

PRESSED UPON FROM ALL SIDES: VATICAN I AND THE PROFESSION OF FAITH

We've all felt on occasion as though the **walls** were **closing** in—pressed from all sides. Young parents dealing with kids, work deadlines, semester exams, to name but three. When Vatican I solemnly opened on December 8, 1869, the **decree** detailed **four** specific reasons for calling together the world's bishops: “for the increase and exaltation of the catholic faith and religion; for the uprooting of current errors; for the reformation of the clergy and the Christian people; for the common peace and concord of all.” In reality, the Church was still reeling from the effects of the French Revolution. There were not a few who were even resigned to the belief that the **papacy** was a dead letter, the Church would be crushed. Nowhere is this more dramatically expressed than in a massive (33x20 foot) **painting** in the Louvre depicting the “Coronation of Napoleon,” at Notre-Dame de Paris. Pope Pius VII idly sits in the background, reduced to little more than a mere spectator on a Roman holiday.

But those same people had apparently forgotten the promise of Jesus that “the gates of hell” would not prevail against the Church. By 1869, the Church was threatened from all sides. From the “secular left” Church **schools** had been **suppressed**, religious congregations expelled. Then again, from the ultra-right wing, the Church was threatened by **nationalism**, such as Otto von Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* in Germany that imposed **state supervision** of Catholic schools and **government** appointment of **bishops**, absent reference to Rome. Does any of **that** sound familiar? Think China in 2022! So, if the Church appeared defensive, she had a right to be! The Vatican I Council Fathers immediately began to fashion a decree outlining the **fundamentals** of the Catholic faith, best described as an extended **profession of faith**.

Less than a month later, it was approved. Comprising only 894 words, it is as **concise** as it is **complete**. The profession is peculiar because it is written as if uttered solely from the perspective of the Pope. “I, Pius, bishop of the Catholic Church, with firm faith believe and profess...” And yet it is a profession of faith for the entire Church. Huh? The profession ends with the pope noting that “this true Catholic faith” which “I now freely *profess* and truly *hold*, is what I shall steadfastly maintain and confess, by the help of God, in all its completeness and purity until my dying breath.” He ends with a commitment to “ensure that all others do the same.” That means us! Thus, this profession should be seen as the articulation of the entire Church. This is not surprising, as it is vital to **reaffirm** basic truths to a **new generation**. This is a key motivation behind the Eucharistic Revival that is happening at the behest of our nation's bishops.

Nothing new was being proposed, but a **return** to the roots. Another **clue** is in the panoply of words or phrases used to express the acceptance of these basic truths: profess, confess, firmly hold, embrace and accept, resolutely assert, affirm, acknowledge, to name just seven. So, why all the reassurances? Simply put, the Church was occupied in facing threats from rationalism and materialism. For rationalists who derived their thought from the teachings of Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, the knowledge of eternal truths could be attained by reason alone. It was vital to enumerate the truths of our faith succinctly. For example: “I *embrace and accept* the whole and every part of what was defined and declared by the holy **council of Trent** concerning **original sin** and **justification**.” It did not attempt to explain the teaching, content to reaffirm earlier teaching anew.

The profession was followed in April of 1870 by the first decree, “Constitution on the Catholic Faith.” It contained four chapters entitled “God the Creator of All Things,” “Revelation,” “Faith,”

and “Faith and Reason.” It was the last that attempted to **engage** modern thinking, the **intellectual challenges** to the faith. In our own day, this approach would engage different, though no less important topics such as gender ideology, human sexuality and indifference to any moral absolutes. We cannot let the moment pass when forces seek to redefine basic human anthropology. As scriptures teaches, “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Has Genesis 1:27 ever been **more relevant** than today?

In my judgment, in addressing the **faith and reason** question, Vatican I articulated one of the most significant conciliar teachings ever promulgated. “Even though faith is above reason, there can **never** be any real **disagreement** between faith and reason, since it is the **same God** who reveals the mysteries and infuses faith, and who has endowed the human mind with the light of reason.” (my emphasis added) Beautifully stated. Truth can never be in opposition to truth, period! Our faith is **not in** contradiction to our reason. Where things became a bit dicey was not in the April 24, 1870 session, but in the discussion of the nature of the Church and papacy that would follow. It would lead to a discussion of **papal infallibility**, a complicated topic, left for a future column. I hope this introduction will “whet your appetite” for more!

- It is our intention that the Cathedral **Saint Cecilia Choir** will resume rehearsals in Mid-September. Under the direction of Dr. Christopher Ganza, rehearsals are slated for Wednesday afternoons from 4:00-5:00 p.m. The choir is open to children in grades 3-8. Spread the word!
- Details have emerged of the union agreement ending the **14-day** Minneapolis **teachers strike** last Spring. If layoffs are needed, the “district shall excess the next least senior teacher, who is not a member of an underrepresented population.” Huh? Both with respect to layoffs and re-hiring, race outweighs seniority. This is ripe for a legal challenge. My take? A teacher’s **performance** in the classroom is what should count.
- According to BCA statistics, **violent crime** increased statewide by nearly 22 % last year, including **201 murders** and 779 carjackings. Aggravated assaults increased by **33.7%**. In Minneapolis, crime has risen in nine of the fourteen categories listed on the city’s website. A combo plate of “defund the police” movement, fewer officers on duty, district attorney policies– all combine to create a volatile mixture.
- **Safety and Security** Envelopes are in the pews. All monies received will be used to **enhance** our Cathedral security, including installing **additional cameras** (\$1000 each) to remove several “blind spots” on campus. We are taking particular care to monitor the parking lot during Masses. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.
- Since I briefly mentioned **Vin Scully’s** death in a recent column, two men approached me to share delightful **anecdotes** about meeting him. One worked at the stadium as a teenager in Los Angeles, the other as an adult bus driver at Spring training towards the end of Scully’s announcing career. Both agreed that he was the real deal– a **true gentleman** who made everyone feel important, not just baseball stars.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector