

FLAME TEEN HANDOUT

Confronting Contradictions

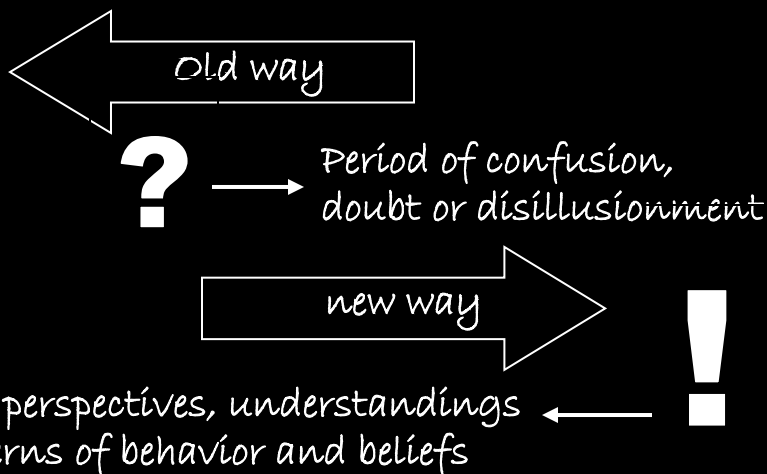
Week 8 – December 5, 2021



CONTRADICTION

- A combination of statements, ideas, or features of a situation that are opposed to one another
- A person, thing, or situation in which inconsistent elements are present
- The statement of a position opposite to one already made.

Change is inevitable. Contradiction can either drive change or result from it.



Common Religious Contradictions

- The faithful pray to a god of peace for assistance in winning wars.
- Many believers fear the god who protects them.
- Many seek personal fortune but pray to a god who blesses the poor.

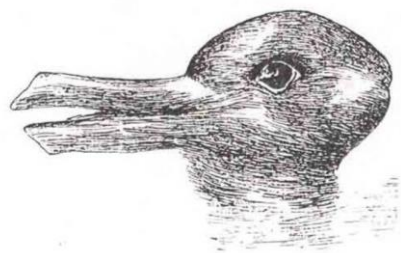
IDENTIFY

THE CONTRADICTIONS YOU SEE IN RELIGIOUS FAITH

Why discuss this?

1. Contradiction is part of everyone's life and occurs in every part of one's life. Wrestling with contradiction causes us to be anxious. Knowing how to cope with contradiction lessens that anxiety
2. Contradictions make us uneasy but are not without value.
 - Jesus himself was seen as a contradiction in his own times
 - Christ's church is called to be a contradictory sign
3. Evaluating apparent contradictions can serve as a catalyst in discovering a deeper more complete truth.
4. "A profound question that confronts religious thought in general is whether or not the idea of "change" may be reconciled with the "eternal" and "perennial" truth" (*Hossein Kamali*, Islamic scholar).
5. Critics have long cited the contradictions of religion as indications of insincerity or possible hypocrisy. Based on my research on the psychology behind religious faith, however, I suggest otherwise... contradictions in religion are not theological errors but efforts to recognize the "varieties of religious experiences."
By embracing contradictory values, religion is teaching that God is for everyone. Inclusion is the greater value. Religion is saying that our common humanity and God trump all that divides us. (*Steven Reiss*, Clinical psychologist)

**What do you see?
Do you see what I see?**



Key elements in discovering meaning

- **Experience**
- **Perception**
- **Context**
- **Available evidence**



one's framework for interpretation

interpretations

Change and develop

- As a result of new experiences
- When new evidence emerges
- Additional perspectives are considered
- Contradictions are accounted for

Can be affected by

- Insufficient experience or knowledge
- New perspectives are rejected
- Bias, including preconceived notions and/or foregone conclusions
- Inaccurate analysis of the evidence or context

A diversity of interpretations and religious practice is, and has always been, part of Catholicism – there is rarely just one Catholic interpretation or way of expressing the faith.



**Diversity is a mark of the Holy Spirit.
Unity within diversity is God's will.**

Catholics believe

- Uniformity does not yield unity; it yields conformity (John Paul II)
- The fullness of Truth resides in God, which God reveals to us in many ways. Truth does not change, but our ability to see and understand it does. (Benedict XVI)
- Until the end of time, the Holy Spirit will be helping the Church to:
 - grow in her understanding of what Jesus said and did;
 - state in new and fresh ways her growing understanding of Divine Revelation.

Tools for dealing with religious contradiction

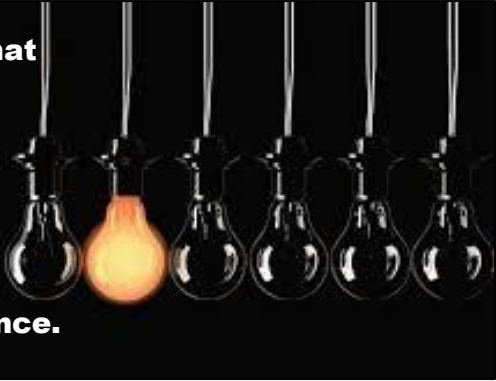
**“It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question.”
Questions are the way we expand knowledge**

1. Ask questions. . .

- ❖ When contradictions appear
- ❖ If multiple interpretations of a passage or teaching seem possible
- ❖ If you do not know the context or the context is unclear
- ❖ To investigate why the teaching was proclaimed in the first place
- ❖ If the wording of the passage or teaching seems puzzling or obscure
- ❖ The passage or teaching denies or negates your lived experience

Questions help...

- Draw out understandings
- Refine current answers or interpretations
- Reveal current answers/interpretations to be deficient or obsolete
- Open paths of inquiry
- Generate curiosity
- Inspire creativity
- Lead to deeper insights
- Engage others
- Influences/alters one's own point of view or another's
- Expose bias



...the faith that grows out of questioning is stronger than the faith born of blind obedience.



Just because someone tells you this is what the Catholic Church teaches does not mean that it IS what the Church teaches. Many times a person is sharing their interpretation of what the Church teaches. Not all Catholics speak with the teaching authority of the Church. Do your own thinking!

2. Share your concerns with others you trust

- ❖ Dialogue brings clarity
- ❖ Different interpretations may shed light on your interpretation
- ❖ Don't settle for easy solutions

3. Recognize truth is deeper than facts

- ❖ Facts are pieces of data, used by researchers to build and/or validate a theory. Though the individual facts may be beyond doubt the way a researcher presents them involves interpretation. This is why even scientists admit that though scientific theories are rigorously tested they cannot be proved with 100% certainty and must always be amended by new evidence or more accurate interpretations of the data.
- ❖ Truth lives in facts, in what we know and can measure and prove. But there is truth beyond that, too. Truth that lies beyond what is provable or not, outside the accepted and the contested.

This is why the majority of scholars in the world claim there are diverse forms of human knowledge and inquiry and they all are “branches of the same tree”, and most educators acknowledge that be exposed to the various disciplines in human knowledge make us better thinkers and more competent in any field we choose to specialize in.

4. Be open minded; Integrate new ideas – rethink when necessary

Religious Dissent - allowed????



Dissent in the church is as old as the argument between St. Peter and St. Paul described by Paul himself in Galatians, so YES dissent is allowed, within certain parameters.

If every Catholic had to agree with everything the Church says or does there would be no Catholics.

Even those who claim there should be no dissent, dissent!

Conservatives who defended the pope's authority and condemned anyone who questioned Pope John Paul II or Pope Benedict XVI, are now freely trashing everything they don't like about the Francis message.

What are the guidelines for challenging Church teaching?

1. Disagreement needs to occur in respectful dialogue.
2. What are you dissenting to? The Catholic Church has a ‘**hierarchy of teachings**’ meaning some teachings are more important than others. If you disagree with the teachings expressed in the Apostles Creed, you probably should not call yourself a Catholic, short of that???
3. Recognize there is a diversity of interpretations on both Scripture and Church teaching within community of the faithful. Perhaps your problem is with a particular interpretation.
4. The intellectual dimension of ecclesial life is just one of its dimensions. In other words, one cannot isolate a teaching of the magisterium to such a degree that all the other components of the life of the church—prayer, worship, community, works of mercy, reading the signs of the times, etc.—are forgotten.
5. Divine revelation is on-going and human consciousness is evolving. The fullness of Truth resides in God, which God reveals to us in many ways. Truth does not change, but our ability to see and understand it, as well as the way it is expressed does.



faith in action

What is one thing you will take away from this session?

What is one thing you will do this week as a result of this session?