Sense

Catholic writer Anne Rice returned to the practice of her childhood faith after a lifetime of agnosticism. When she did so, she realized that she could not simply return to her childhood understanding of Catholicism. She had become an educated woman, and she knew she would have to

subject the Faith to her reason and to her education. She admits that she was frightened at the prospect. She thought that science and modern discoveries would contradict her Catholic religion, and that she would have to keep her faith in a separate mental compartment that could never touch the rest of her thought processes. She was delighted to find that the Catholic faith stood up well, and that she could live a life well integrated with both faith and reason. Many people feel that the Faith is too far removed from the modern, rational, scientific and technological world. As a result, they compartmentalize their religious experience. What they do at church simply does not touch the rest of their lives—except in some of their moral decisions. They avoid asking the deep questions because they fear there can be no sensible answers. As a result, they rely upon a belief system which they have inherited from others, and the practice of their Faith becomes nothing more than an unsatisfying adherence to a set of doctrines, moral principles and religious traditions.

Monsignor Giussani, however, says it is possible to explore the Faith in a mature and intelligent way. Furthermore, he says that to be truly and fully human, we must embark on this great adventure of faith, and he proposes three basic tools for the quest.

First: Reality

Giussani believes that the Faith adventure begins with who we are as human beings. Rather than basing the adventure on religious doctrines, moral principles or religious traditions, he says that the starting point is our own human existence. Who are we? Why are we here? Why is it that we can think, feel and question? These most basic elements of our shared experience are the tools for the journey of faith.

First of all, our adventure needs to be based in reality; but what is reality? It is easy to think that reality is what is outside ourselves--that reality is simply those things that can be proved by history, science and technology. However, history, science and technology are increasingly uncertain about the nature of reality. The more historians examine the past, the more complicated it becomes. Furthermore, as scientists examine

the “reality” of the physical world, the more that “reality” shifts and moves away from definition. Science can provide certain facts and statistics, but reality is more than scientific data. Reality involves intangible things such as music, religion, relationships, emotions and thought.

True reality is not simply what can be proved in the physical realm, but neither is reality just an idea or theory. Reality is not a philosophy or belief system. Reality is our own human experience, and the foundation of that reality is that first and most basic experience of being alive, which we all share. We can think. We can love. We can make decisions. Therefore the foundation for our exploration of the Faith is our own experience of life. Because we are alive we can ask the big questions; the fact that we can ask the big questions means faith is not only possible, it is necessary.

The first big question is “How is it possible to ask the big questions?” Why am I aware of myself, my thoughts, my desires, my need for love? This philosophical question can only have one of two answers: “My questions, desires and need for love are random and meaningless,” or “My questions, desires and need for love are part of a plan. I was made this way for a purpose. I have questions because there are answers. I have desires because there are things that will meet those desires. I have the need for love because there is such a thing as love.” This first and most basic condition is what Giussani calls “reality,” and the need for something greater is the reality upon which the whole quest is based.

Second: Reason

The search for reality begins from the reality of our own hearts, and the desire for love and Truth pushes the search forward. Seeking to fulfill desires can be a shallow and emotional business, but Giussani says that even when seeking simple desires, the process is reasonable. Even when merely seeking a loaf of bread to buy or an entertainment to pursue, the search is carried out in a methodical way. We explore, gather evidence,

listen to experts, think things through and attempt to reach a reasonable conclusion.

We often think that "reason" is limited to what can be demonstrated scientifically, or we imagine that "reason" only pertains to what is logical. Giussani says that being reasonable is more basic than that. We use reasoning to draw all sorts of conclusions every day—some of them right and some of them wrong. In many different ways we gather information, consider the facts, discuss the possibilities and come to conclusions. It is the same mature and reasonable process that must be used when exploring the Christian claims.

Every human advance has been made by one person trusting the word of someone else whom he considers to be an authority. In fact, this is an important part of the scientific process. No scientist starts his research from scratch. They work within a tradition, and develop their experiments and theories based on existing knowledge which they have received from other people whom they trust. They work with existing facts, existing theories (some of which cannot be proven scientifically) and assumptions which they take on the authority of those who have gone before. Combined with these known facts, a good scientist often develops new theories based on intuitions and "hunches." These are educated guesses which the scientist then goes on to test and verify. When they take this step they are not negating reason, but moving beyond it.

Giussani says that this is the way true faith works. Faith is the ability to take some things on trust and to move forward in the adventure. Faith combines known facts, theories about things that cannot be proven scientifically, intuitions, hunches and personal verification. This is where the journey of faith becomes exciting. It is only through faith that we are able to step into the unknown and do previously unexpected and unimagined things. Only through faith do we move forward into new realms of understanding and experience. Only through faith can we take giant leaps into new levels of our relationship with God. In this way, faith is not contradictory to science, but is actually a kind of science in itself. In this way, faith actually becomes the climax and high point of reason.

Third: Morality

The word “morality” usually connotes right or wrong behavior. However, Giussani uses the word not only to mean behaving in a correct way, but also to mean being a good person. Furthermore, he uses it to mean pursuing all that is Beautiful, True and Good.

The journey of faith begins with the basic reality of who we are and our basic human needs and desires. We try to fulfill these needs through a reasonable process, and we use our brains to figure out the truth. This is the process of faith. If, however, we are seeking what we desire, how do we know that the search is for something good? Maybe we are just following a human instinct which is, at best, neutral and, at worst, something evil.

The most basic desires we have are good. Sin is a good desire that has been twisted. We sin when we misunderstand the good desire, and seek to fulfill it in a lesser, twisted or untrue way. For example, everyone desires to love and be loved. That is a good desire which is too often turned into lust, and which can quickly ruin our lives and the lives of others. The adventure of faith is a moral quest to discern the twisted pursuit of desire’s fulfillment from its true pursuit. This is the quest of a lifetime: to follow the true and the good in our desires until they bring us to the ultimate Goodness, Truth and Beauty.

Finally, this moral quest is not something optional, but it is something which springs from who we are as human beings. The longing and desire for what is Good, Beautiful and True is at the heart of humanity, and this quest is necessary if we are to be truly and fully human. However, the search demands hard work. The quest is like a forty year trek through the desert, and to accomplish this great quest we need a map to guide us.

Quest of the Spiritual Hero

In every age, and in every human culture, the spiritual heroes are the ones who have set out on the adventure of faith, and their stories provide the map for the quest. The heroes are the ones who left their comfort zones

and embarked on a great adventure. No matter what their culture or religion, the spiritual quest makes the same essential demands, because, as Giussani observed, the desire to discover and to validate the truth is universal.

The need to begin the adventure of faith often hits people when they are unprepared, and frequently comes through the difficult circumstances of life. Unfortunately, most people do not realize that the journey is part of life, nor do they realize that there is already a map for their quest.

The great heroes in the Catholic tradition are the patriarchs, prophets and saints from the Bible and Church history. Each one of them had to leave their ordinary expectations and assumptions behind, and enter a world of danger, adventure and risk. There are some basic steps that each hero has to take, and these basic steps can guide those who are leaving “polite conformity,” to begin the adventure of verifying the truth.

The Ordinary World

The first step of the journey involves leaving behind “The Ordinary World.” In the Ordinary World we have a set of people who support us and expect us to maintain the façade of polite conformity. These people are often our friends and loved ones who want the best for us, but do not want us to venture too far from the comfort zone or to question its values. They make us feel warm and secure, but they have an interest in keeping us from the adventure of faith, for embarking on the adventure presents a challenge to them.

The Ordinary World is comfortable and secure, but it is also dull and deadly. The spiritual hero instinctively has to question the comfortable security of the Ordinary World. He senses that there is more to life, and he is already beginning to search for the truth when called to the adventure of faith.

Hearing and Questioning the Call

The call to adventure upsets the status quo. The hero suddenly faces risk, uncertainty and fear. The call to adventure may come through one specific incident, or it may come through a sequence of events. This is precisely the time when a person might first move forward into a faith that is vital and real, but it may also be the time when he abandons the Faith altogether. According to Giussani's process of reasonable faith, the person in crisis must begin to question in a mature and reasonable way.

For the polite conformer, the call to the adventure of faith seems wrong or even rebellious. To question the faith seems threatening. At this stage many would-be spiritual heroes simply turn back, and content themselves with the religion of "polite conformity," although they know it is ultimately empty and unsatisfactory.

Many adolescents find themselves having to consider the claims of the Christian faith, and this exercise seems too demanding and difficult. It is the same for many adult Christians. The circumstances of life force them to face a challenge that is confusing and frightening. They know they need help in order to answer the call, but do not know where to find it.

Many men hear the call to spiritual adventure at the mid-point of life. In the face of this crisis some men respond by turning back to their youthful answers. They try to look young, act young and to attract young women in immature ways. These men are the Old Fools. Other men fall victim to despair and cynicism. When their old ways of coping no longer work, and they realize that the outward signs of success are worthless, they become angry old men: the Bitter Fools. The wise man is the one who realizes that the crisis is simply the call to spiritual wisdom. He realizes that he is called to an inner adventure which will bring him to his ultimate fulfillment. He knows his own limitations, and in this simple humility he becomes the "Holy Fool."

Resources for the Journey

To embark on this path of wisdom the spiritual hero must have help. At this stage of the journey, the hero discovers the resources he or she needs for the journey. Maybe he joins a Bible study group. Maybe he discovers a spiritual director or embarks on the discovery of a new form of spirituality. Perhaps he takes a course in his religion, begins to read books about the Faith or prays more seriously. Perhaps he feels a vocation to serve others as priest or deacon. Maybe he hears the call to serve in the community and to give back some of what he has gained in the world.

At this stage, the resources for the journey often appear almost miraculously. God brings someone or something across the hero's path as a means of providing the necessary answers which will guide the hero to the next stage. The information gleaned, whether through a mentor or through prayer and study, gives the hero permission to question the Faith, and shows him how to do so in a positive and powerful way. This permission and guidance allows the hero to move on to the next stage in confidence.

The Step of Faith

The next stage of the journey is the step of faith. Just as Peter stepped out of the boat to walk on the waves, the hero must be ready to take the "risk of faith." This is an exciting and difficult thing to do, and the older a person is, the more difficult it is to step into the new world of a faith that is open ended, vital, dynamic and free. Nevertheless, it is at this point that the reality of human existence enters a new dimension in which reason is engaged within the search for all that is Beautiful, Good and eternally True.

The Church's process of education in the Faith should be designed to empower this process. The people of God must be called to their true destiny-- to a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ—always going deeper into the Faith and always moving further into the mystery of the human and divine life of Christ Jesus.

Radical Discipleship

If the Catholic Church is to thrive there must be more men who will lead the faithful in taking the “risk of faith.” Men are able to take risks for their careers, for their businesses and for their sports, but they must also take risks for the Faith.

It may be that difficult and dark days are ahead for the Catholic Church. If not, it is certainly true that each one of us will face dark days throughout life. When facing a mid-life crisis, whether we respond as the Old Fool, the Embittered Fool or the Holy Fool will be determined by our response to the challenge of faith at every stage in our lives. The next generation will only learn how to take the “risk of faith” by observing the significant adults in their lives taking that same risk day in and day out. The demand to step out of our comfort zones, examine the faith for ourselves and embark on the adventure of faith is a demand that is as old as humanity itself. In every age the patriarchs, prophets and saints have heard the call to leave all and follow Christ.

Those who have gone before us inspire and encourage us, and it is our calling to do the same for the ones who will follow. The writer to the Hebrews summed it up best when he wrote

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you many not grow weary or fainthearted” (Hebrews 12:1-3)

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INTERNET RESOURCES

- The Order of Saint Benedict: www.osb.org
- American-Cassinese Congregation: www.osb.org/amcass
- English Benedictine Congregation: www.benedictines.org.uk
- Swiss American Congregation: www.osg.org/swissam

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Father Dwight Longenecker is the author of *St. Benedict and St. Thérèse: The Little Rule and the Little Way* and *Listen My Son: St. Benedict for Fathers*. He is also the author of seven other books on Catholic faith and culture. Ordained under the pastoral provision for married former Anglican clergy, Father Longenecker is a priest of the Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina, and is married to Alison. Father Longenecker and Alison have four children. He serves as chaplain to Saint Joseph's Catholic School in Greenville, South Carolina and is on the staff of Saint Mary's Church, Greenville. Connect with him at: www.dwightlongenecker.com.

“Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response.”

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

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The Knights of Columbus, a fraternal benefit society founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut, by Blessed Michael McGivney, is the world's largest lay Catholic organization, with more than 1.9 million members in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. The Knights support each other and their community, contributing millions of volunteer hours to charitable causes each year. The Knights were the first to financially support the families of law enforcement and fire department personnel killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and to work closely with Catholic bishops to protect innocent human life and traditional marriage. To find out more about the Knights of Columbus, visit www.kofc.org.

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Knights of Columbus, Catholic Information Service
PO Box 1971 New Haven, CT 06521-1971
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