

Ecclesiology

Dr. Richard H. Bulzacchelli

CATHOLIC STUDIES
ACADEMY



Ecclesiology

Syllabus & Objectives

This course is intended to provide an overview of the Church's teaching about herself in the context of scriptural and historical evidence. We will consider the relationship between the organizational and social structure of the Church and structures already familiar to the first Christians from Scripture and Jewish tradition. We will also consider evidence in the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers for the continuity between the framework of ecclesial organization and authority present in the Catholic Church today with that of the primitive Church, even during New Testament times. We will discuss questions of ecumenism arising from the differences of the rites present within the Catholic Church, as well as those arising from the fact of division within the Church. This study will include consideration of the difficulty, evinced in the Church's historical experience, of effecting a final reconciliation between all surviving churches of apostolic origin, as well as the ecclesiological differences that arose within the Western theological tradition at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Students who complete this course will be equipped to:

- Present in broad strokes an argument for the continuity and authenticity of the Catholic Church in relation to the Church of the Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament,
- Describe how the Modernist Crisis relates, historically, to the teaching of the First Vatican Council concerning the universal and immediate primacy and infallibility of the pope,
- Identify and Explain several models of the Church, including common models like, Church Militant, Pilgrim Church, People of God/New Israel, Kingdom of God, and Body of Christ, Bride of Christ, and Universal Sacrament of Salvation, identifying strengths and weaknesses inherent in these models,
- Define the terms “koinonia ecclesiology” and “Eucharistic ecclesiology,” and explain the essential relationship between these ideas.

Ecclesiology

Lectures

The following lectures will be provided in this course:

1. The Problem of the Church in the Twenty-First Century: Where Things Stand Today
2. The Roots of the Church's Formal Structure from Ancient Judaism through the Apostolic Fathers
3. The Primacy of Peter in the New Testament and Its Connection to Ecclesial Indefectibility and Infallibility
4. The Petrine Office in Relation to the Broader Hierarchy and Magisterium from the Council of Jerusalem through the Papacy of Leo I, and the Point of Departure Between Rome and the East
5. Protestant Ecclesiological Models of the Reformation Period: Church-Dividing Differences from Catholic Teaching
6. The Modernist Crisis, the First Vatican Council, and the Modern Model of the Papacy
7. Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus, the Question of Ecumenism in the First Half of the Twentieth-Century, and the Controversy Over the Teaching of Leonard Feeney
8. The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council: Old Models and New
9. Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue Since the Second Vatican Council: The Good, the Bad, and the Unfortunate
10. False Models of the Church from Neo-Marxist and Post-Modernist Liberationist Theologies
11. One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: The Enduring Dogmatic Content in the Essential Models of the Church
12. The Church of the Future: What Will It Look Like?

Note on Suggested Readings: Students should remember that suggested readings for this course are just that: suggestions. Our lectures cover numerous thinkers and historical periods, so the suggested reading list can be extensive, particularly for certain lessons. In some cases, for the convenience of the student, a recommended reading is given with a hyperlink to an available online source, which can be accessed free of charge.

In any event, students need not consider this reading a "requirement," and they should remember that lessons and readings can be taken at a pace that matches the student's own schedule. The mystery of the Church is a difficult areas of theological study, inclusive of numerous enduring controversies between the Catholic Church and our separated brethren and continuing live debates internal to the Catholic Church. The outcome of these latter controversies is yet to be determined, as is the resolution, in the course of providence, of the controversies of the past. Our intention here is modest: to provide a survey of the development of Catholic teaching and theological opinion on the topic of the Church from the time of the primitive Church to the present day, familiarizing the student with the most important figures, concepts, controversies, and definitions pertaining to this broad question.

The Problem of the Church in the Twenty-First Century: Where Things Stand Today

Suggested readings: Pew Research has conducted numerous surveys and analyses of religious belief and practice in the United States and Europe, and across the globe. I recommend exploring their website. In particular, I recommend as a start, the following links. Explore these surveys and consider their implications in light of your own experience of Life in the Catholic Church and your awareness of what is happening in the Church today, both in the United States and globally.

“U.S. Catholics
Open to Non-Traditional Families,” September 2, 2015.

David Masci and Gregory
Smith, “Pope’s
proclamation, like views of U.S. Catholics, indicates openness to
nontraditional families,” April 8, 2016.

Caryle Murphy, “What’s a sin? Catholics don’t always agree
with their church,” September 25, 2015.

Gregory Smith, “Just
one-third of U.S. Catholics agree with their church that Eucharist is body,
blood of Christ,” August 15, 2019.

How would you characterize the situation of the Church in the twenty-first century? Is the theological reality of the Church as a medium of the gospel of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, a vehicle of conversion, a locus of rebirth to eternal life, and a supernatural presence in the world, readily discoverable to observers who seek to escape the mereness of their natural condition, or is this theological reality difficult to see even for those who wish to see it? If the latter, what factors do you think contribute to that obscurity?

The Problem of the Church in the Twenty-First Century: Where Things Stand Today

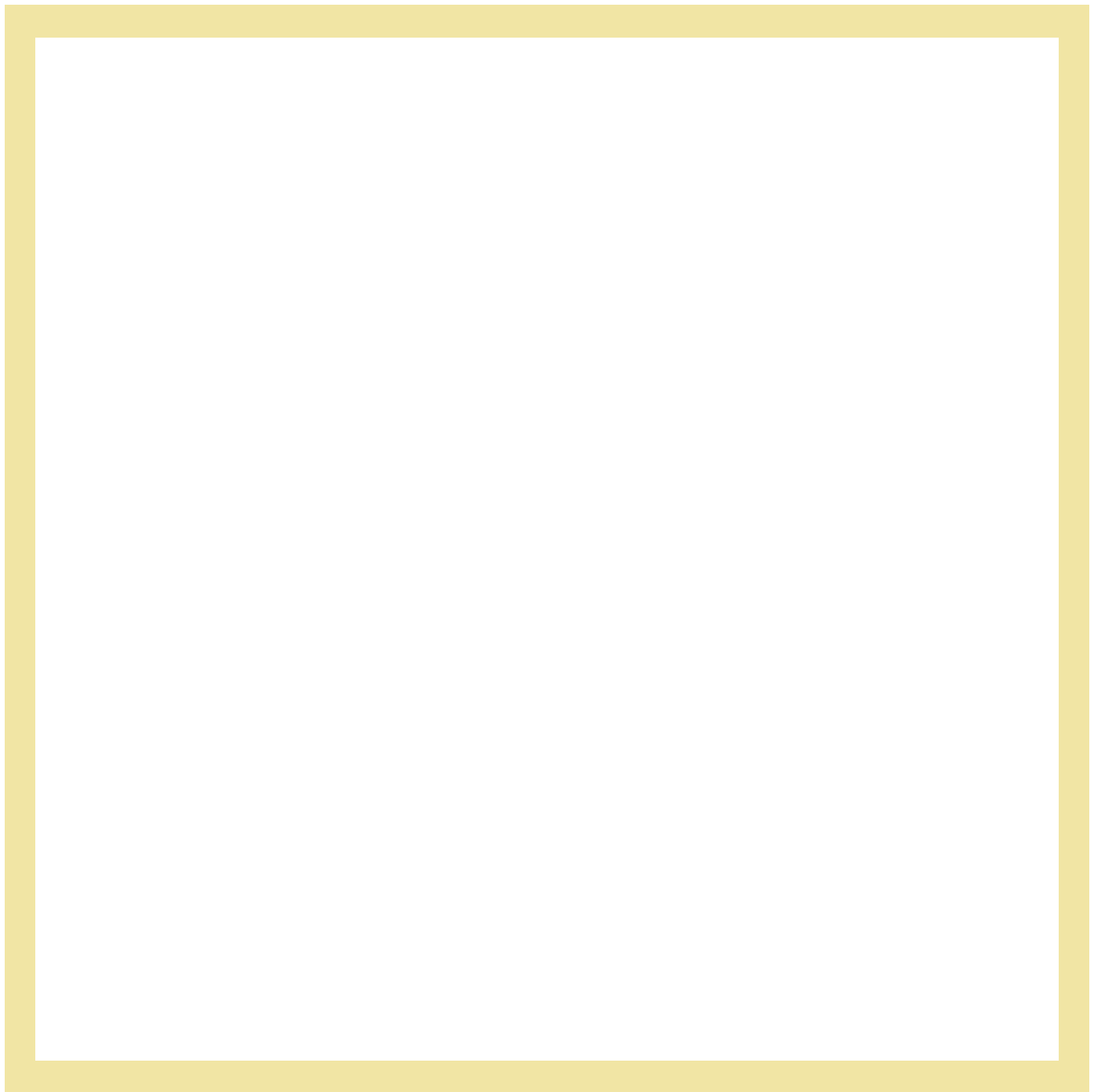
If you have been a life-long or long-time Catholic, have you ever considered leaving the Church because of something you saw in the Church as disturbing, disappointing, incongruent, difficult to reconcile with what you understand the Church to be?

Alternatively, if you are a convert to Catholicism, how does your general conversion relate to your embrace of the Church? At a practical level, what authority if any, and how extensive, does the Church exercise in the world today?

The Church of today is not exactly the same as it was at the time Christ established it, but according to Catholic teaching about the Church, there are some things that can be changed and others that cannot, in the Church. Do you think anything about the Church needs to be changed, not that the Church might conform to contemporary sensibilities, but that the Church might more clearly answer its primary and inalterable mission, given by Christ himself? Do you wish to see it? If the latter, what factors do you think contribute to that obscurity?

The Problem of the Church in the Twenty-First Century: Where Things Stand Today

Notes:



The Roots of the Church's Formal Structure from Ancient Judaism through the Apostolic Fathers

Suggested readings: The Gospel of Matthew (in toto).

3 John

St. Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letters (available here) to: the Smyrnaeans, the Philadelphians, the Trallians, the Magnesians, the Ephesians, and Polycarp.

What is the typological significance of the number twelve as the number of the apostolic circle? What evidence do we see in the New Testament that this number was seen to be important in the primitive Church, in the time before the Church's missionary expansion at the hands of SS. Paul, Barnabas, and others?

What role do the feeding miracles play in Matthew's depiction of the authority of the twelve? How do these miracles help us understand the content of the Sermon on the Mount or other teachings of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel through the lens of ecclesial structure?

The Roots of the Church's Formal Structure from Ancient Judaism through the Apostolic Fathers

Where does the idea of the “episkopos” or “bishop” come from, and what is it understood to mean?

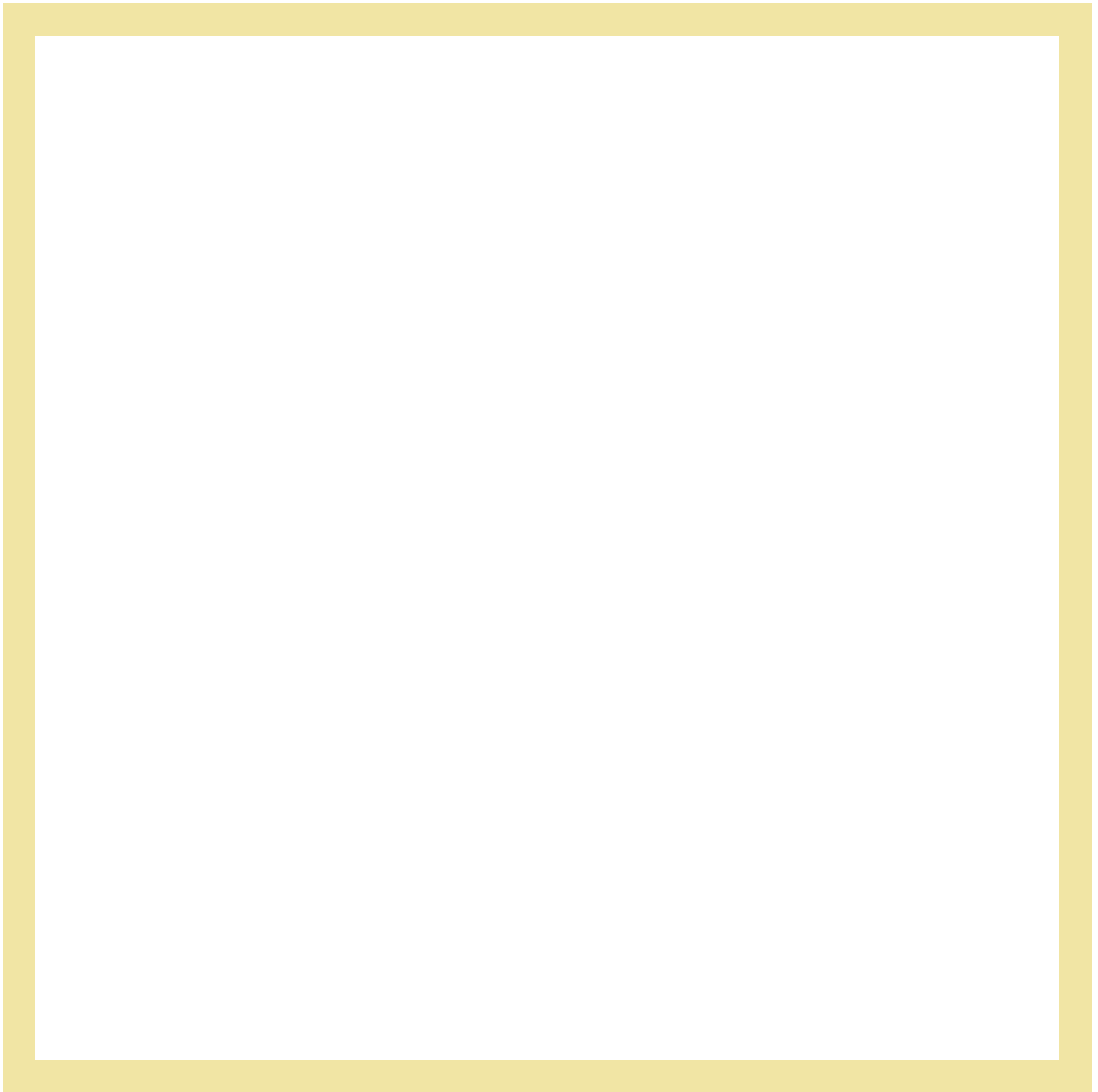
What, do the words *synagogos* and *ecclesia* mean, and what is the relationship between them, both historically and linguistically?

What evidence do we find in the Third Letter of John for a highly-developed hierarchy by the end of the First Century? How does the evidence in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch strengthen the view that a hierarchical structure much like that extant in the Church today had existed already in the immediate post-apostolic age?

What further evidence does Clement supply for the assertion that the Church's post-apostolic hierarchy was understood from the very beginning as existing in divinely ordained continuity with the authority Christ had granted the Apostles?

The Roots of the Church's Formal Structure from Ancient Judaism through the Apostolic Fathers

Notes:



The Primacy of Peter in the New Testament and Its Connection to Ecclesial Indefectibility and Infallibility

Suggested readings:

The Gospel of Matthew (review).

What is the significance of Jesus' macarism ("blessing") of Peter after Peter confesses Christ to be the Messiah and the Son of the living God? What is meant by the giving of the "keys to the Kingdom of Heaven," and what Old Testament reference is being made in this passage?

What is meant by the authority to "bind and loose," and what significance, if any, is to be found in the fact that while this power, which Christ gives to Peter, is given to all of the Twelve, but the Jesus never extends his saying about the "keys" to anyone other than Peter? What does Petros mean?

The Primacy of Peter in the New Testament and Its Connection to Ecclesial Indefectibility and Infallibility

What do we learn from the fact that Jesus never addresses Peter as Peter, but only as Simon, even though he explicitly refers to him as Peter in Matthew 16:18? What is the meaning of the name Simon and why is that name meaningful in the context of his specific role in the apostolic circle?

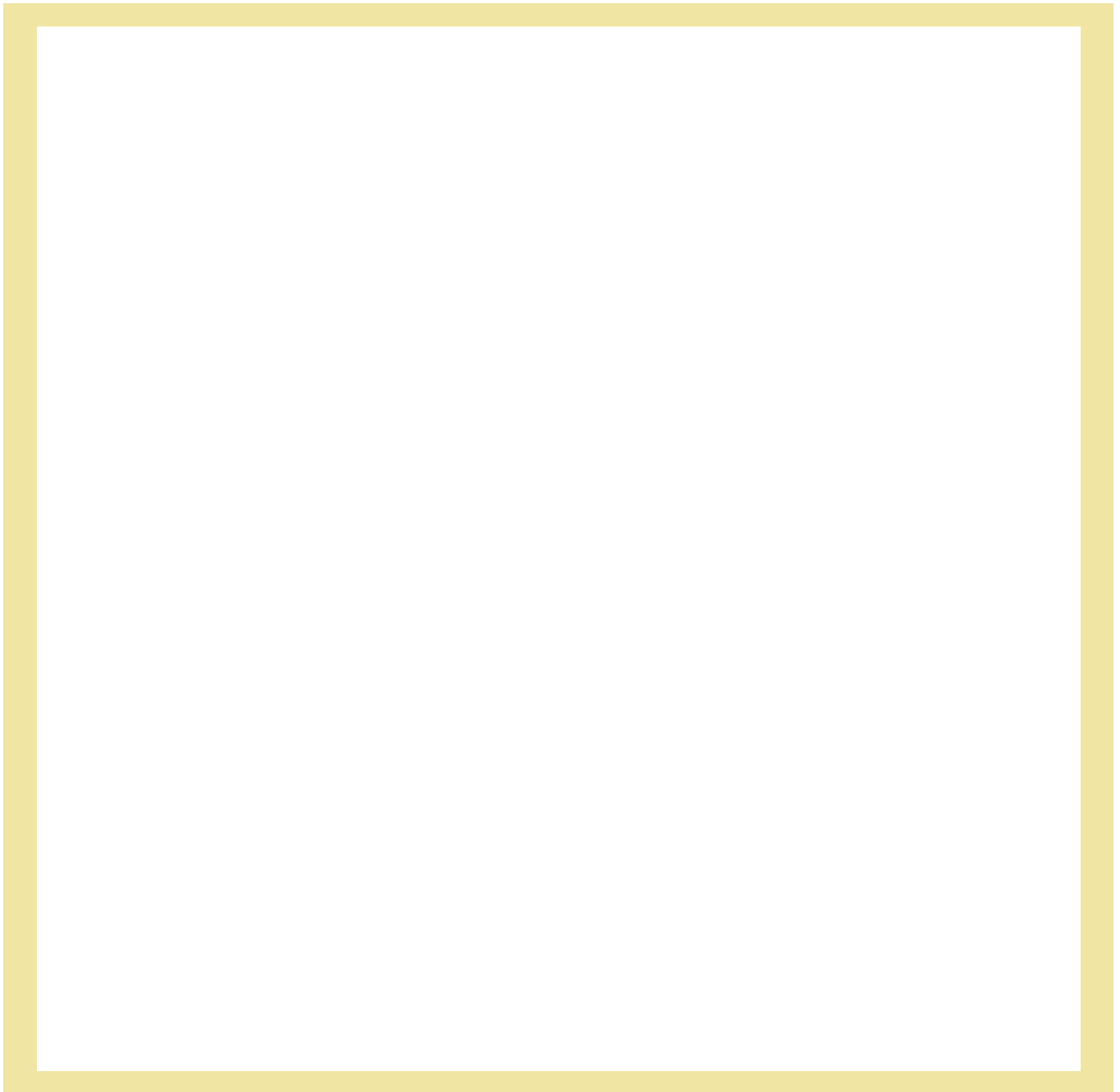
What is the typological symbolism of the phrase, “son of Jonah” in Matthew’s gospel in light of the passage in Chapter 17, surrounding the episode of the Temple tax?

What can we infer about the intention of the author of Matthew’s Gospel in presenting such a powerful portrait of the crucial role of Peter in a Gospel that would only be disseminated in its final form after Peter had already died.

While Matthew’s Gospel is the most deliberate of the gospels in presenting a portrait of the Church as an element of Jesus’ salvific plan and the role of Peter, can you think of any evidence for some sense of the primacy of Peter elsewhere in the New Testament?

The Primacy of Peter in the New Testament and Its Connection to Ecclesial Indefectibility and Infallibility

Notes:



The Petrine Office in Relation to the Broader Hierarchy and Magisterium

The Petrine Office in Relation to the Broader Hierarchy and Magisterium from the Council of Jerusalem through the Papacy of Leo I, and the Point of Departure Between Rome and the East

Suggested readings:

Adrian Fortescue, *The Early Papacy to the Synod of Chalcedon in 451* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).

While the Gospel of Matthew had presented a clear image of Peter's central role, other evidence in the New Testament introduces elements of ambiguity. The Council of Jerusalem was held in an attempt to resolve a long-standing dispute over the requirements to be imposed upon gentile converts to Christianity. Peter and Paul disagreed at first, rather strenuously, and it was Paul's view that prevailed at the Council. Additionally, James, rather than Peter, appears to have presided over the Council. Do you think this episode undermines the thesis of petrine primacy? Why or why not?

The Council of Jerusalem is significant, especially, for its function in the life of the broader Church, roughly two decades from the Pentecost, and roughly four decades before Christianity's definitive break with Judaism. In light of the proceedings at Jerusalem, we can see that those assembled there had assumed within the Church an authority associated with what body then active in Judaism's legal framework?

The Petrine Office in Relation to the Broader Hierarchy and Magisterium

What evidence do we find in the Letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians that petrine authority may have been a recognized reality in the primitive Church? What other interesting evidence does the letter of Clement provide for understanding the relationship between the Roman church of the first century and the Roman church of today?

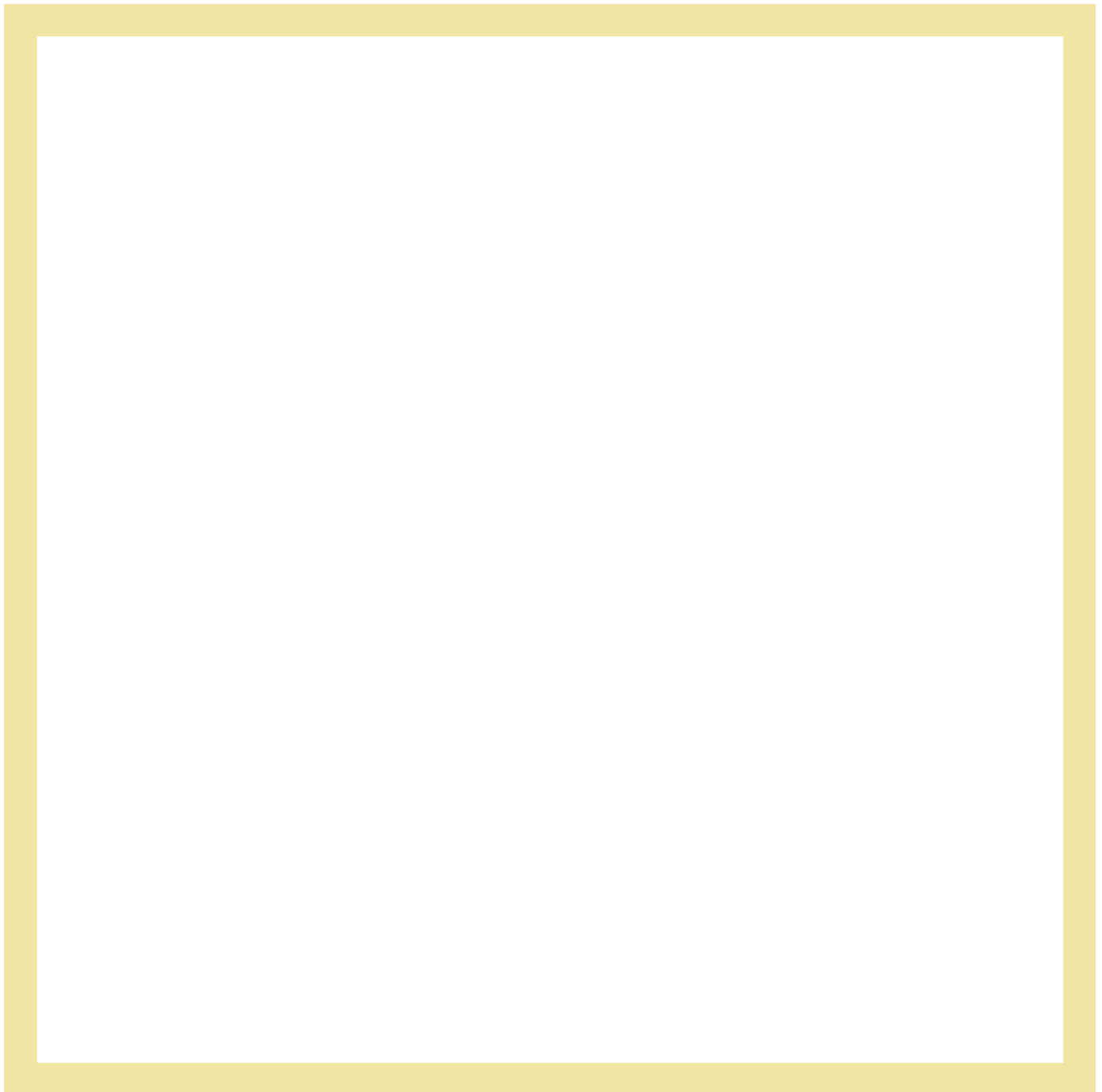
What evidence do we find in favor of the thesis of petrine primacy in the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch?

What evidence exists in the writings of the Post-Nicene Fathers supporting the thesis of petrine primacy in the early Church? What role did the pope play in ecumenical councils and in the judicial affairs of the Universal Church?

How did the pope come to be seen as having supplanted the role of “Pontifex maximus,” originally a function within the politico-religious structure of the Roman Empire, and what significance is there in the assumption of this role by the bishop of Rome? Finally, how do we see the bishop of Rome exercising this function, practically, within the life of the Church, by the time of Leo I?

The Petrine Office in Relation to the Broader Hierarchy and Magisterium

Notes:



Protestant Ecclesiological Models of the Reformation Period: Church-Dividing Differences from Catholic Teaching

Suggested readings:

The Unaltered Augsburg Confession, a.d. 1530, Glen L.

Thompson, trans., ed., (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), Articles 7, 8, 14, 15.

A Tabular Comparison of the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, the 1658 Savoy Declaration of Faith, the 1677/1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, and the 1742 Philadelphia Confession of Faith (Scroll to heading, “Of the Church”).

Although we usually think of the Protestant Reformation as a conflict arising over the questions of grace and justification, and the nature of the sacraments, as well of the relationship between Scripture, ecclesiastical authority, and tradition, in fact a central question in the Protestant Reformation was that of the Church itself. How does the Lutheran understanding of the Church in its universal or catholic dimension deviate from Catholic teaching? In what ways might the Lutheran view converge with the Orthodox view, and in what ways might it differ?

How is the Church understood in the Calvinist/Reformed tradition? How would the Catholic Church assess these models?

Protestant Ecclesiological Models of the Reformation Period: Church-Dividing Differences from Catholic Teaching

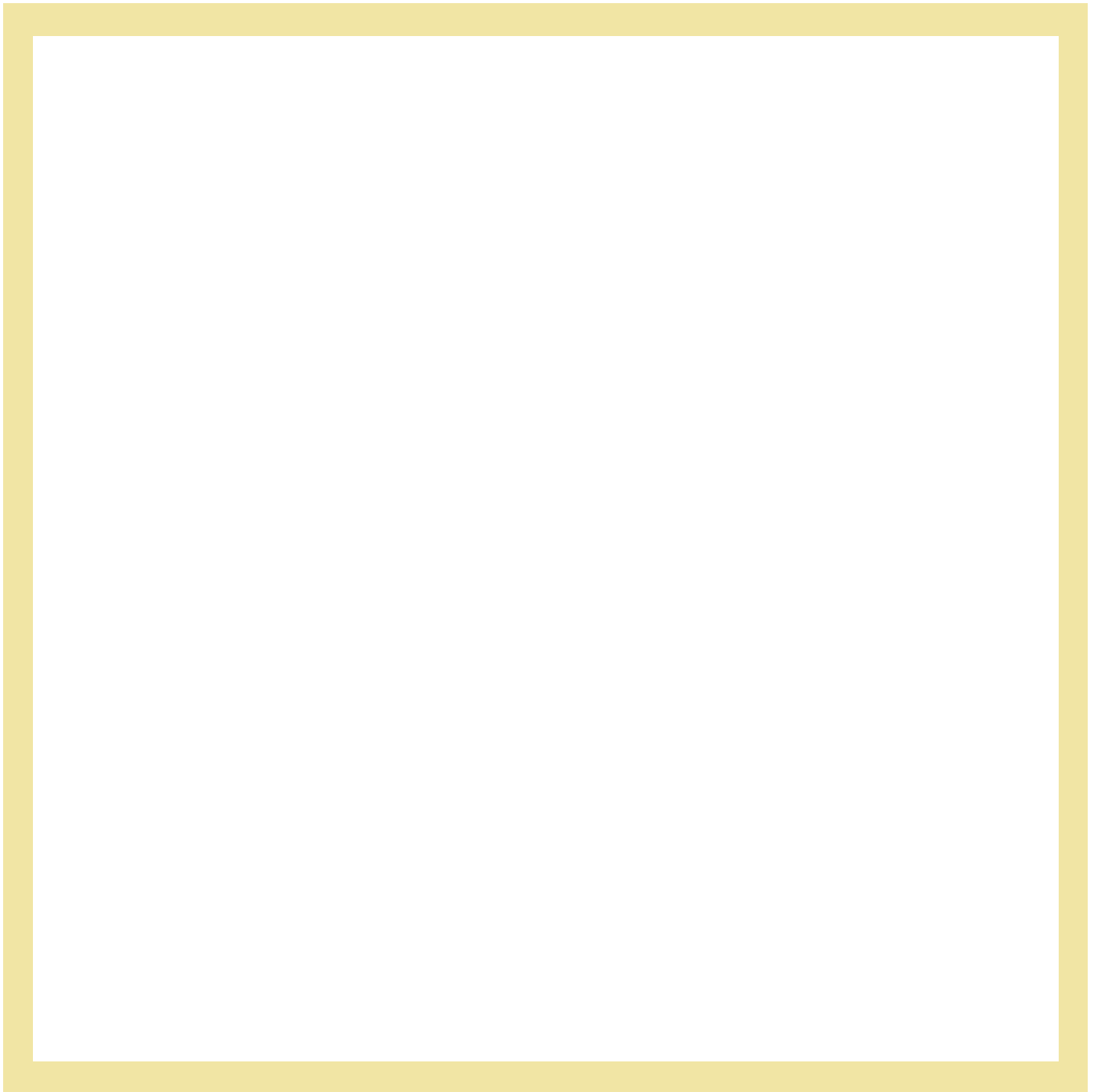
What turn does the Congregationalist movement finally make that undermines the very idea of universality or catholicity in the Church altogether?

As you consider the various Protestant models of the Church developed within the first two centuries of the Reformation era, do you think, based on what you know of the development of the Church from the New Testament period through the time of Leo I, that these models would be recognizable to the Christians of the early Church?

What profound but frequently overlooked patristic insight concerning the Church do we find represented in many of these Protestant confessions?

Protestant Ecclesiological Models of the Reformation Period: Church-Dividing Differences from Catholic Teaching

Notes:



The Modernist Crisis, the First Vatican Council, and the Modern Model of the Papacy

Suggested readings:

Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, *Pastor aeternus* (18 July 1870).

“Responses to the Circular Letter of Chancellor Bismarck on the Interpretation of the Constitution *Pastor aeternus* of the First Vatican Council, January–March 1875,” in Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* [Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals], Latin–English, Peter Hünemann, ed., 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), §§ 3112–3117.

Describe the Modernist crisis from the perspective of the Church in terms of the philosophical, theological, religious, and political situation of the time. How was the Catholic Church itself situated in the years leading up to the First Vatican Council and immediately following it?

Why did Pius IX believe that a solemn definition of the Universal and Immediate Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the bishop of Rome, along with the charism of papal infallibility, was essential given the situation of the Church in the world of his time?

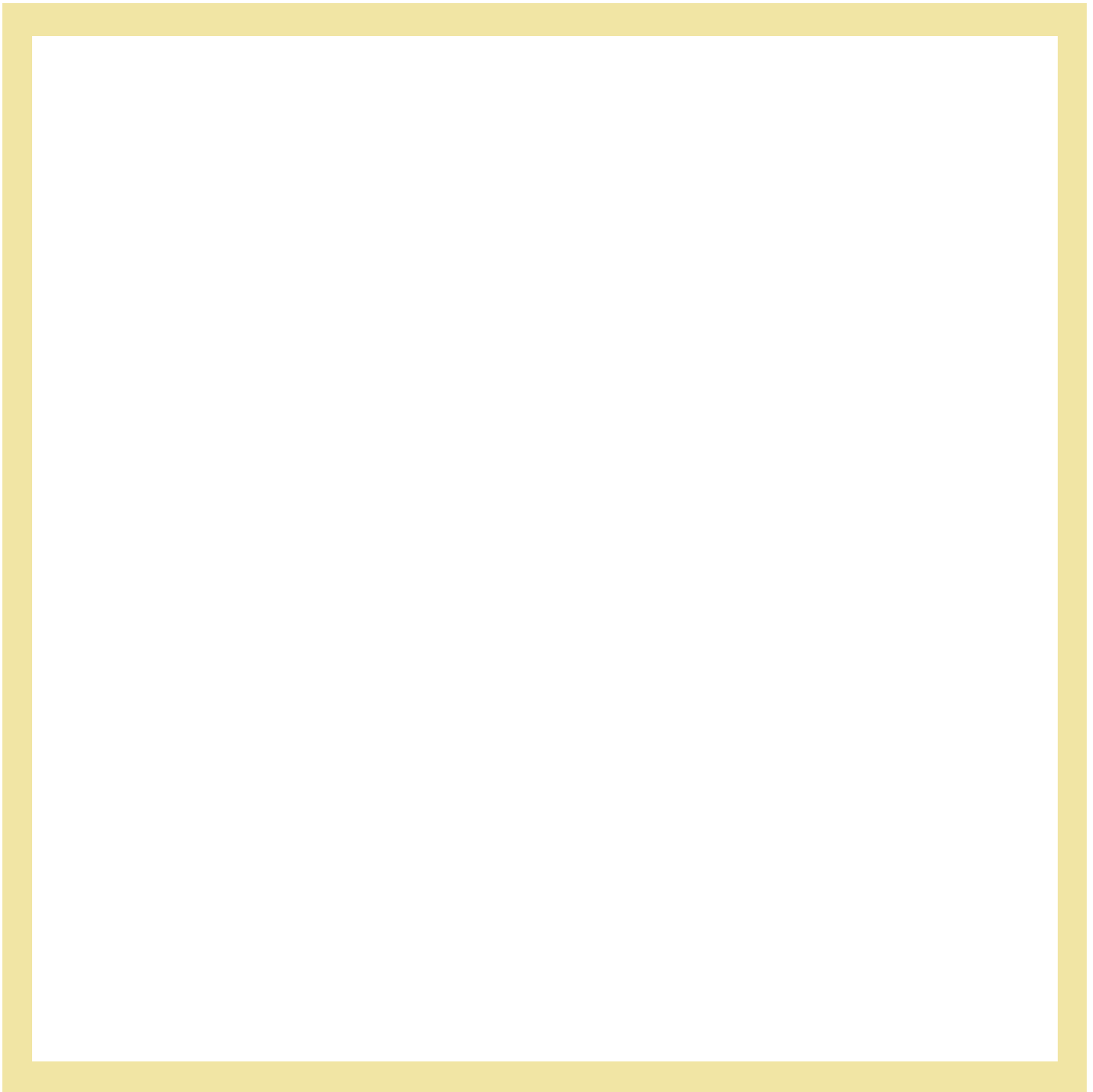
The Modernist Crisis, the First Vatican Council, and the Modern Model of the Papacy

The characterization of the teaching of Pastor aeternus by Otto von Bismarck, then Chancellor of Germany, would sound like a correct reading of the document, to many faithful Catholics today, but the German bishops of the time openly corrected his interpretation of the document. To complicate matters, the German bishops faced accusations of heresy for their interpretation of the Council's teaching, but Pius IX himself vindicated them by explicitly ratifying it. How did Bismarck understand the teaching of the Council and, by contrast, how should we understand that teaching, according to the German bishops and Pius IX's ratification of their articulation?

Does the teaching of Pastor aeternus leave certain questions about papal primacy and infallibility unresolved? If so, what are some of those questions?

The Modernist Crisis, the First Vatican Council, and the Modern Model of the Papacy

Notes:



Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus

Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus, the Question of Ecumenism in the First Half of the Twentieth-Century, and the Controversy Over the Teaching of Leonard Feeney

Suggested readings: Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Mortalium animos* (6 January 1928). Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (29 June 1943).

F. Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani, Letter from the Holy Office Concerning Fr. Leonard Feeney (8 August 1949).

Is the teaching that “outside the Church there is no salvation” witnessed consistently by Fathers and Doctors of the Church and in Magisterial interventions, either directly or indirectly, throughout the history of the Church?

Historically, this teaching is repeated more forcefully in times of schism. Is that fact significant in attempting to understand this teaching?

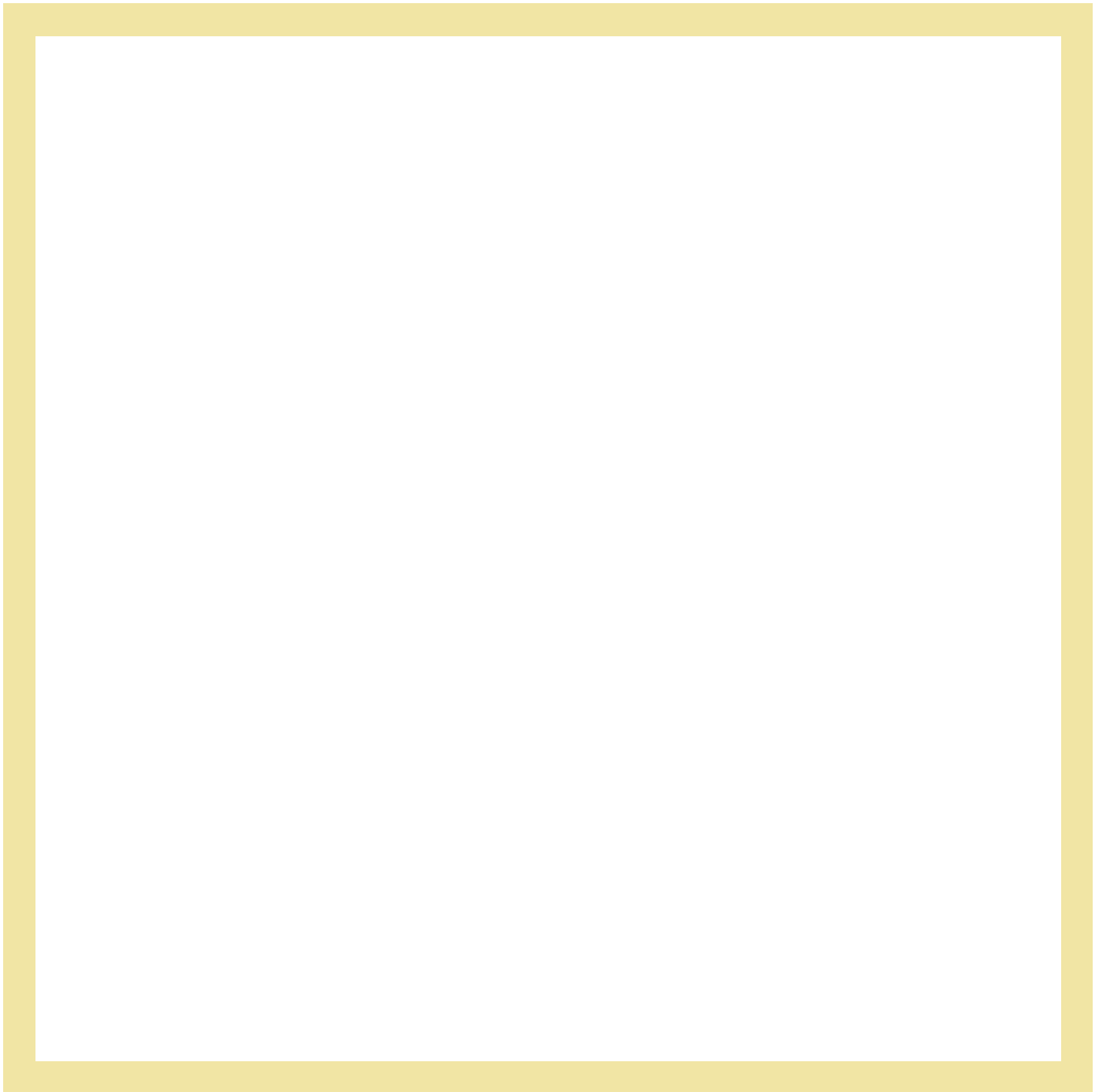
What is the most stringent interpretation of this teaching as Leonard Feeney represented it?

Why do you think that interpretation was deemed overly sweeping by the Holy Office and by Pius XII, leading to Feeney’s excommunication in 1953?

Why is it important, both soteriologically and eschatologically, that we affirm some form of the teaching, “outside the Church there is no salvation?” Consider the transtemporal nature of the Church, inclusive of those who have died?

Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus

Notes:



The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council: Old Models and New

Suggested readings: Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964).

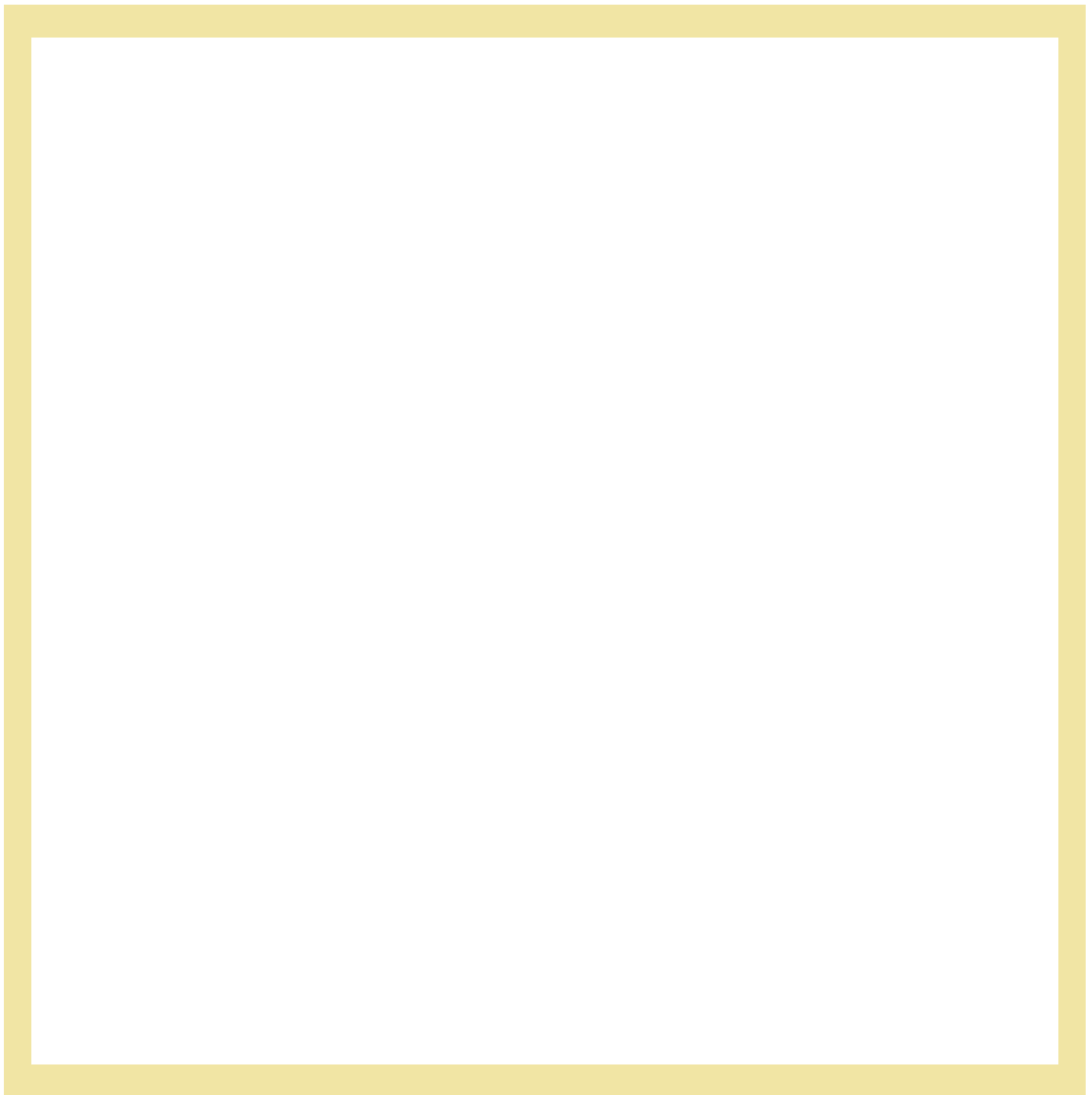
One of the significant shifts in the Second Vatican Council occurred in the promotion of language used to speak about Christianity and the Church that was intended to appear less confrontational, less judgmental, less exclusionary, and less triumphalist. Talk of the “Pilgrim Church” took the place of the language of the “Church Militant.” Understanding what appears to this point to have been essential in the Church’s teaching about herself through the centuries, do you see any possible difficulties a change in emphasis here might have presented for the Church? What abuses or losses of focus would you say may have arisen from the abandonment of the language Catholics had previously used to speak about the Church?

Do you see in *Lumen gentium* any areas in which we find a deepening of insight or a restoration of models of the Church from the patristic period?

What is the meaning of the phrase, “subsistit in,” or “subsists in,” when attempting to identify the Universal Church established by Christ? Why the change from simply “is”? Is there any justification for this change? If so, how would you explain it? Is this language subject to abuse? If so, how?

The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council: Old Models and New

Notes:



Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue Since the Second Vatican Council: The Good, the Bad, and the Unfortunate

Suggested readings: Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964) Ch. 8 (§§ 52–69).

Vatican Council II, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (21 November 1964).
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific
Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000).

In what ways does a renewed effort to restore communion between all the churches of apostolic origin come into view in the documents of the Second Vatican Council? What ways of speaking about the Church in these documents may contribute to that effort?

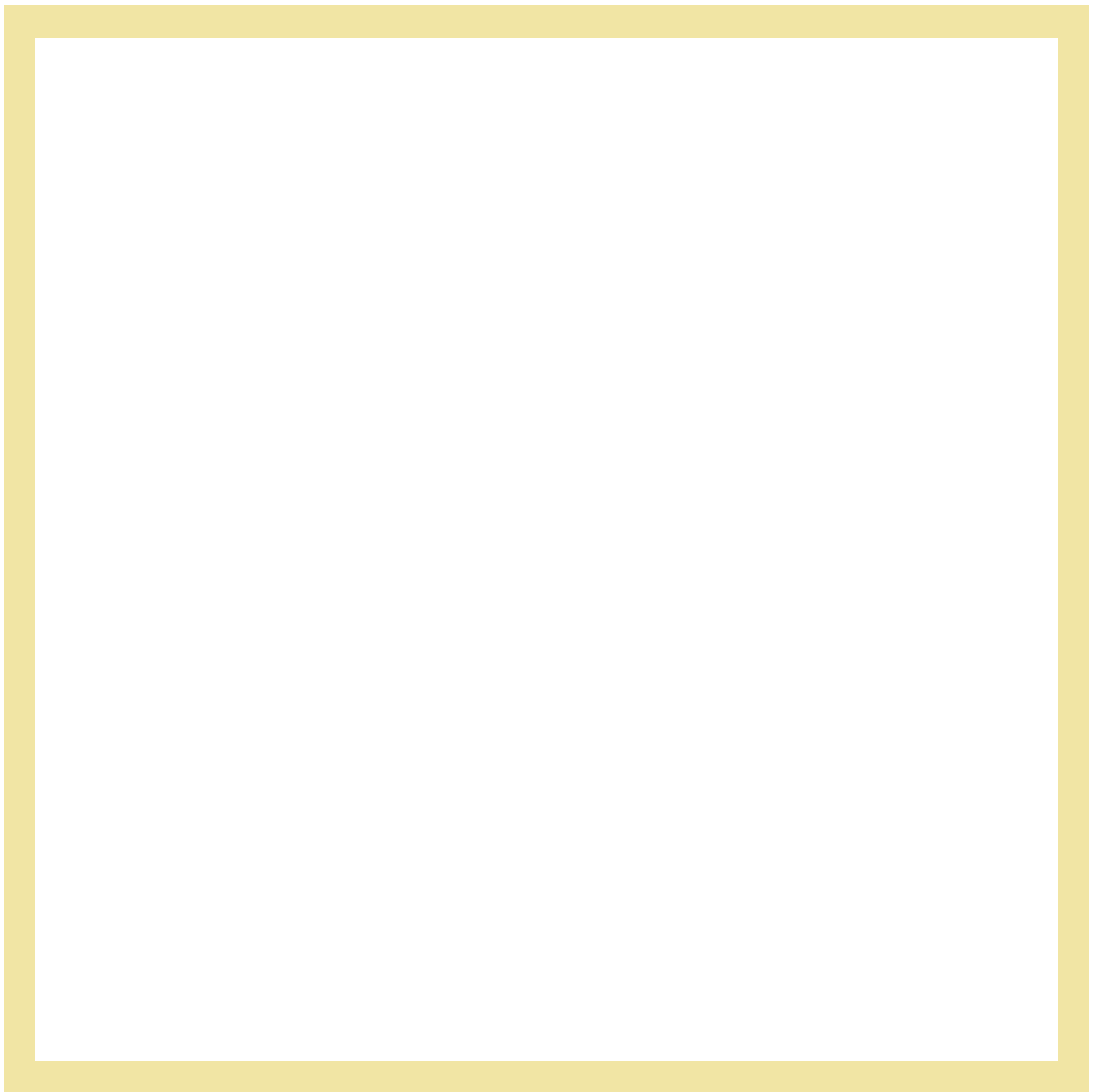
How are Christians in ecclesial communities outside apostolic succession regarded in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council?

There was much debate at the Second Vatican Council over whether to write a document about the Virgin Mary, and if so, whether it should be presented as a free-standing document. In the end, the decision was made to include a statement about the Virgin Mary in *Lumen gentium*. What was the justification for this move, and what implications does it have, positively or negatively, on ecumenism?

Some have argued that certain approaches taken by the Council Fathers at Vatican II have placed the Church in a sociologically weakened or neutered position from the perspective of her evangelical mandate. What is the basis of this critique? Is there evidence for it? How has the Church attempted to correct erroneous and harmful interpretations of the Council's teaching with respect to the unicity of the Church and the unicity of Christ for salvation, and thus, the Church's mandate to evangelize and baptize?

Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue Since the Second Vatican Council: The Good, the Bad, and the Unfortunate

Notes:



False Models of the Church from Neo-Marxist and Post-Modernist Liberationist Theologies

Suggested readings: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction Concerning Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation (6 August 1984).

In the time since the Second Vatican Council, catechetical representations of the Church have become largely sociological. Emphasis has been placed on the Church as a community, as an event, as a task, or as a realization. While some truth can be found in these ways of speaking about the Church, how, at a practical level, do they tend to give rise to abuses and distortions of a serious nature?

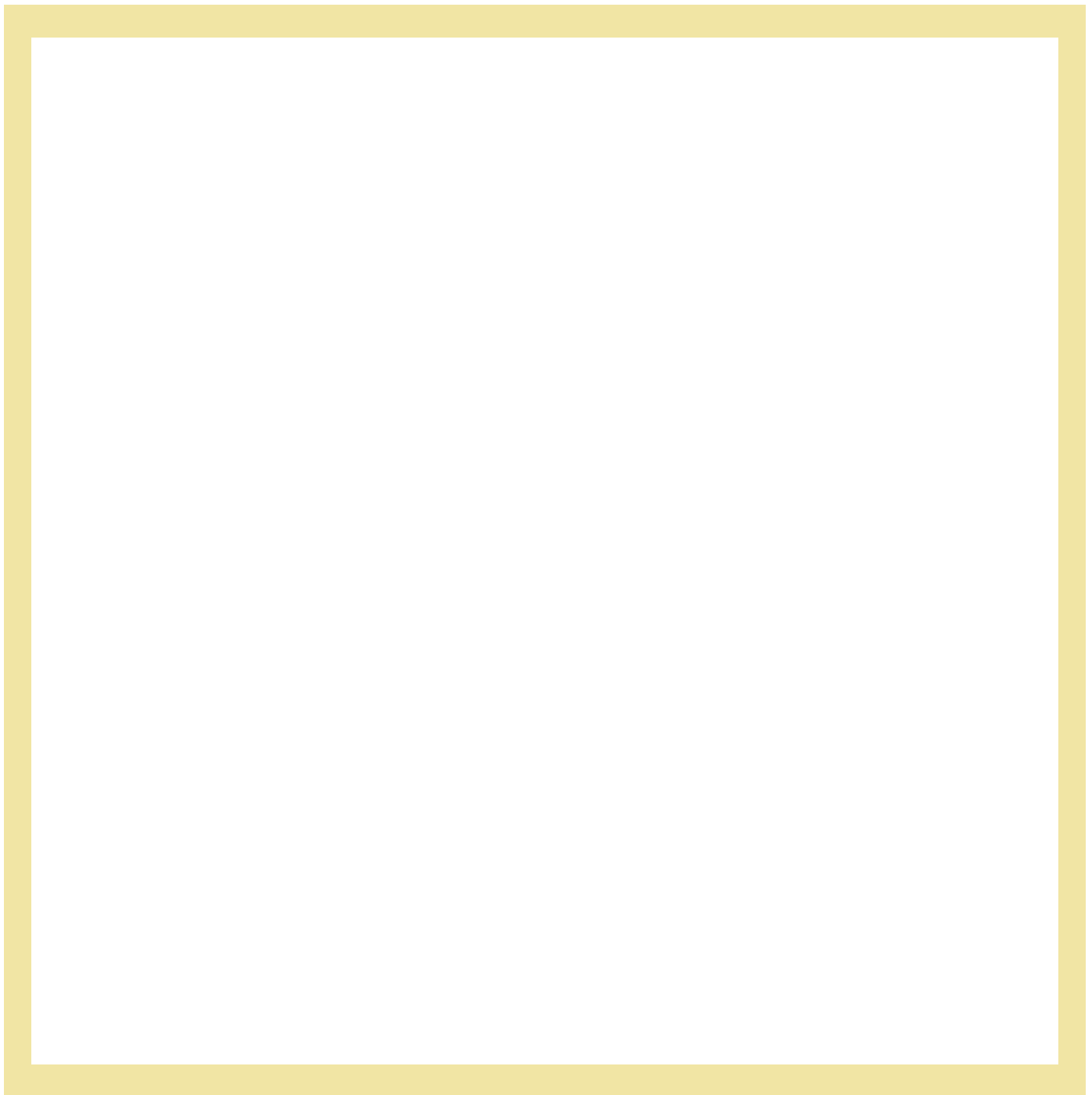
How does the language and imagery of Christianity lend itself to a Marxist or Neo-Marxist interpretation? How does Postmodernism prepare the groundwork for the effort to reinterpret Christianity along these lines?

Does this liberationist approach to Christianity originate with the 1960's or is it much older than that? How far can you trace it back?

What evidence do you see of a Neo-Marxist, Postmodernist, Liberationist recasting of Christianity as an active and serious threat to the life of the Church? Can you think of examples of this line of thought by Catholic thinkers or public figures today?

False Models of the Church from Neo-Marxist and Post-Modernist Liberationist Theologies

Notes:



One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: The Enduring Dogmatic Content in the Essential Models of the Church

Suggested readings: Joseph Ratzinger, “One Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church: Church as the Locus of Service to the Faith,” Michael J. Miller, trans., in, *Credo for Today: What Christians Believe* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 128–136, and “The Church’s Credo: Why I Am Still in the Church,” Michael J. Miller, trans., in *Credo for Today*, 181–200.

Why is it important to maintain a model of the Church tied to, though not reducible to, visible, juridical communion?

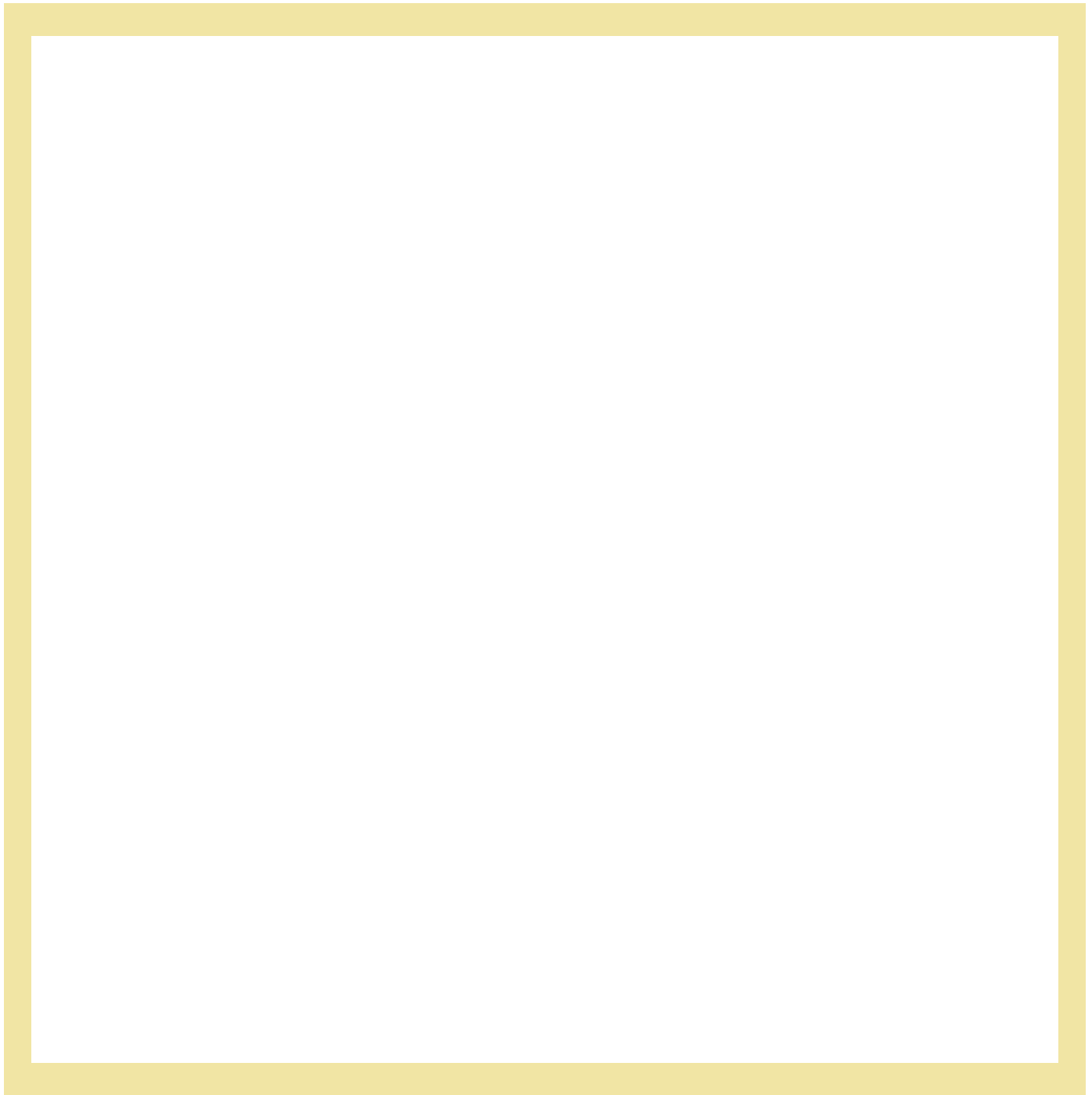
Why is it important to understand the concept of “communion” or *koinonia*, in the Church, Eucharistically and not only juridically or sociologically?

In spite of the sins of the people in the Church and the institutional shortcomings of the Church, how is it possible to speak of the Church as holy?

Can you explain the connection between the idea of apostolic succession and catholicity? Why, returning to Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome, does the authenticity of the covenantal community as a local and concrete instantiation of the Church Universal depend on its objective continuity with the ministry of the Apostles?

One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: The Enduring Dogmatic Content in the Essential Models of the Church

Notes:



The Church of the Future: What Will It Look Like?

Suggested readings: Here, I recommend this excellent example of a responsible treatment of Patristic theology on the part of an Evangelical Christian who retains many of his Evangelical presuppositions and commitments while recovering many of the features of early Christian thought largely forgotten within much of Protestant tradition and de-emphasized within later Roman Catholic thought. I am enthusiastic about the contribution this book makes to ecumenical dialogue.

Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2009).

How does the thought of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel appear to borrow from trinitarian theology while, at the same time, completely deconstructing it and replacing it with something wholly incompatible with Christianity?

In the centuries following the Protestant Reformation, some self-described “Christians” have gone on to rehabilitate ancient trinitarian heresies, mostly in the form of Sabellianism and Arianism. Can you name some denominations that have moved in these directions?

The Church of the Future: What Will It Look Like?

Suggested readings: Joseph Ratzinger, Transcript of a Radio Address, “What Will the Future Church Look like?” (1969), [available here](#) or in Joseph Ratzinger, Faith and the Future, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 101–118.

Imagine the institutional reach the Catholic Church has enjoyed throughout the world, and especially in Western Culture, for the better part of her history. Given current circumstances and trends, do you project that the Church will enjoy the same kind of social influence in fifty or a hundred years as it does now? Why or why not?

Parish consolidations, diminishing membership, and even more rapidly diminishing vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and more recently, to matrimony, have characterized the trajectory of the Catholic West since the post-Conciliar period. Short of extinction, which by faith we know to be impossible for the Church, how do you think this trajectory will resolve? Is a “Remnant” Church a possibility? At what point would you feel compelled to identify one? Do you expect things to get worse before they get better, reaching a trough in a profile not dissimilar to the status of the Church in the Ante-Nicene era, or do you expect the Church of the twenty-first century to get a second wind and rally as a cultural force?

The Church of the Future: What Will It Look Like?

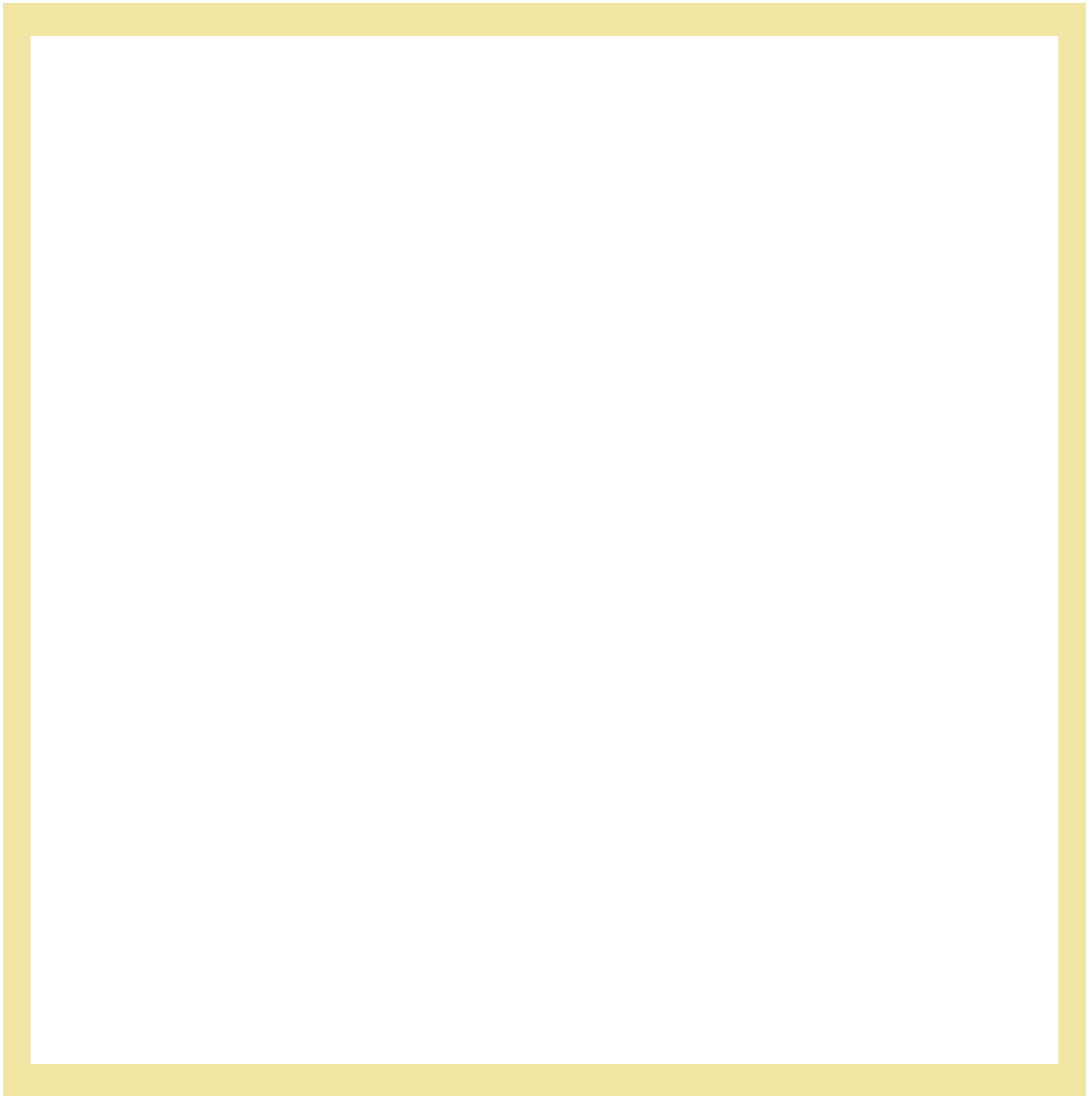
Some predict that a schism could befall the Church if certain factions like those discussed in Lesson 10 assert themselves too strongly. How would you imagine that process unfolding? How would you imagine that such an event might resolve? What would the Church look like on the other side of it?

What do you think of the idea of the “Benedict Option?” Do you think it is possible that such an “option” is being forced upon serious Christians today? What affect does that consideration have upon your understanding of ecclesiology? How might this scenario challenge classical Catholic models of the Church, and how might it lead to positive and continuous development that also addresses some of the concerns raised by our separated brethren?

But we should not forget about Africa. Factoring in the explosive growth of the African Church, which also correlates with tremendous evangelical energy and missionary zeal, think again about what the Church could look like in fifty or a hundred years. What do you see?

The Church of the Future: What Will It Look Like?

Notes:



Further Notes

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