Part Three

COMMUNICATING THE FAITH
ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS I have been asked to speak to graduate students in theology about teaching techniques. I have invariably excused myself from doing so, for I am embarrassed to admit that, after thirty-three years of preaching and twenty-seven of teaching theology, I have no theory about how to do what I do. I fear that all I have to say to fledgling teachers is a variant of the advice given to beginning actors: speak clearly and don’t trip over the furniture. So, to reflect on how to communicate the faith, I must turn to those whose wisdom about leading others into the tradition I have found most helpful over these years of preaching and teaching. What follows is in two parts: the first being a series of brief “conversations” with four great communicators of the faith from whom I have learned, and the second being a few observations on the task of communicating the faith to young adults, the college-age men and women whom I teach. I hope, even if I have no right to expect, that these observations may have relevance to others as well.

**Conversations**

*Thomas Aquinas*

Saint Thomas offers perhaps the most important observation for consideration in thinking about how to communicate the faith: teaching is necessary but insufficient. In addressing the question of the cause of faith, Thomas observes that there are two requisite elements for faith.¹ The first is that what is to be believed must be proposed to human beings.
This is necessary if faith is to be explicit. Faith is not simply a subjective disposition, a kind of universal credulity ready to accept anything. Faith has content, and since faith refers to the things of God, its content must be revealed by God. To some God reveals the truths of revelation directly, e.g., the apostles and prophets; to others these truths are communicated by the preachers and teachers whom God sends to them. So teaching is necessary for faith. But, Thomas reminds us, there is a second requisite: the person taught must assent to what is taught. He mentions two causes that can bring about the assent of the believer to what is taught. The first, external cause could be an external inducement to belief, such as a miracle. But, Thomas notes, this cannot be the primary cause of the believer’s assent because not everyone who sees a miracle is moved to faith. There must be an internal inducement. Some, e.g., the Pelagians, have mistakenly thought that this internal inducement is an act of the believer himself; a free choice on the part of the one to whom the truths of God’s revelation are taught. This cannot be because the truths are supernatural and, in assenting to them, the hearer is raised above the limits of human nature. So the internal cause of faith must be a supernatural principle accorded to the believer; in short, it is an act of God. Thus, the primary cause of the assent of faith is the grace of God.²

What does a teacher of the faith teach? At the outset of the Summa Theologiae, Thomas indicates that what God reveals is Godself, and the way God reveals Godself is complex. In the very first question of the Summa Thomas announces that his subject is sacra doctrina, which he distinguishes from theologia, which, in one sense of the term, may be included in sacra doctrina.³ "Sacred doctrine" is a very inclusive term in Thomas. It is preeminently Scripture, the record of God’s self-revelation to the apostles and prophets, but Scripture was not simply an inspired book or a collection of texts. For Thomas, as for virtually all medieval Christian teachers, Scripture was embedded in and foundational to a tradition of thought and practice, of prayer and action. Sacred doctrine includes for Thomas not only the Bible but also those interpretations of the scriptural texts that had accrued over the centuries in the Fathers of the church and the tradition of preaching and the liturgical contexts in which texts were read.⁴ Teaching sacred doctrine meant presenting the hearer with the full richness of the church’s prayer, preaching, and practice. Thomas recognized, of course, that not every believer could be taught the full richness of sacred doctrine. As he wrote:

The truth necessary for salvation is summed up in a few brief articles of faith. To characterize the word that we proclaim, Saint Paul cited Isaiah: “A short word shall the Lord make upon the earth” [Rom 9:28, quoting Is 28:22]. Human ends are clarified in a brief prayer in which our Lord instructs us how to pray and teaches us what we ought to desire and hope for. Human justice, which consists in obeying the law, it completes with one commandment of charity: ‘Love is the fulfillment of the law’ [Rom 13:10].⁵

The teacher of the faith is primarily a teacher of Scripture, but Scripture as interpreted in the glossa ordinaria, the standard commentary of patristic exegesis, as well as the liturgical uses to which biblical texts had long been put and their authoritative ecclesial interpretation (usually drawn from conciliar and canonical sources). The essence of this scriptural teaching is encapsulated in the articles of faith, the official creedal statements of the church, the Lord’s Prayer, and the commandments, preeminently the commandment of love. It is not hard to see already developed here what became the typical homiletic cycle of topics by the close of the Middle Ages and so widely used in post-Tridentine Catholic preaching and catechesis — indeed, which still provides the outline for the new Catechism: the creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the commandments. The all-important qualification, however, is that the teacher of the faith, let him or her be ever so qualified and skilled, will not lead the hearer to believe unless the hearer is moved by God to assent to what is taught, i.e., unless the grace of faith is infused. We shall return to this central condition for the communication of the faith. For the moment we will concentrate on the work of the communicator.

Augustine

Augustine was a rhetorician, a professional communicator, by education and profession until his conversion and short-lived retirement. Only a few years after his baptism, he was chosen as a priest of the church in Hippo Rhægium, and three years later became its bishop. Thus he once again found himself in the role of teacher but no longer of rhetoric, now a communicator of faith. Because of his fame as a teacher and preacher, he was consulted on several occasions by people seeking advice on how
to teach the faith truly and effectively. One of those persons was Deogratias, a deacon of the church in Carthage, who around the year 400 requested Augustine’s counsel on how to instruct people with little or no background in Christianity and apparently equally little general education. The busy bishop responded by writing *De catechizandis rudibus*, his treatise on the religious instruction of the unlearned.

Augustine offers advice both on what should be taught and how to teach it. On the subject matter, he is in agreement with virtually all the Fathers of the church, so many of whom were bishops and charged with the ministry of preaching: the source and subject of all Christian teaching is Scripture. Augustine insists that this means that the Christian teacher is first of all to teach a narrative because the Bible is primarily the account of a story beginning with the origin of all things in God and ending in the vision and promise of the union of creatures with God. But when speaking to the kind of audience that Deogratias envisions, the *rudes* or unsophisticated, the teacher ought not to try to give a detailed account of all of salvation history. He should rather give a summary of major events and turning-points in the narrative, selecting these key moments with an eye to being able to connect with them the central issues in the Christian faith which arise from the biblical history. Augustine does not envision a catechism structured according to the articles of the creed. Instead, he presumes that the creed is structured according to the narrative of salvation history. He would be in full agreement with Nicholas Lash who, observing that “the Creed is not a list of theses, a catalogue of chapter headings for a textbook of theology,” has written, “What the Scriptures say at length, the Creed says briefly.” One might think of books 11 through 22 of Augustine’s own *De civitate Dei*, that vast, discursive compendium of Christian teaching, which, while dealing with central doctrines and not a few theological disputes, is basically a history of salvation from creation to the eschaton. *De civitate Dei* is, of course, an instance of what Augustine calls a “longer” or “fuller” narrative, not the summary presentation that is appropriate to the unsophisticated beginners that he and Deogratias so often taught. In either case, however, the organizing principle of the presentation is that of Scripture, namely, the narrative of salvation history out of which doctrines have developed and through which they can be made intelligible to those being instructed in the faith.

How can one summarize salvation history into a shorter narrative and be certain that one is not omitting something essential? Augustine offers a simple hermeneutic for reading and so for teaching the narrative: the centrality of Christ. All the events prior to the Incarnation are recorded in Scripture in order to point us toward the coming of Christ, and everything that has happened since is the fruit of that coming. The key to understanding the Scriptures, and therefore the standard by which the wise teacher determines what to include in his summary narrative, is Christ. But what precisely does this Christocentrism of Augustine’s teaching mean? Why Christ? What do we learn from Christ? Augustine’s (entirely typical) answer is that Christ came both to teach and to demonstrate that God loves us so that we might be moved to love God.

If, therefore, the principal reason for Christ’s coming is this: that human beings might learn how much God loves them, and that they might learn this so that they would be drawn to love him by whom they were loved first and might also love their neighbor according to the commandment and example of him who became our neighbor because he loved them when they dwelt far from him, and if all the divine scriptures written in earlier times were written to signify the Lord’s coming, and if everything written subsequently and established by divine authority is a testimony to Christ and teaches us to love, then it is clear that on the two commandments to love God and to love our neighbor depend not only the whole law and the prophets, which were the only sacred scriptures at the time when the Lord taught, but also all those books about divine matters written later for our well-being and cherished in our memory.

So this is how Augustine understands Jesus’ words that the two great commandments are the key to all the Scriptures. If this is true of the Hebrew Scriptures, he reasons, it is also true of the Christian Scriptures. Indeed, I think that, in the context of his treatise to Deogratias, we are correct in understanding Augustine as claiming that any Christian writing, i.e., the whole of patristic literature, is of permanent value to the extent that it is rooted in the two great commandments. And so this is the Christian teacher’s guide for the summary presentation of salvation history: the whole of the narrative leads up to and foreshadows Christ and flows from him and points to him, and Christ is the demonstration
of how God loves us and how we are to love one another. According to Augustine, this is the sum and substance of the teaching of the faith.

If this is what must be taught, how does one communicate it effectively? Augustine turned to his rhetorical training to answer that question. Around 396, a few years before his treatise written for Deogratias, he wrote the first, second, and most of the third book of *De doctrina christiana*, which in the Middle Ages became one of the most widely read of his works and has had a deep effect on preaching and catechesis in Western Christianity. Thirty years later, in reviewing his work, he decided that it was incomplete and added what are now the end of book three and the whole of book four. "The first three books help in understanding scripture," he wrote; "the fourth shows how one who has understood it should express himself."\(^5\) The first three books are, indeed, the clearest statement of his hermeneutics for scriptural exegesis; the final book is the advice of a rhetorical master on how to communicate with an audience. Paraphrasing Cicero, Augustine tells us that effective communication involves teaching, delighting, and persuading.\(^6\)

One might think that in presenting hearers with what is true expressed clearly and accurately, one has done enough as a teacher. But for the communication of faith more is needed. Pastoral zeal cannot allow the teacher of faith simply to announce the truth, for he or she wants to move the audience to love. That is, as we have seen, the whole point of the Gospel — to kindle in one's hearers love for God and neighbor by presenting the story of God's love for us. So the teacher of faith wants to hold the hearer's attention, wants to delight the hearer. It is not enough to say the truth; one must lead one's hearer to want to listen to the truth. But even that is not enough.

For if the things that are being taught are of the kind which it is sufficient to believe or know, consenting to them simply means admitting that they are true. When, however, something is being taught that has to be done, and is precisely being taught so that it may be done, in vain does the way and style in which it is said give pleasure, if it is not put across in such a way that action follows. It is the duty of the eloquent churchman, when he is trying to persuade the people about something that has to be done, not only to teach, in order to instruct them; not only to delight, in order to hold them; but also to sway, in order to conquer and win them.\(^7\)

Faith is an assent that leads to action, namely, the action of loving God and neighbor. One might say that the assent of faith leads the hearer to love what ought to be loved, for in the first book of *De doctrina christiana* Augustine had drawn his distinction between use and enjoyment, *uti* and *frui*, the key to clarifying our loves. Throughout his writing, however else he changed his mind on issues, he remained convinced that the central reality and driving force of the human person is love. The great question is not whether we love, but what we love. So, delighting the hearer, bringing him to love what he ought to love, is an essential part of the communication of faith. Since love is the impetus to action, persuading the hearer is also essential.

So, the teacher of faith must know the truth that he seeks to communicate, present it in a way that will attract and hold the hearer's interest, and energize and inspire the hearer to act on what he has heard. In short, the teacher must be knowledgeable, interesting, and energizing. As any teacher knows, this is easier said than done. Augustine, however, has an even more interesting requirement for teachers of the faith and a remarkable suggestion about how to achieve it. It is interesting that, in the formal treatise on instructing people in Christianity, *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine omits a subject that had occupied a large part of his attention in *De catechizandis rudibus*. In seeking his advice on teaching the faith, Deogratias had written that he often found himself disappointed in his own performance and discouraged by his hearers' lack of response. This is surely a familiar experience to every teacher of any subject, and Augustine regarded it as sufficiently important to devote a large part (sections 14 to 22) of his response to it. A disheartened teacher lacks what Augustine considered an all-important quality, *hilaritas*.

*Hilaritas*, as Augustine used it, is a difficult word to translate. He takes it from the Latin translation of 2 Corinthians 9:7, which he quotes twice in his reply to Deogratias: *hilarum datorem diligat Deus*, and which we are accustomed to translate into English as "God loves a cheerful giver." "Cheerfulness" does not quite get at what Augustine means, however. A better translation might be "enthusiasm" or "enjoyment." The teacher of faith must be enthusiastic, must enjoy what he or she is doing. Without this quality, it is highly unlikely that faith will be communicated to one's hearers, whether they are worshipers listening to a sermon or students in a classroom.
At some length, Augustine discusses six factors that can sap enthusiasm and hinder the teacher's enjoyment and offers ways to counter them. First, the teacher may find it burdensome to adapt his or her presentation to the hearers' level. This is especially the case when one is instructing rudes, the unsophisticated in the subject presented. Second, one can be dissatisfied with one's own performance as a teacher, feeling that one has not been able to do justice to what needs to be taught. Third, introductory presentations for newcomers to a subject are necessarily repetitive, which may well weary the teacher. Fourth, hearers may not be responsive for one reason or another, which cannot fail to disappoint the presenter. Fifth, the instructor may well have other responsibilities that require time and attention. And finally, teachers are human beings who may well be preoccupied with problems that others have caused them or that they have caused themselves and that have nothing to do directly with teaching at all. While Augustine has interesting things to say about each of these hindrances to enjoyment of teaching, one theme appears in each of his responses: teaching must always be about the hearers, not the speaker. If the teacher is bored by accommodating his or her presentation to the level of the students, he or she should remember that teaching is for the good of the students, not the teacher. If one is unhappy with how one is teaching, one should recall that the students are the ultimate judges of one's performance, not oneself. If teaching fundamentals becomes boring, the teacher should recall that though he or she may have taught the lesson for the umpteenth time, it is the first time that the students have heard it. Teachers should not assume that the way they would respond to something is the way their hearers will respond. The work of communicating to people who do not react in the way we would is precisely the great challenge of teaching. Everyone has a multitude of obligations, but if one is a teacher (and preeminently a teacher of faith), then nothing is a more pressing responsibility than the instruction of one's students. And if one finds oneself distracted by worries and problems, the teacher must re-center himself or herself on the students. The key issue is that teaching is a service, an act of love, and so long as the lover is focused on the beloved and not on himself or herself, the lover cannot fail to be enthusiastic.

Being knowledgeable, interesting, and energizing are not enough in teaching the faith; one must be enthusiastic or, to put it another way, one must enjoy what one is doing. This enjoyment comes naturally from centering attention on those taught, not the one teaching. The teacher cannot help but be enthusiastic about teaching if the students and their needs remain the focus of his or her attention. I do not think it is doing an injustice to Augustine to hear in his advice to Deogratias an echo of Marshall McLuhan's dictum that the medium is the message. One cannot teach the Gospel, which is first and foremost the story of God's love for creatures to which we should respond by loving God and our neighbor, unless one clearly and obviously loves one's students.

**John Henry Newman**

On more than one occasion in his long life, John Henry Newman cautioned his contemporaries in an age entranced by the doctrine of Progress that education is not religion. In his caustic series of essays, “The Tamworth Reading Room,” in which he dismantled the claim that education in the sciences and literary culture would necessarily lead to moral improvement, as well as at length in Part 1 of *The Idea of a University*, he reminded his readers again and again that liberal education has its own ends and purposes that may and should prove of use to religious faith but are distinct from it. This caution must be kept in mind if we are to draw any suggestions about communicating the faith from Newman's observations on education. Nevertheless, Newman is so astute an educator that I think it both appropriate and important to draw from him, especially on two points.

Throughout the nine “discourses” collectively entitled “University Teaching,” which make up the first part of *The Idea of a University*, Newman describes the goal of liberal education in several ways, culminating in the eighth discourse, “Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Religious Duty,” with his often-quoted picture of a “gentleman.” The opposite of a gentleman in Newman's sense of the term is what he earlier in the fourth discourse, “Bearing of Other Knowledge on Theology,” calls “a man of one idea.” The “man of one idea” is the person who absolutizes one way of knowing or one field of knowledge and so devalues or distorts all other ways of knowing.

Hence it is that we have the principles of utility, of combination, of progress, of philanthropy, or, in material sciences, comparative anatomy, phenology, electricity, exalted into leading ideas, and keys, if not of all knowledge, at least of many things more than
belong to them, — principles, all of them true to a certain point, yet all degenerating into error and quackery, because they are carried to excess, viz., at the point where they require interpretation and restraint from other quarters, and because they are employed to do what is simply too much for them, inasmuch as a little science is not deep philosophy.\textsuperscript{15}

In this fourth discourse, Newman is at pains to demonstrate that an education which ignores theology will inevitably lead to some one or more other fields encroaching on properly theological issues and concerns and so pretending to knowledge that they cannot rightly claim. This overextension of fields of knowledge is what produces people of one view.

The goal of university education, according to Newman, is the attainment of a philosophical cast of mind. He describes this as the “only... true enlargement of the mind,” by which he means “the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence.”\textsuperscript{16} The “man of one idea” is an instance of what the lack of philosophy in this sense produces. Because he has no overview, no architectonic principle by which his knowledge and experience can be ordered, a person allows a particular viewpoint, a field in which he is especially knowledgeable or adept, a perspective that he finds particularly comfortable or genial, to become the organizing principle of his life. At worst, he becomes a fanatic; at the least harmful, he will be a crank. The lack of what Newman calls “philosophy” can produce another extreme: the person who believes himself to be “tolerant” because everything is equally valuable — or valueless — to him. Newman gives a striking image:

Perhaps [such people] have been much in foreign countries, and they receive in a passive, otiose, unfruitful way, the various facts which are forced upon them there. Seafaring men, for example, range from one end of the earth to the other; but the multiplicity of external objects, which they have encountered, forms no symmetrical and consistent picture upon their imagination; they see the tapestry of human life, as it were on the wrong side, and it tells no story. They sleep, and they rise up, and they find themselves, now in Europe, now in Asia; they see visions of great cities and wild regions; they are in the marts of commerce, or amid the islands of the South; they gaze on Pompey’s Pillar, or on the Andes; and nothing which meets them carries them forward or backward, to any idea beyond itself. Nothing has a drift or relation; nothing has a history or a promise. Every thing stands by itself, and goes in its turn, like the shifting scenes of a show, which leave the spectator where he was. Perhaps you are near such a man on a particular occasion, and expect him to be shocked or perplexed at something which occurs; but one thing is much the same to him as another, or, if he is perplexed, it is as not knowing what to say, whether it is right to admire, or to ridicule, or to disapprove, while conscious that some expression of opinion is expected from him; for in fact he has no standard of judgment at all, and no landmarks to guide him to a conclusion. Such is mere acquisition, and, I repeat, no one would dream of calling it philosophy.\textsuperscript{17}

The absence of philosophy, then, makes one either a fanatical “man of one idea” or leaves one adrift in a life that is experienced merely as one thing after another. In the former case, all things are related to one another by subordinating everything to one way of thinking, one vision, one perspective; in the latter, nothing is connected to anything else at all. This is reminiscent of Paul Tillich’s description of the idolater and the atheist. Tillich famously described “faith” as “the state of being ultimately concerned.”\textsuperscript{18} An “ultimate concern” makes ultimate demands upon us and promises ultimate fulfillment to us. It is possible — indeed, Tillich thinks, all too possible — to assign ultimacy to something that is, in fact, not worthy of ultimate loyalty and that cannot offer ultimate fulfillment. Such false objects of ultimate concern are idols, false gods that shatter at moments of testing. Virtually everyone has some form of faith in Tillich’s definition of faith, although most often faith turns out to be idolatrous. There seems, however, to be the limit case of atheism. The atheist is the denier of any ultimacy. Nothing is of ultimate concern; everything is equally important — or unimportant. Newman’s “man of one idea” is an idolater; his person who passes through life like a tourist is an atheist.

The teacher of faith obviously does not want his or her hearers to be atheists, but neither should they become people of one idea. Worshiping false gods is not necessarily preferable to refusing to worship...
anything. Thus to communicate the faith to others, the teacher of faith must encourage in his or her hearers the development of what Newman meant by philosophy. This may appear to be an extraordinary demand to make of the teacher of faith since Newman thought such a philosophical cast of mind to be the product, not often achieved, of university education. Indeed, to insist that believers be people of such a philosophical mind-set may well seem elitist. I certainly do not intend to suggest that every preacher and religion teacher must provide his or her hearers with the kind of liberal education that Newman so wonderfully describes in *The Idea of a University*. But it is incumbent upon the teacher of faith to show how the Gospel connects with all the dimensions of the hearers’ lives. As Newman envisioned “philosophy” as an understanding of the interconnections of fields of knowledge so that no one of them trespassed into the proper domain of any other, so the believer must be helped to see how religious faith and its doctrines and practices relate to all the areas of his or her life. Unless the believer has some sense of how Christianity affects and is affected by science and the arts, politics and economics, history and psychology, the believer may well either mistakenly identify religion with one of those fields or subordinate religion to them or assume that religion replaces them. The faith is catholic not only in that it is to embrace the whole world but also in that it embraces the whole human person and the whole of his or her experience. This may be a difficult task, but if it is not addressed, the results of its absence become ever more destructive.

Not every teacher will be able to make explicit the connections between Christian faith and all these dimensions of human experience, of course, and not every student will be able to hear the lesson if the teacher could do so. Few people, however, have been so acutely aware of the many ways in which human beings come to knowledge and to faith as Newman, and he certainly recognized that not all of them were clear and explicit. Indeed, sometimes for some persons the most fruitful ways of knowing and believing are not at all clear and explicit ones. In a remarkable passage from a sermon preached at Oxford in 1840, a passage presaging in an extraordinary way some of the central elements in both *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Newman wrote that reason, defined as “the faculty of gaining knowledge without direct perception, or of ascertaining one thing by means of another,” is “a living spontaneous energy within us, not an art.” I do not think that violence is done to Newman’s point if we read his description of the implicit working of reason as in large part a description of the mental working of human beings more generally, including the ways in which one may be brought to faith.

In this way [reason] is able, from small beginnings, to create to itself a world of ideas, which do or do not correspond to the things themselves for which they stand, or are true or not, according as it is exercised soundly or otherwise. One fact may suffice for a whole theory; one principle may create and sustain a system; one minute token is a clue to a large discovery. The mind ranges to and fro, and spreads out, and advances forward with a quickness which has become a proverb, and a subtlety and versatility which baffle investigation. It passes on from point to point, gaining one by some indication; another on a probability; then availing itself of an association; then falling back on some received law; next seizing on testimony; then committing itself to some popular impression, or some inward instinct, or some obscure memory; and thus it makes progress not unlike a climber on a steep cliff, who, by quick eye, prompt hand, and firm foot, ascends how he knows not himself, by personal endowments and by practice, rather than by rule, leaving no track behind him, and unable to teach another. It is not too much to say that the stepping by which great geniuses scale the mountains of truth is as unsafe and precarious to men in general, as the ascent of a skillful mountaineer up a literal crag. It is a way which they alone can take; and its justification lies in their success. And such mainly is the way in which all men, gifted or not gifted, commonly reason — not by rule, but by an inward faculty.21

In *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Newman described “notional assent” as the acceptance of the truth of an inference and “real assent” as the acceptance of the truth of an experience. Communicating faith is not primarily a matter of supplying propositions and information (although that is part of faith) but rather evoking and naming experiences. The teacher of faith should help his hearers examine their experience and offer categories to them for understanding that experience. Teaching faith is, in a sense, offering people a hermeneutic for interpreting what they experience within and around themselves so
that disparate parts of their experience begin to connect and emerge as a meaningful whole. In terms of the passage from the University Sermons, the teacher of faith evokes and helps interpret the indications, probabilities, associations, received laws, testimonies, impressions, inward instincts, memories — in short, the living experience — of his or her hearers.

Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner's rich reflection on the salvific agency of the word is part of his theology of symbol, one of the central links in Rahner's systematic theology. Entering that reflection is much too vast a project for my purposes. There is one strand of Rahner's thought about the word that will be helpful for my purposes: his discussion of the relationship of the internally and externally spoken word of God, "the essential connexion between the inner word of grace and the external, historical, social ('ecclesiastical') word of revelation." The external word of revelation is the account of salvation history, the proclamation of the apostles, the doctrinal teaching of the church, and the worship of the community; it is the instruction in faith that parents give their children, the homily the pastor preaches, the lesson taught by the catechist, and the lecture delivered by the theologian. The external word is, in short, the concrete expression of God's self-communication that comes to us in countless shapes in our time and place.

The external, historical word expounds the inner one, brings it to the light of consciousness in the categories of human understanding, compels man definitely to take a decision with regard to the inner word, transposes the inner grace of man into the dimension of the community and renders it present there, makes possible the insertion of grace into the external, historical field of human life.

The internal word of God is the grace by which the hearer of the external word is enabled to assimilate to it as the self-communication of God. It is the internal inducement to faith that Thomas Aquinas wrote of as the primary cause of faith. As Rahner wrote, "It is only the inner grace, light of faith and inward connaturality with God, that makes it possible for man to hear the external, historical word of God strictly as the word of God, without subjecting it to the a priori of his own human spirit and thereby debasing it." The fruit of faith, faith that brings forth righteousness that is formed by love and issues in works of love, is the result of the coming together of the internal and external words. The external word gives shape and direction to the inner longing of the human person for life and purpose and hope and forgiveness, i.e., for God. To use Saint Thomas's term, it is what makes faith "explicit." But the external word without the internal word is a lifeless letter without the Spirit. The inner action of God giving Godself to the human person is the power that enables us to receive the externally proclaimed word with the profound "yes" of acceptance and obedience and joy. Without the external word, the internal word remains implicit; it is (to borrow a famous image from Rahner) "anonymous"; it is unnamed. Without the internal word, the preaching and teaching of the faith remains, at most, the imparting of more or less interesting information. "In a word, for the full normal accomplishment of the personal self-disclosure of God to the personally self-actualized man, the inner word of grace and the external historical word come together, as the mutually complementary moments of the one word of God to man." The teacher can never know when the internally spoken word of God is, as it were, aligned with the externally spoken word. There is no way to be certain that the moment is right for the external word to give shape and explicit form to the impetus to assent within the hearer. Therefore the communicator of faith must speak the word "in season and out of season" because he or she can never be sure when the season is. More often than not the teacher or preacher will find that the word of faith that he or she offers is out of season. Augustine warned Deogratias that lack of receptivity in his hearers would be a discouragement. One does not usually associate hilaritas with Rahner, but I suspect that he would have thoroughly understood and agreed with its necessity for the external teaching of the word.

At the risk of disjointedness, I will add one further observation drawn from Rahner that may seem unconnected to his reflections on the internal and external words of God. Although his "fundamental course" in Christian faith may seem to presume a more sophisticated audience than most preachers and teachers of faith face, Rahner maintained that "in today's situation all of us with all of our theological study are and remain unavoidably rude in a certain sense, and that we ought to admit that to ourselves and also to the world frankly and courageously."
complexity of the world in which we live has rendered the rudes in the classical sense of the term virtually extinct. Rudes, as Augustine used the term, were not people who were unintelligent or even uneducated; rather, they were persons of very limited experience, people who had not traveled and who were unaware of other contexts and customs than those they had lived in all their lives. Mass communication and easy transportation have almost eliminated such rudes from our society. No one who has access to a television or who has a radio in his or her car or who reads a newspaper or who has ever glanced at the cover of *Time* or *Newsweek* is a rudis in this classical meaning of the word. Rahner suggests, however, that there is a modern rudis and that the description fits almost all of us. Because of the explosion of knowledge and information and the complexity of the world in which we live, all of us are people of more or less narrow experience. Even the most knowledgeable person in one field is at a loss in other fields. In this sense, any one seeking to communicate the faith today still faces the task of Deogratias fifteen centuries ago in Carthage, that of catechizing the rudes. Rahner's suggestion about how to do so is interestingly very close to Augustine's.

Noting that a reader of a book described as "foundations" of faith and claiming to offer "an introduction to the idea of Christianity" might be surprised not to find it a work of fundamental theology, Rahner explains that, however useful the classical arguments for the credibility of Christian faith may have been at one time and may still be in certain circumstances and purposes, no one has ever claimed that such arguments are necessary for faith or even likely to be conducive to it for most people. For today's rudes, i.e., virtually everyone, a different course is required.

By its very nature the foundational course must necessarily be a quite specific unity of fundamental theology and dogmatic theology. ... [The] particular characteristic of the traditional fundamental theology from the nineteenth century until our own day consists in this, that the facticity of divine revelation is to be reflected upon in a purely formal way, as it were, and, in a certain sense at least, is to be proven... The point of our foundational course in theology is precisely this, to give people confidence from the very content of Christian dogma itself that they can believe with intellectual honesty. In practice it is the case that a fundamental theology of the traditional kind, despite its formal clarity, precision, and cogency, very often remains unfruitful for the life of faith because the concrete person, and with a certain theoretical justification, has the impression that the formal event of revelation is not really all that absolutely clear and certain.29

In other words, the best apologetics is a good dogmatics. The most persuasive communication of the faith is an account of what Christians believe that shows how the various articles of faith hold together and the ways they shape and interact with the many dimensions of human life. This is not far from Augustine's insistence that the narrative of salvation is the content of the teaching of the faith. This is who we are, this is how we got here, this is what we have experienced, and this is where we are going; however different their language and thought forms, Augustine and Rahner would both recognize this as the content of the teaching of the faith.

**Observations**

George Bernard Shaw famously claimed, "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches," and my corollary is that he who cannot teach, teaches others to teach. With that salutary caution in mind, I make bold to offer some reflections on communicating the faith based on these brief conversations with Thomas, Augustine, Newman, and Rahner.

1. No teacher of the faith should have too exalted a view of his or her usefulness. Faith is not something that one can give to another unless one happens to be God. Faith is a theological virtue, i.e., it is a habit infused by God into the heart and mind of the believer. First, foremost, and always, the teacher must remember that faith is a grace, an act of God's self-giving. The teacher can exemplify this grace. He or she may sacramentalize it. He or she may inspire the hearer to desire it. What he or she cannot do is give it to the hearer. Grace is given by God alone because grace is the self-communication of God to creatures.

The teacher cannot be the cause of faith, but he or she may be the occasion of faith. The grace of faith leading to the assent of belief remains formless, implicit, and incapable of communal expression and proclamation without the word of God taught to us by others. The word of faith taught by parents, friends, catechists, pastors, and theologians makes
explicit the impetus toward belief that the Spirit of God enkindles in the heart and mind. The historical, public forms of faith — doctrines, liturgy, forms of prayer, devotional practices — concretize the unspeakable groanings of the Spirit.

Since the teacher cannot cause faith in the hearers apart from the grace of faith given by God, the teacher's first work for his or her hearers must be to ask that this grace be given them. The first duty of a communicator of faith to his or her hearers is to pray for them. It is also the one work at which a teacher is always successful.

2. The teacher of faith is a storyteller. The faith that is taught is a narrative. Even in its most abbreviated form — “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again” — the proclamation of faith is a story. Before he or she is an instructor in doctrines or moral precepts, the teacher of faith tells a story. The best advice about how to tell the Christian story is that of the King of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland: “Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop.” I am convinced that the way to introduce people into the faith is to show them how they fit into a story that, quite literally, begins “in the beginning” and continues without end. I know no greater service that a teacher can do for students (certainly contemporary American students) than to help them discover that history is their biography, that their life-stories began long before their lives, that they are part of a universal narrative.

Obviously this Christian narrative is, in large part, Scripture. But it is a serious mistake to tell this story in such a way that, after reaching its central moment in the life, death, and destiny of Jesus Christ, we jump to the eschaton. The narrative is the story not only of patriarchs and prophets and apostles but also of martyrs and church fathers and monks and reformers, of saints and scholars and builders of communities and servants of the poor. The history of the church is as much a part of the story of God’s self-communication to creation as the history of Israel. To try to teach the faith without teaching the story of the Christian community may not be quite performing Hamlet without the prince, but it is at least comparable to performing Romeo and Juliet without Juliet.

3. For many centuries, Christian preachers and teachers made the narrative of salvation the story of their hearers by employing an allegorical exegesis of salvation history in which types and antitypes answered to one another across centuries. That may not be especially persuasive to hearers today, but the goal of those teachers from Origen to Dante to Erasmus (not a bad lineage, that) remains important: to show how the past of the story of salvation is still present. I suggest that today this should be done by introducing students into conversation with their predecessors in the story.

The communion of saints is a powerful image in our tradition, and one that has multiple meanings (as do all really powerful images). One of those meanings that may be useful to recover is communion as communication or conversation. I have just suggested that to introduce people into the faith is to introduce them into a community that has a history. To be truly a participant in a historical community is to enter into conversation with persons who do not happen to be living at the same time as we are. Many of the most important, interesting, and insightful conversation partners happen to be dead at the moment. Being dead in no way diminishes their value as members of the tradition. In one of my favorite passages from Chesterton, he writes:

Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our father.10

Believers have a right to enter into the ongoing conversation within the tradition that we sometimes call the communication of saints. It is my firm conviction that in communicating faith, i.e., introducing others into the narrative of salvation, we must do so by bringing them into conversation with other believers who are not present to them at this time and place. I do not mean simply that they should be told about them — what they did and thought and said — but rather that they ask them questions and open themselves to be questioned by them, that they fight with them and agree with them on some things and disagree with them on others, in short, that they do all the things people do when they talk with one another. (It will not have escaped the reader, I hope, that
the first part of this paper is a series of four brief conversations with people who do not happen to be breathing at the moment.)

4. All successful communication is conversation. I fear that this may be thought a trendy statement of contemporary adult educational theory. Far be it from me to suggest that communicating the faith is an extended question-and-answer session, still less a matter of breaking into discussion groups. What I am suggesting is at least as old as Plato. I do not think that it is merely a matter of literary form and flair that Plato wrote dialogues. I suspect that it is rooted in something he had learned from Socrates, namely, all real learning takes place in conversation. A homily or a lecture should be as much a conversation as a small group session. The speaker is in conversation with the text and, equally importantly, with his hearers who should be talking back, albeit within themselves: “What does he mean? Do I agree? If not, why? How does this cohere with what I have experienced or heard in the past? What ought I to do if this is the case?” The communicator of faith must be in conversation with predecessors within the tradition and able to introduce others into that conversation.

5. The absolutely necessary requirement for all successful preaching and teaching is joy. Augustine is quite correct: the communicator of faith must be characterized by hilaritas, must be enthusiastic, must enjoy what he or she is doing. As he knew, however, there are many things that sap enthusiasm. Weariness, discouragement, the nagging fear of pointlessness, all can poison one’s joy. And again Augustine is quite correct about the (in my experience) one and only way to hold on to one’s enthusiasm for teaching or preaching: center on one’s hearers. Communicating faith is not about the speaker; it is about the hearers. Preachers or teachers who are passionately devoted to the people in front of them will not necessarily be eloquent or knowledgeable, but they will be convinced of the importance of what they are doing and excited about doing it because those for whom they do it matter so much. At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned that I have little to say when asked to advise graduate students about teaching. For many years the one counsel I have given them is that they must love what they teach and whom they teach.

6. Finally, preachers and teachers of faith should never forget that the primary resource for their teaching lies not in them but in their hearers. The restless heart that Augustine recognized as the longing for God in each and every human being drives us all, some faster, some slower, some by a more direct, some by a more circuitous path, toward God. Preachers and teachers simply give names to the inner experience of their hearers, what Rahner described as the fruitful meeting of the internally and externally spoken words of God. That deep and abiding hunger, that restlessness of the heart, that ache for God is the preacher’s and teacher’s greatest ally and primary resource. My favorite statement both of the privilege of communicating faith and of the ground of confidence for doing so is taken from Wordsworth:

   what we have loved,
   Others will love, and we will teach them how.31