



# PRINCIPLES

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## Three Sane Decisions to Help You Save Your Soul



Fr. Robert Spitzer

The following is adapted from the 2019 Commencement Address delivered at Christendom College.

It is a real honor to be with all of you here today, and I want to open with saying, congratulations to the class of 2019. I can already tell from that incredible, faith-filled, and articulate salutatorian speech how well educated and deep you are, not only in the ways of the world, but most importantly, in the ways of faith and in the heart of Jesus Christ.

Allow me to share three decisions with you that I make every single day; products of my experience of Catholic education, as a student, also as a professor, and as a university president. They're in stark contrast to the world. They are the light of Christ, in my view. But because of the strength of the popular culture, I have to remind

### About the Author



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myself of them every single morning when I get up. And I would encourage you to do the same. When I wake up, I say out loud, “Today, I am going to live for contributive purpose rather than comparative purpose. Today, I am going to look for the good news in others rather than the bad news. Today, I am going to make the Lord the center of my life and not the world.”

Do not think for a second that anybody is impervious to the message of the culture, which is: to put our faith in the world and not in the Lord. All of us need to remind ourselves. Saint Ignatius made all Jesuits do an eight-day retreat to restore their balance back to the Lord, to get them out of the culture.

Let me explain more about these three decisions. The culture will tell you that comparative identity is sufficient. That being at the top of your game, achieving much, having great status or power, having great intellect, or other great skills and abilities as a leader, will be sufficient.

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But it isn't sufficient. It almost walls out God. You'll know that it isn't sufficient the minute you begin to ask these questions neurotically:

“Who's achieving more? Who's achieving less? Who's got more power? Who's got less power? Who's got more status? Who's got less status? Who's more popular? Who's less popular? Who's winning? Who's losing? Who's more intelligent? Who's less intelligent? Who's more athletic, who's less athletic? Who's more beautiful? Who's less beautiful?”

Yet, this is not the real meaning of life. The Lord has told us the real meaning of life using the word *caritas* (or *agape* in Greek). We say that love, or what I would call contribution, is really the purpose of life. And the only way of bringing that comparative identity under control is to shift our intentional focus. Shift the focus to these questions instead:

“How will I make an optimal positive difference in this world? How will I make an optimal positive difference to my family? How will I make an optimal positive difference to my friends? How am I going to make—with my time, my skills, my talents, my energy—an optimal positive difference to the Kingdom of God, and to the Church? How will I make an optimal positive difference to the community or to the organizations for whom and with whom I work? How am I going to make an optimal positive difference to the society or to the culture?”

Ask these questions, and then put at the end of it, “For this I came, to make an optimal positive difference to family, to friends, to the Church, to the Kingdom of God, to culture, to the organizations and

community in which I live, for whom I work.” Notice how the “better than,” the comparative identity, slips into the background. And when it does, it becomes manageable. No longer have I to worry about achieving more than anybody else. No longer have I to worry about being more popular than anyone else. I’m using my achievements to make an optimal positive difference to family, friends, community, Church, and the Kingdom of God.

I don’t have to be smarter than you, as an end in itself. Rather, I focus on using the intellectual talents I have to make an optimal positive difference. When you do this, you will notice decidedly that any emptiness and alienation that you are feeling within yourself suddenly begins to fill up with a sense of God’s presence in your life.

On the other hand, if the comparative identity gets more and more intense, you’ll notice jealousy, fear of failure, fear of loss of esteem, ego rage, ego blame, and self-pity. You’ll notice inferiority. You’ll notice superiority. You’ll notice contempt and loneliness and depression. And if you get neurotically into that state, you’re going to think to yourself, “Life is really miserable, unhappy, dark, alienating and lonely.” And indeed it would be.

For, this promise—that comparative identity can “bring it all”—is nothing more than an insidious and demonic lie. But the minute you start using those other questions—“How am I going to make an optimal positive difference



Fr. Robert Spitzer receives the St. Peter Canisius Award for Distinguished Service to the Church Through the Teaching of Catholic Doctrine and Theology from Christendom College President Dr. Timothy O'Donnell (May 2019).

to my family, to my friends, to my church, to the Kingdom of God, to the culture and my community, the organizations around me?”—the minute you do that, and you really make your identity statement “For this I came,” all of those feelings of emptiness, depression, impulsivity, self-pity, ego rage, and ego blame begin to subside. Pursuing contributive identity is not only a spirit of living in the light of Christ, but also a very productive life in Christ. You’ll not live a better life than after you make those decisions for yourself.

Remind yourself every morning. “Today I’m going to live for the contributive, not for the comparative. I’m going to make the comparative subservient to the contributive, and use the intellectual gifts, the gifts of articulation, the gifts of status or power, or whatever I’ve been given, to make an optimal positive difference to the Kingdom of God and to the world in every way that I can.” You’ll never regret it. You will live a life of sanity, a life toward salvation, and a life that will do immense good.

Secondly, every single morning, remind yourself of this: “I am going to look for the good news in others rather than the bad news.” We all know how the bad news is a default drive and can intrude into our consciousness. When you’re looking for what’s irritating, weak, stupid, and unkind, you’ll notice immediately how a person slips out of a state of transcendent mystery into a mere problem. They’re not only becoming a problem, but the people and the culture around you are becoming a problem. Life’s becoming a problem. And you become a problem to yourself. The transcendent mystery is gone. The vision of the light of Christ, leading us to salvation in Himself, in perfect truth, love, goodness, and beauty, subsides. And then everything becomes highly problematic.

Instead of looking for the bad news in the other, we should intentionally look for the good news in the other. We should look for the little good things that people try to do, the great good things they aspire to do. We should look for their delightful idiosyncrasies. We should look for, of course, their gratuitous acts of kindness and the fact that they are transcendent mysteries. They are literally transphysical manifestations of a desire for, and an awareness of, perfect truth, perfect love, perfect goodness, perfect beauty, and perfect being. And they’re destined for eternity.

If you look at people that way, if you look at their unique goodness and lovability, rather

than focusing on irritations, then what’s annoying, weak, stupid, and unkind gets contextualized. This is not only true for marriages and for family. It’s also true in workplaces, and in every walk of life. If you look for the good news in the other, then empathy is possible. And if empathy is possible, you’ll enter into a unity with one another, whereby doing the good for each other is just as easy, if not easier, than doing the good for yourself. And that perspective alone will bring that empathy, that love, that *caritas* which Jesus is asking of us.

If you look for the good news in one another, this will help your marriage immensely. I assure you of this, for all intents and purposes, the bad news will become contextualized. You will have a much greater bonding with other human beings. People will no longer perceive you as a negative source coming down the street. And people will join in league with you to make a difference with one another that will be utterly productive for your contributive identity from now on.

Thirdly, when I get up in the morning, I have to say: “Today I’m going to make God, the Lord, the center of my life. I’m not going to make the world the center of my life.” Of course, there are honors and riches and glories that are always going to be tempting. But you must remind yourself that the Lord is the center, that you need to live not only for your salvation, but to help all the little eternities around you get to that salvation. Your objective,



then, is to make not only an optimal positive difference in the world, but an optimal positive difference to the Kingdom of God. And that entails great faith.

Now, some of you who are analytically minded might be thinking, “If I’m going to live for the Lord, if I’m going to deny myself, if I’m going to put the world in the backseat, if I’m going to say ‘*Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*,’ I just want to be really sure.”

You can be really sure! There is no reason for anyone to be in doubt who has an open heart to God. Today, there’s more evidence for God than ever before in the history of humankind.

Do you want evidence from metaphysical proofs for the existence of God? Just take a look at Bernard Lonergan’s metaphysical proof. Take a look at Mortimer Adler’s metaphysical proof. Take a look at all the Hilbertian mathematical proofs for the beginning of past time. Take a look at them, they’re all over the place, and they’re really good proofs.

They prove that there’s an unconditioned, unrestricted, totally unique, constantly creating, unrestricted act of understanding, understanding itself, which is outside of space-time asymmetry: the

Creator of all else that is. That’s what they will prove. And they’ll prove it, in a way that is not just persuasive, but logically rigorous, even in terms of a scientific interpretation of those metaphysical terms.

But oh, there’s far more than that. If you’re scientifically minded, I assure you, there’s more evidence for God from contemporary physics today than you can possibly imagine. The Borde-Vilenkin-Guth Proof shows that every multiverse, every universe with an average expansion rate greater than zero, has to have a beginning, and that beginning necessitates a Creator of physical time and physical space. There’s the new entropy evidence that is out there, which has been burgeoning since 2001. There’s the new fine-tuning evidence that I’ve written extensively about in several articles that shows the intelligence of the creative force outside of space-time asymmetry.

If you want every single equation, if you want every article with direct links, just go to [crediblecatholic.com](http://crediblecatholic.com). Click on the Big Book and have a field day. There’s no dearth of evidence.

Furthermore, if you really want to get to the truth of things, God is not just an unrestricted act of understanding, an unrestricted

## ABOUT *PRINCIPLES*

Animated by the joyful, lived experience of the faith, *Principles* draws on the fruits of an authentically Catholic liberal arts education to explore the ideas necessary to live a fully integrated Catholic life: one that upholds the value of human dignity, the role of virtue in private and public spheres, and the centrality of charity in both thought and action. We envision a Church—and a watching world—that embraces sound reason rooted in a robust faith.

reality that is constantly creating everything that is, through its perfect mentative act. God is unconditional love. We know that with certainty, not only because we can infer a Platonic transcendental of perfect love in a perfect being, but much more explicitly, from Jesus Christ Himself. And Jesus Christ came to this earth in an incarnate form.

You might be saying, “But I just need to be so certain here. I have to make sure of the truth. If I’m going to declare him the way, the truth, and the life, I had better be certain.”

First of all, the historical arguments are better today—put out by N. T. Wright and so many others—than they’ve ever been before.

Next, I’ll give you the Shroud of Turin. It is now certain from four tests, Fourier-Transform Infrared Spectroscopy, et cetera, that the Shroud probably goes back to 50 A.D., plus or minus 150 years. There are Roman coins on this man’s eyes that could only have been minted in 29 A.D. in a special minting by Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. The Shroud of Turin has more evidence for the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus than you could ever have thought.

As a matter of fact, scientists have only been able to replicate this most unique image on the Shroud, (which is a perfect three-dimensional photographic image, on a non-photographically sensitive linen cloth), by ArF excimer laser in a laboratory. It would take 14,000 ArF excimer lasers—more than all the ultraviolet capacity available in any laboratory in the world today—to transform that non-photographically sensitive linen into a perfect three-dimensional photographically sensitive cloth. That would be close to 6-8 billion watts of light energy just coming out of that dead body! Furthermore, the body had to become spiritual, it had to become mechanically transparent, so that the Shroud could penetrate it three-sixteenths of an inch in order to get three dimensions, the bones inside the body perfectly proportional to the surface of the body itself.

How can a dead body become spiritual, mechanically transparent, and give rise to 6-8 billion watts of light energy? That’s like having half a million searchlights come out of this body in a single 40 billionth of a second pulse. This requires a

supernatural cause of immense proportions. My point is this: Jesus Christ is Lord. And now, today, He's giving us scientifically valid, dateable evidence.

Do you want more evidence for the Church? Take a look at the Lourdes Medical Commission, and all of the scientifically validated miracles there. Take a look at what's gone on in the canonizations of recent saints. Take a look at the Eucharistic miracle that was overseen by Pope Francis in 1996 in Buenos Aires. Jesus Christ has given us more than abundant evidence through miracles, through the Resurrection evidence that's emblazoned on the Shroud of Turin, along with the evidence of His Crucifixion.

You can be sure! And if you are sure that Jesus is risen as He

promised, and He's risen in 6-8 billion watts of light energy, why not just simply say it? Jesus Christ is Lord. And therefore, He is the way, and the truth, and the life. So, when you get up in the morning, say to yourself: "Today, I am going to live for the Lord Jesus Christ. He is my way. He is my truth. He is my life. And insofar as that is true, I will condition every single thing that the culture, television, Instagram, and Facebook, tells me. I'm going to live as if Jesus Christ was the Lord in my life this day."

I have three things to give to you. They are these pledges: "I'm going to be contributive today. I'm going to do this, before the comparative. I'm going to look for the good news in others before the bad news, and contextualize the bad news with the good news." And finally, "Today, I'm going to live for the Lord Jesus Christ, who is my way, my truth, and my life, and I will condition everything that the world tells me by His truth, rather than by the so-called dark truth of our spiritual enemy."

If you do that, I assure you of this: those three pledges every morning will bring you salvation. They'll bring you protection from your spiritual enemy, the Devil. They will certainly also bring you sanity—and not only sanity, but tremendously good relationships, tremendously good leadership potential. And at the end of the day, a happy life. Not just happy in this world, but happy in the Beatific Vision with our Lord Jesus Christ, and with one another, in heaven forever. **P**

# PRINCIPLES

FOR A FULLY INTEGRATED CATHOLIC LIFE

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85	8.3%	14.7%
90+	9.5%	17.5%

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