

Four More Letters

Being an attempt to facilitate understanding
within the Church

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)
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Introduction

Dear Reader,

The following are four more letters in the style of this author's "four letters to people who are not in the Church."

These four more are just what the cover of this little book says they are: an attempt to facilitate understanding within the Church.

These letters attempt to put into practice the "secret" of communication which the Church itself teaches: Start by acknowledging all that is already right before you ask for change.

Four More Letters

A Letter from the Laity to Its Clergy

Dear fathers,

First of all, we thank you. We know full well that the Church we love was built by leadership, and that you are striving now to be good leaders. We know that you have made great sacrifices in accepting God's call to be our clergy,

that you have worked hard to be prepared,

and that you have been required to develop a greater variety of talents, and to have knowledge of a greater variety of issues, than has ever been required before.

We understand that you deal with the expectations of people from all walks of life, and that the timing and number of their needs and wants is sometimes more than your time or energy can handle.

We know that you must deal with hypocrisy, superstition, and prejudice all the time, and that you sometimes take the blame for what God Himself has done.

But we know that you love God and love us.

This said, we ask you for your best. Number one, preach to us. Tell us about God. This is the most important thing we need from you, and we are not going to get the truth anywhere else. Help us see how great God is, and how wonderful are the things that we believe. We are eager to be inspired; inspire us. Please don't let a single Sunday go by without trying.

We understand that the Church needs money, and so do the missions, but please don't let talk about these things be the main theme of any Mass. We think the people sitting next to us will be more generous, and even sacrificial, if their faith gives them life and they see giving as a way to show themselves that they believe.

Please don't yell at us because of the people who are not in Church, or talk to us about society's problems without giving us a faithful way to understand them, or something we ourselves can do about them.

We understand that you are balancing many things but please don't make us feel we are adding to your burdens if we ask to speak with you.

We understand that it is hard to hear confessions. Please keep trying to balance between challenging and consoling us, and don't make us feel that the confession of minor sins is wrong if this is the way we are choosing to work on them.

If you explain the reasons for the rules, we will try to understand them.

And please don't get mad because we're watching. We want so much to have people to look up to. (We don't get this on TV.) And if it seems that you in some way appreciate *us*... well, perhaps you don't realize how uplifting this is.

A Letter from the Clergy to the Laity

Dear people of God,

First of all, we your ministers thank you. We know full well that the Church we love was built on your faith, sacred obedience, and generosity. We know that there would be no Church without you.

Please know that we admire your faithfulness, your strength, and your patience.

We are grateful for your trust, your presumption of our best, and your forgiveness when we fail.

This said, we ask you for more: If we are helping your faith to grow, please let us know. This is not only encouraging—and everyone needs to be

encouraged—but it is practically helpful; it helps us to know what’s working.

Please don’t make us beg for money. Remember, the money is not for us. And all of us owe all we can give, not as little as we can excuse. We will try to give you good goals for giving; please pick one and stick with it—even after we stop talking about it.

Please get your doctrine from us. We realize that you hear from many sources; but, realize this also: Most of those who judge Church teaching do not understand it. They do not accept, or even know about, our presumptions, and, like so many modern people, they judge everything based on the way it makes them feel (about themselves at the moment). Please ask questions when you are confused or have doubts. We promise to give you honest answers.

Please be open. Surely you realize that the world has changed so much in our lifetimes. Don’t be upset because the Church is trying to do its job: to make sense of faith for our times. Listen when we talk about the basics, the essentials; try to distinguish these from ways of explaining or celebrating them. Understand: It is *not* a big mind that cannot grow past what my mother taught me.

And please don’t try to pressure us to do what we should not. We understand that you care about your families, and want them to do the right thing. But it is not the right thing to “get” baptized, to “get” married, even to “get” buried in church if you are not a real—this means “practicing”—member. Fake promises ultimately hurt the whole people. If you want your family members to do the right thing, get them to church, at least to ask questions.

Ad Amantem traditionis (to the lover of tradition)

Dear lover of tradition,

This author loves tradition too, and has the highest respect for you, a deep and knowledgeable believer, who loves the Church, and loves for real, with a life that accepts sacrifice whenever this seems right.

I say to you: I understand that your love for the Church implies your respect for stability and consistency, and that you reject dilution and anything else that is less than dignified and worthy of God's people and His guidance of us.

I understand that much of what you have rejected, that calls itself "progressive," does not at all appear to represent progress but rather surrender, or silliness, or worse, faithlessness. I accept that many of us who argue for reform have not done a very good of thinking out the implications of what we suggest, and even less so with the eternal matters which our doctrine handled so well in the light of other days.

But our experience of God has deepened, as it should have. Our idea of God's love has grown, as must be right. And this has brought about tensions that God wants us to resolve so that we can grow still. (Is this not the mission on God's family here on earth?)

Christian Materialism responds to this tension and reconciles our experiences of God and life; it offers us the greatest spiritual gifts we might receive, encourages no evil, and is demonstrable to all who might look!

Yes, it is true that change will be needed, as change has been needed before. And, perhaps, more change will be needed than we are accustomed to justify, but certainly *not* more than Jesus asked of Judaism, and because some accepted this change we are called Christians!

Please look at the virtues still and wholly present, and never better grounded, in what has been suggested. Please remember that it is not a Catholic option to disregard our God-given reason. Please trust God and the ultimately infallible decisions of His Church.

Our faith so wants us to work for the evangelization of the world, that all God's children will be one family in faith. The reforms suggested will make this possible—so much sooner than we expected. (Even before that, it will give us a faith we can explain successfully to our children.) Nothing of the essence is being lost. (See this!) Growth always leaves something behind. (Is this not *your* experience of life?) Our new explanations of the faith will touch your heart if only you will take an honest look. (And how badly did you believe in hell, anyway?)

Praise the Lord

Dear brothers and sisters who love to praise the Lord,

There is no denying that your spontaneity in prayer and freedom to express the fullness of what you really feel is healthy for you and beautiful to God.

Likewise, it is wonderful that you have come to discover the Holy Spirit within you, and behind all that happens.

And how right it is, that because you are so aware of the Holy Spirit in and around us, you also experience the power of faith—the power of faith to make us whole, and make our lives so much happier.

Besides all this, your groups do so well to share joy with others, and the messages you share so often touch the real issues that people face and offer them the response of faith.

In short, charismatic style prayer belongs in the Church, and it has been a good thing for many people.

Of course, like everything else touched by human hands, wherever there is something good, there is also the possibility of misunderstanding and abuse.

With regard to the power of faith: All too often people misunderstand. They think that the power of faith means “if I really believe God can do this

for me, He will do it for me.” Such an idea thinks that faith is something we use to negotiate with God: “I give you my confidence, You give me what I want.” Such an idea fails to recognize that God knows better than we do what we need in order to be prepared to live with Him forever. It forgets that faith in God is faith in God—that God knows what He is doing—the only idea that is sure to give us peace.

With regard to a great sense of the Holy Spirit: Great thing, yes. What is not so great is the idea that the Holy Spirit is some sort force in the air that I can call down and plug into for the sake of some power or experience. What is not so great is the idea everything we feel, or that happens around us, is the result of a deliberate miracle, in order to give us an obvious message or escape from some problem. Please understand. God, in His design of us and His plan for the world, does not need to tweak us or the world endlessly in order to bring about what He wants. And it does not respect our God-given reason—nor the reasonable minds of other people—to suppose a miracle every time something remarkable happens. This was the way of the pre-scientific people of the past, but cannot be the way of the modern, mature believer. Rather, the modern, mature believer knows that God lives in us and is behind all things, but he knows too that not everything that crosses his mind is exactly what God wants him to think or act on, and he also knows that he does *not* know the exact “why” things happen as though everything is an obvious message.

With regard to the virtue of spontaneity and freedom in prayer: The problem is that whenever we are very emotional we are therefore a bit less rational. This leaves us liable to be carried away—something that sometimes happens at prayer meetings with the result that authentic faith in God is discredited, or worse, people decide that God is speaking directly, miraculously to them with a message for other people.

Therefore, please, pray freely from your heart but remain in command of yourself.

Avoid, please, the sort of techniques that do nothing more than provoke emotions without content that in any way endures. Therefore,

Please avoid the misuse of repetition, i.e., the repetition of barely meaningful pieties, and the screaming which is both a sign and a source of someone out of control. It is a sign for obvious reasons. It is a source of

trouble because any innocent person surrounded by others in an extreme state of emotion will have his feelings manipulated whether he likes it or not.

Please avoid the misuse of music, especially unnecessary volume and repetitious strumming or drumbeats which agitate people's minds until they lose control.

Please understand, the same thing takes place whenever there is intense "praying," especially if someone is in top of me, and most especially if there is touching or pseudo-touching. This is not the Holy Spirit being channeled into people by some practitioner. Rather, it is the manipulation of people's emotions and it leaves nothing behind once the manipulation is over. (And there is no such thing as holy fainting.)

For the same reason, please, be wary of what is referred to as talking in tongues. We understand that, in Christian history, as in the history of all religions, people were sometimes overcome with emotion and tried to speak anyway. Later, this created a precedent for people to express emotion without having to say anything. But this was not a particularly good thing to do and it does not advance the cause of credible faith. Even worse is the idea that various kinds of murmuring show that a person has been "possessed" by God, and in some religions saved! But God does not "possess" His children. (Why would He do that?) And He sees no virtue in any person speaking nonsense.

What God wants is that we grow into the most mature faith that we might attain. This is a faith that is rightfully built on our God-given reason and never contradicts it. It is a faith that trusts God and His plan for our lives, and accepts the struggle of our life on earth. And it is a faith that looks to heaven but has no need to escape from earth.

May your groups foster this faith. May these groups—never without a time of good teaching—result in something that lasts. May they praise the Lord for His goodness, while at the same time trusting His goodness and offering to His people nothing less than peace.