

Building on a Solid Foundation

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*Examining Seven Topics
of the Catholic Faith*

Mr. Daniel J. Daou
Rev. Father Antoine Bakh
Mr. Joseph Bakhos

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*To the mother of our Lord;
may the Son that she bore
be encountered in these pages.*

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Introduction

For two thousand years, the Catholic Church has been bringing Christ to the world, witnessing to his death and resurrection and bearing his life to the faithful through the sacraments. Despite this lengthy tradition, a recent article from the *New York Times Magazine* describes the Catholic faith as the new counterculture in America—and it is!¹ The ancient faith has not succumbed to centuries of worldly pressure but remains an ever new and challenging witness to the truth. For many Catholics the temptation to give in seems overwhelming. It would be so easy to concede on many points of faith and morals. But the consequences can be devastating, as many have learned from experience.

The authors of this book have chosen to concentrate on seven topics of the faith that are hardest hit by today's culture in order to build upon a solid foundation of rock. The intent is to provide the reader with biblical and rational support on topics often questioned. It is meant to invigorate Catholics to renew their commitment to the faith, because, as St. Paul warns us, "Our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness . . ." (Eph 6:12).²

First of all, we need to be convinced that dogma is important.

¹ Jennifer Egan, "Why a Priest?" *New York Times Magazine* Apr. 4, 1999: p. 30.

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Many have the attitude that authority is not necessary. They may feel that Truth is self-evident. They may feel that anyone might simply use common sense to find the truth. It is true that human beings are given a natural capacity to distinguish between good and bad behavior. St. Paul even affirms this observation in his letter to the Romans when he points out that the gentiles have the demands of the law “written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15).

The problem is that human beings often beguile themselves. Many have made a shipwreck of their faith. Dogma is important as long as we care about being conscious of what we are doing. In contrast to the animal world of instinct alone, human beings are given the chance to mature into a state of freedom, where we can learn to distinguish between what we are inclined to do and what we ought to do. St. Paul makes this point very well in his letter to the Corinthians.

When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things (1 Cor 13:11).

In this passage, St. Paul is warning us not to be satisfied with a child’s knowledge of the faith. We must never stop striving to learn about God and the revelation that he imparted to us through the Church. The essence of dogma is clarification. It makes clear what the truth is. Unfortunately, dogma often stands in contrast to the pull of emotions and the tug of what “feels right.” This is why it meets with so much resistance!

When friends or family want to discuss the Eucharist or the pope or our beliefs regarding purgatory or Mary, it is our duty to explain the faith in a helpful way (1 Pt 3:15). Oftentimes, if a person can be convinced that what the Catholic Church teaches about Jesus Christ is true, then belief in the moral teachings will follow. This is the meaning behind Christ’s parable of the house built on a rock. The rock in this parable is the rock of right faith that provides us with stability when we are faced with a strong temptation to sin. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says that

it is our duty to learn fully about the true faith, “so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching . . .” (Eph 4:14).

One way to grow in the faith is to read the Bible with understanding. This book should help towards that end, because it shows that the Bible is an integral part of the Church’s testimony about God. While many people stay away from the inspired writings of the Old Testament because they are so difficult to understand, we have tried to show how these writings reveal how Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s revelation of himself to his creation. They also help us to understand the full meaning behind Christ’s words and deeds in the New Testament.

This book does not attempt to cover all there is about the faith. It serves as a compass to point out the right direction on seven topics that tend to cause confusion. The first chapter deals with the Triune Godhead. The Trinity, in one sense, is the beginning and end of the story, because it is the gift that Jesus came to give. The second chapter on the Eucharist tells how Christ is the Messiah who steps into his creation and gives his life to a dying world as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The next chapter on salvation then explains what we must do to be saved. The fourth chapter on the Church reviews the primacy of Peter, but mainly it explains how we personally are joined to Christ in his Church. He has chosen not to appear to everyone in person but instead has arranged for the Church to imitate his mother in bearing him into the world for the generations to come. Later chapters on Confession and purgatory explain how the stain of sin can be removed so that the life of God can be restored to our souls. Finally, the chapter on Mary shows how she sums up salvation history as well as our vision of the future, when the New Jerusalem (the city of all God’s children) will be drawn fully into the life of the Holy Trinity. Each chapter concludes with an appendix from the early Church Fathers (A.D. 70–450), so that you can trace for yourself the continuity of faith that extends across two thousand years. We hope these

early writings will help you to look back with gratitude to the prior generations of Christians and that the book as a whole will inspire and encourage you to take part in passing on our Catholic faith to the next generation.