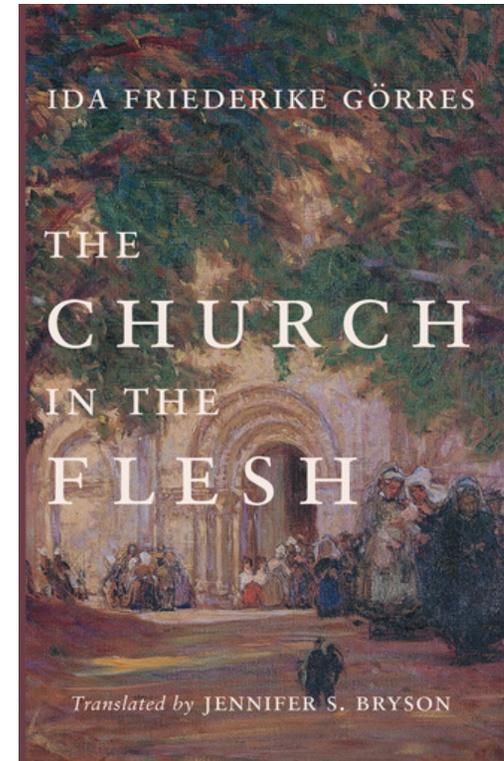


The Church in the Flesh

STUDY GUIDE

by Jennifer S. Bryson

Questions for
book club discussions,
the classroom,
and personal reflection



The Church in the Flesh, published by Cluny Media in 2023, is available for purchase at ClunyMedia.com and other booksellers.

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Contributors to The Church the Flesh

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1901 Bohemia – 1971 Germany.

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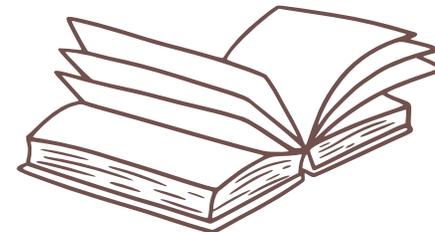
Author of this discussion guide.

About This Discussion Guide

The questions in this guide are offered merely as suggested starting points for your own conversation. Chapter by chapter, the initial questions focus on the book, while some of the latter questions invite readers to reflect on ways this book may relate to their own lives.

Getting Started

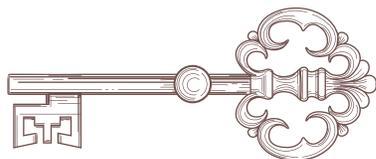
1. Who was Ida Friederike Görres?
2. In what sense are the six chapters of this book “letters”?
4. What year was *The Church in the Flesh* published in German?
5. How does Leo Scheffczyk describe *The Church in the Flesh*?
6. How does Alfons Rosenberg describe *The Church in the Flesh*?
8. In the Preface, how does Görres describe “the dying of the Church in souls”?



Chapter 1: *The Church in the Flesh*

The visible Church—the visibility and materiality of the Church—is a gift of salvation and a frustration at the same time. (4)

1. What is Barbara's objection to the external objects and practices of Catholics?
2. Which material or exterior Catholic practice have you struggled with?
 - 2A. What changed your attitude to this practice?
3. What are some ways you have experienced "the visibility and materiality of the Church" being "a gift of salvation"?
4. Why does Görres say that an aversion to the material world may sometimes be a "noble concern"?
5. In what ways does "the physical form" serve as "the strict and chaste veil for the inviolability of that which is truly interior"? (13)
6. Why does Görres assert that refusal to find God's image in material creation may lead to humans creating an "imaginary" god?



7. Görres writes, "we have lost the 'key' that deciphers the 'devotional images' made by God – stars, plants, animals, elements." (24) What do you think she means by the "key" that helps us, for example, to see a star as not merely a material thing in the sky, but also a symbol of the light heralding the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem?

8. Why does Görres explain the errors of dualism to Barbara?

- 8A. Identify a dualistic heresy from Church history.

9. Why does Görres assert that "no one hates 'nature' more than Satan does"? (22)

10. Why does Görres argue there will be no religion after death?

11. What does Görres mean by the statement that Catholics today are "only the leaves of one summer on the two-thousand-year-old tree"? (5)

12. Which themes of Chapter 1 does St. John Henry Newman address in the letter Görres quotes on page 28?

13. Imagine that Ida Görres wrote this letter to you personally and you have the opportunity to write to her. You ask her to explain a passage from Chapter 1 to help you understand it better. Which passage would you select?

14. A niece or nephew sees your Rosary and says, "It is alright for you to be spiritual, but those beads are silly!" How would you respond?

Chapter 2: Bedrock and Tree

A living form means two things: continuity and change. (34)

1. Görres depicts continuity as “bedrock/house” and “anvil.” How would you depict continuity in the Church?
2. Görres depicts change as “seed/tree/body” and “mustard seed.” How would you depict change in the Church?
3. How does Görres’s discussion of the Church’s relationship to history in Chapter 2 relate to her explanation of the importance of the “things” of the Church in Chapter 1?
4. Görres quotes Ernst Jünger’s remark that tradition is “the drive to open a museum” (39). Why does Görres reject this label for tradition?
5. Which traditions in the Church do you think exemplify tradition as “a process and a result,” as Görres describes it?
6. What is Görres’s criticism of those who think “history is only the process of becoming”? (50)
7. Görres relays the account of Father Ryder hearing St. Newman, “whilst he pointed out how frequently the initial sin of heresy was impatience.” What role do you imagine impatience played in the interaction of Eve, the snake, and Adam in Eden (Genesis 3)?

8. Görres contrasts helpful and harmful “zeal for reform” (49–52):

helpful	harmful
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “anchored ... in the Church”• “at home in the Church”• “want[s] to act ... in harmony with true Tradition, with responsibility, with patience”• “view[s] itself as an instrument and servant of the Church”• “has a responsibility to the leaders as well as the weak”• “reform with the Church”• “zeal ... concern .. primarily for ... this Plan and Will of His”• “eyes focused on His hands”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “compelled to situate its basis outside” the Church• “come[s] from anger, bitterness, arrogance, and impatience”• wants “to act rebelliously”• wants “to act ... suddenly”• “reform ... against” the Church• “zeal ... concern .. primarily for ‘the whole’” per se “as a concern would embrace a people, a state, a family”

8A. Identify a saint who exhibited a helpful “zeal for reform.”

8B. Identify a heretic who exhibited a harmful “zeal for reform.”

9. Regarding erroneous attempts at development inside the Church:

9A. Identify a heresy that sought continuity without change.

9B. Identify a heresy sought change without continuity.

10. Görres concludes, “If you dig deep enough and ask honestly enough before you know it you will stand before the face of the Living God. Whoever sees her, sees Him.” Share a way that the Church has helped you see “the face of the Living God” (52).

II. Discuss:

So often it seems to me as if the Church is once again in early spring—in the very early part when nothing can be seen but snow, ice, mud, and floods; the dingy rotting remnants of the splendor of last autumn lie around in gardens but underground the entirety of April is tucked inside the roots and seeds. For certain, godlessness is certainly still on the rise, and who knows what superficial superiority it will still achieve—but what it destroys largely belongs to last autumn’s harvest. I believe in the coming Easter. (48)



Chapter 3: Why We Believe

The Church demands faith in herself as well as in the witnesses of Christ sent by God, in Him and us ‘at the same time,’ as a continuation of His Incarnation, as ‘the pillar and bulwark of the truth’ (1 Tim 3:15). (68)

1. Why does Görres frame the issue for Barbara as “Why we believe” instead of “What we believe”?
2. Describe how you felt when you read Görres’s description of the kidnapped child’s passion to know where he came from. (62)

3. According to Görres, how does having faith differ from having opinions on individual matters concerning the Church?
4. In what ways would relying only on scientific certainty limit one’s ability to pursue the Truth?
5. Görres explains that our “still-folded together” or “bud-like” belief suffices for salvation (70), but we should not remain in this state. Why not?
6. How would you respond to Barbara’s pointed questions about the Church, “Can one command faith? Can one threaten punishment where faith is absent?”
7. Johann Adam Möhler writes, “Love grasps God,” when he is explaining “the mystery of our knowledge of God.” How would you explain to Barbara the ways that love enables a person to “grasp” God?
8. Faith, says Görres, can be “alive through love.” How would you describe to Barbara what it like to encounter someone whose faith is “alive through love”?
9. Which manifestations of the following have you seen in the Church? In your own life? Görres writes, “Today, Christians are in the most terrible danger of unbelief, not those ‘outside’ who are much more often simply blind and unwitting; rather Christians who, for fear that it might be true and devour their lives, amass all sorts of ‘reasons’ to reject the message.” (83)

10. “In its content and unfolding, our faith is something comprehensive and living... You have to know the whole thing if you are to judge the parts,” writes Görres. (58–59) Share an example of how faith in “the whole thing” has shaped how you “judge the parts” of the Church.

II. Discuss:

Did a flower ever come into the world by way of a gardener examining a heap of torn parts individually, judging each one on its own for its value, beauty, and usefulness, without seeing or evaluating their mutual relationship, and then sticking and attaching roots, fibers, stems, leaves, buds, calyxes, petals, stamens, and pistils to one another, mixing in parts of various plants according to his own taste and preference? You cannot even construct a ‘lifeless thing,’ a machine or a building, in this way; here, too, the plan of something whole forms the basis, and every smallest little piece is placed in it in some proportion. (58–59)



12. If Barbara were to ask you, “Why do you believe?” how would you respond?

Chapter 4: The Nuisance of Morality

... one can separate religion and morality. Of course one can. But do you find this fact so wonderful and exhilarating? On the contrary, I find it sad and dreadful. (112)

1. Görres’s interlocutor proposes:

Instead of always anxiously asking about the Ten Commandments, we ought to come to an agreement with God out of the power of our creative conscience and from there shape the situation sovereignly. (107)

What do you think the result would be if every single person on the planet believed that each individual is morally sovereign?

2. Why does Görres believe that the problem with the Pharisees was too little—not too much—morality?

3. Görres speaks of those who aim to do good to others and who believe that this alone fulfills their duty toward God. Why does she think this is insufficient?

4. How did Luther’s separation of the Law from the Gospel contribute to the “dismantling and dismembering of morality?”

5. Why does the attempt to separate religion and morality result in a dismantling of both?

6. Görres explains, “Man must prepare himself for the Truth.” How can moral laxity lead to unpreparedness for Truth, to spiritual blindness?

7. Görres asks, “Is it at all possible for a Christian to accept the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God and at the same time to dare to amputate them so arbitrarily?” (119. And see Matthew 19:17, John 14:15, and Acts 16:30).

8. Imagine a baptized Christian insists that all we are called to do is to be loving and kind, “like Jesus,” and therefore we must not tell others what we think is right and wrong. How does the example Görres shares of St. Paul’s response to Felix and Drusilla differ from this? (118–119. And see Acts 24:24–25.)

9. Görres identifies five ways to approach moral questions (138). How do these relate to how our culture views morality?

- A. *“Morality” in the bourgeois sense is what people say.*
- B. *Ethics is what reason says.*
- C. *Secularized conscience is: what I say.*
- D. *Christian conscience is: what God shows in my heart as His commanding Will.*
- E. *Christian morality is: what God shows through His Church as His commanding Will.*

10. “It would be better to die than to sin, it would be a lesser evil for the world to end than for there to be a single voluntary insult against God.” (129) How might you explain this to a friend who is skeptical about this statement?

11. Görres' interlocutor is concerned that the Church is "jeopardizing the entire future of Christianity because of a truly insignificant point of sexual morality" and her interlocutor asks, “Isn't it more important to proclaim Christ and His Kingdom than monogamous marriage?” (106–107) How would you respond to this?

12. Regarding clarity Görres asks, “Don't you think that everyone can get into situations where a clear and implacable “You should!” or “You must not!” provides a spine-strengthening and is an ally of one's own innermost, self-doubting conscience?” (136) Why is such clarity “a boon, a gift, a bright window in the forsaken landscape of nighttime”?

13. How do you see morality as more than just a “heap of rules” in your own life?

13A. How does this support practical obedience in the moral life?

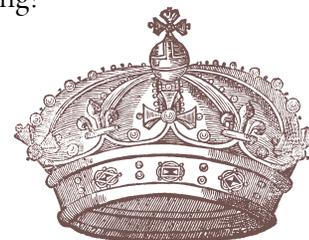
Chapter 5: The Enthroned

It is the same way the morality of the Church literally stands out as “heavenly” from all mere ethics, not in content, but in justification, because her highest standard is neither what is useful nor seemly, neither the honor nor the happiness of the individual nor of the general public, neither is it reason nor what is traditional nor personal insight into conscience, but the face of the Enthroned, who not only gives but who is the Eternal Law. (173)

Chapter 5 continued

1. What does Johanna find unsettling about the “hegemonic form of the visible Church”?
2. Which of the Church’s grand ceremonies and rituals do you find perplexing? Why?
3. Identify some of the images of Christ that Görres shares to respond to Johanna.
 - 3A. How does isolating only one of these images of Christ and excluding others distort our understanding of who Christ is?
 - 3B. Which of these images resonate most with you?
4. How might you explain to a skeptic the value of a Holy Year, an Infant Jesus of Prague, the Feast of Christ the King, or some other expression of the Church’s faith that Christ is King?
5. Görres writes: “Guardini actually defines the essence of what is antichristian ...: ‘to prove that existence is possible without Christ—no, that Christ is the enemy of existence and that existence can only be fulfilled if everything Christian is destroyed.’” (165)
 - 5A. Which examples of this have you seen in modern secularism?
 - 5B. How might this indicate that Christ is more than just a “gentle preacher” or “ethical leader”?

6. How does Görres distinguish “pastoral care” from serving ‘humanity,’ or seeking the ‘happiness of the masses’?
7. Görres writes, “But with Church abuse of power, one always feels that an element of desecration, indeed, ravaging the Divine, is involved.” (160) Believers and non-believers alike often intuit this same feeling. Why is this feeling often shared by believers and non-believers alike?
8. Görres says that “we no longer know at all what ‘majesty’ means: a rule that deserves awe, power to which not only the body but also the soul bows, with the deep understanding that this ruler is worthy of his office and honor.” (157)
 - 8A. Why do you think there was significant interest and sympathy at the death of Queen Elizabeth II in 2022 from places where nearly all traces of royalty have been abolished?
 - 8B. How can images of royalty help us understand God’s divinity?
 - 8C. How might images of royalty, if not approached appropriately, distort our understanding of God’s divinity?
 - 8C. What are your favorite aspects of the Feast of Christ the King?

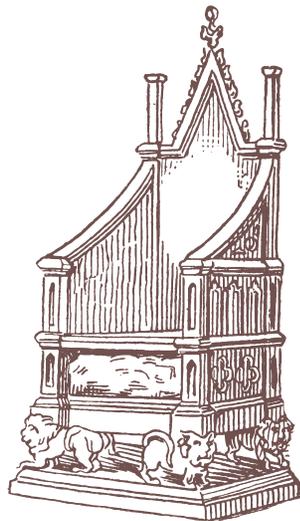


9. Discuss one of the following quotations from Chapter 5.

9A. *The real missionaries, the old ones as well as the present ones today following in their footsteps, have different facts to announce than their feelings about this or that crisis situation. They are messengers and have to pass on what has been commanded; like messengers in war, they are just as little allowed to change, tone down, exclude part, or in any sense cheapen the message in order to accommodate the public – they are servants “with the letter from Great Lord,” like Saint Birgitta said; they didn’t write it, they are in a sense not responsible for its content, no matter how much it is bound to function as a bomb. (171)*

9B. *The Church knows herself as the steward for this exalted and transfigured Lord. It is she, she alone, who must proclaim, assert, represent His claim to the throne in the midst of our worldly time on this earth. (154)*

9C. *Perhaps it is the case that we too then ... will grasp a glimmer and outline of that distant, apocalyptic reality, which speaks of the rushing of many waters, of thunder and lightning and earthquakes and the great multitude that no one could count, from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, in white robes and with palms in their hands, and with a loud voice proclaiming their God holy. (180–181)*



Chapter 6: The Church of the Saints

Of course, we only ever want to see the “cedar-plank” in the fire, or the noble bee’s wax candle melting away with its fragrant scent. The tallow candle stinks and smokes—but that is why it too burns, who can deny it? Perhaps before God, the only decisive thing is really whether one lets oneself be seized by fire and burned. That one preserve the spark from above, that one not let it suffocate, not in poverty, not in the overabundance of one’s particular nature: that is man’s share in the wonderful, mysterious process of sanctification. (208)

1. What are some of the false images of sanctity common today inside and outside the Church?
2. How does Görres explain the difference between imperfection and sin?
3. Why does Görres caution against the temptation to develop “a ‘new’ image of the true Christian who is no longer supposed to be a saint but a ‘believing sinner’”? (190) And what is the difference between a saint and a so-called “holy sinner”?
4. Görres writes:

The saint is the person perfect in God’s love, in whom God’s victory over sin has been revealed. He is the one redeemed in whom redemption works out as redemption from sin, in whom the freedom of God’s children becomes real. (221)

How do the saints help us understand the meaning of freedom?

Chapter 6 continued

5. What does Görres mean when she says, “The saint is the most important person in the world”? (184)
6. Why does Görres differentiate “the vessel” or “frame” from “the content” of a saint? (187)
7. Share a favorite quote from Chapter 6 and explain why it resonates with you.
8. Identify a saint whose biography made you feel uncomfortable. What was hard for you to accept or understand in the life of this saint?
9. Describe or show a work of art of a saint that helped you understand sanctity.
10. Görres says the only thing in common between many of the greatest saints is their “unspeakable surrender to the victorious hand of God.” Tell about how one of your favorite saints struggled to surrender to God.
11. Compare what distinguishes the Catholic practice of pursuing sanctity with the “path to perfection” in another religion, spiritual school, or atheistic worldview.
12. You are “sanctificabilis,” or “holy-able,” as Görres writes. How did Chapter 6 help you to reflect in new ways on sanctity in your own life?

Overall Questions

1. If you read *The Church in the Flesh* without knowing about the book or the author, when would you have guess it was written?
2. The painting on the cover of the book is “The Christening,” 1920, by Gonzalo Bilbao. Which elements of “the Church in the flesh” do you see in this painting?

Other Works by Ida Friederike Görres

Forthcoming translations by Jennifer S. Bryson 2024–2025. Pre-publication working titles and the year the book was first written or published in German:

- *Bread Grows in Winter* (1970), essays from 1967–1970
- *John Henry Newman: A Life Sacrificed*, written ca. 1946–1948; published posthumously
- *On Marriage and on Being Single* (1949)
- *To Strengthen the Church in Souls: Essays from 1941 to 1971* (working title)
- *What Binds Marriage Forever: Reflections on the Indissolubility of Marriage* (1971)

About Ida Friederike Görres

To learn more, visit idagoerres.org.

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Book Discussion Guide
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