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Catholic Public Theology on YouTube:  
The Articulation of Public Theology on Social Media

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## Abstract

This study explores the articulation of Catholic public theology on the social media platform YouTube. To do this it works with both a minimal and maximal definition of public theology and establishes several markers and tasks associated with its identification. It uses Content Analysis to systematize selected materials from four Catholic YouTube channels and establish their status as composite content adapted for computer-mediated communication. This entails looking at manifest and latent content as coherent performances that derives its meaning from both direct speech and associations recruited into it.

The study establishes how the content it examines can be characterized as a fragmented form of public theology that is articulated for a social media platform.

Key words: public theology, YouTube, social media, composite content, computer-mediated communication

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# 1. Introduction

Social media platforms are a ubiquitous presence in contemporary culture, as a media tool they are influential over public discourse and provide the potential to reach a variety of audiences at their own convenience. Churches and religious representatives appear increasingly aware of this potential and how to use platforms for effective communication and as a means of influence in public discourse.

This study will look at expressions of theological engagement with public issues on the social media platform YouTube to assess its status as public theology. This is a form of theology that branches out beyond faith traditions and is aimed at creating dialogue with wider culture, it seeks a common good without an explicitly expressed missiological intention. Because it is engaged with public issues in public arenas, YouTube is a well-suited medium for this kind of theology as it allows for a wide public distribution and a presentation that is easily understood outside of church and academia.

Because YouTube is a video-sharing platform, I argue that it adds audiovisual requirements to public theology because, as video accounts, the theological engagements become composite content that combines multiple layers of presentation. These layers must function within the logic of the computer-mediated communication used on the platform to attract interaction with the public it seeks to attract.

A public theology formulated for a social media platform is a relevant topic of study as it may indicate how religious representatives (in this case Catholic) are choosing to engage a contemporary public on contextually relevant issues.

## 1.1. Purpose and Framework

This paper intends to analyze material by Catholic content creators on YouTube to assess in what way their theological engagement can be characterized as a form of public theology formulated for social media.

The guiding questions are:

- In what way can the content be characterized as public theology?
- In what way can the content be characterized as public theology formulated for social media?

## 2. Theory and Method

### 2.1. Theory

The framework of this study operates from an understanding of public theology based on the works of Harold Breitenberg (2003), Katie Day and Sebastian Kim (2017), and Ted Peters (2018). This framework acknowledges that public theology lacks a definitive classification and will work with essential markers as qualifiers for a model that will be associated to social media.

The minimal conceptualization of this model is that public theology extends beyond the “publics” of church and academy to engage in dialogue with wider society; it is primarily interested in public discourse about public issues; it aims to be comprehensible and persuasive to those inside *and* outside the faith tradition; it is non-authoritative in its truth-claims, speaking with rather than to the public; and it is performative, combining reflection with action (Breitenberg 2003, 61-66; Day and Kim 2017, 10-17; Peters 2018, 157).

It is also considered an attempt to answer the public question “show us what theology can do?” (Day and Kim 2017, 2); this framework will consider the creators’ choice of social media a deliberate attempt to directly respond to this question by adjusting theology to the logic of computer-mediated communication. In the case of YouTube this means audiovisual productions that must combine appealing substance with an appealing presentation able to attract a public to interact with.

It is central to public theology to consider which “public/s” are intended (2017, 11-13). In this model the publics of intent are perceived as *public opinion* and *media*. This is partly based on the nature of YouTube’s participatory framework which is defined by physical distance and indeterminate viewership (Dynel 2014, 37-38), meaning that public theology must create interaction with a multivariant public that it is physically removed from. It seeks to influence and create discourse, e.g., with those lacking a faith commitment (Kim 2017, 17), but does so with a scattershot aim intending towards a space for theology in popular culture. It is thus seeking to influence popular opinion and to create a theological media presence.

Public theology is a discourse to be understood as explicitly theological but not confessional (Breitenberg 2003, 61). A Catholic public theology, as this framework intends, is understood as confession-informed. The distinction between confession-informed and confessional is partly based on the addressees of the content and the issues engaged, i.e., whether the issue is “public”. A public issue applies to public opinion outside the faith

tradition as well as within it, e.g., the real presence of Christ in the eucharist is a confessional issue, while the ordination of women is a public issue with confession-informed responses.

Beyond these minimal characteristics this model adds the maximal definition that public theology ought to fulfill five tasks outlined by Ted Peters. It ought to be, (1) pastoral, (2) apologetic, (3) scientific, (4) political, and (5) prophetic.

Its pastoral task means addressing existential questions of ultimate meaning, e.g., death and destiny, and to give voice to philosophically reflected and meaningful responses.

Its apologetic task means that Christian commitments, doctrines, and symbols are rendered plausible, reasonable, and helpful in modern discourse.

The scientific task means that there is mutual interaction between theology and science, and that theology is well-versed with the intellectual integrity of contemporary science.

Its political task is to contribute with a positive theological angle to a vision of justice and the common good, and its prophetic task is to negatively measure the present against the standard of the Kingdom of God (Peters 2018, 154, 175).

These minimal and maximal definitions will function as a unified framework to assess the content of this study and how it engages the publics it seeks through audiovisual means.

## 2.2. Method

For this study Content Analysis has been chosen as an unobtrusive method which utilizes pre-produced content, making it suitable to analyze different forms of communication. In this case it will be used to analyze texts that are produced in a realistic setting, addressing contextually relevant themes. It has also been chosen for its usefulness, per Lindsey Prior, as a “hybrid method” (Prior, 2014, 362) where the distinction between quantitative and qualitative is less fixed. This integrative ability is deemed necessary as the study will combine a quantitative set of measurable units even though the focus lies on a qualitative analysis, and it will use Content Analysis to “systematically manage and summarize large quantities of relatively unstructured information” (Nelson & Woods 2014, 111).

The quantitative units consist of statistics regarding the content creators and the content produced, this will include data regarding the content selected for analysis, e.g., level of engagement (likes, comments, views), date of publication, and length of videos. These elements illuminate the content selection of the study while providing an overview of the type of measurable interaction the content generates online.

The qualitative aspect of the study focuses on the texts, i.e., the YouTube videos. These will be regarded as “accounts” of composite content and the method will be used to examine “what has been recruited into the account” and how this is “connected or co-associated” (Prior 2014, 364).

While the primary focus of the analysis will be on the manifest content (speech), the latent content (structure, form, and non-verbal audiovisual elements) is considered significant to the performative and aesthetic layers of the accounts, and part of its production of meaning.

The content intended for analysis has been selected through method triangulation, quantitative data has been filtered through qualitative categories to isolate and assemble themes coherent with the theoretical framework. The initial categories of triangulation were “most viewed” (in the creator’s publication history), “most recent” (date of publication), and “most contemporary” (issue specific content relating to COVID19 and racism/the Black Lives Matter-movement, chosen for their prevalent news coverage during 2020).

The assembled content was sorted after the qualification of “public issue”, then arranged according to frequency of occurrence within the four chosen creators. A theme was established if the issue occurred among three out of four creators. Once a theme had been established, additional content was added which had been filtered out by the previous quantitative measurements, but which cohered with the theme. Superfluous content was removed if it did not adhere with a theme.

### 2.3. Earlier Research

The research on public theology sourced for this study pertain to the conceptualization and history of public theology, as well as the specific relationship between theology and modern digitized and global culture. While this research functions as indicators of how to understand public theology, they lean towards liberal and Protestant expressions of theology, signifying a need for a closer exploration of conservative and Catholic expressions.

### 2.4. Material and selection

#### 2.4.1. *Primary Material*



The primary material is the content published to YouTube by English speaking Catholic content creators. They have been selected after activity level (active in the last twelve months); subscriber amount (a minimum of 50 000); and views (a minimum of 1000 000 total views) and narrowed down to four. These categories intend to establish a general level of audience reach, indicating their ability to influence the intended publics. The creators have also been selected for the intentionality of content, i.e., confession-informed content engaging with public issues, intending an engagement with public discourse.

Table A.

Creator/Channel	Status	Country	Date of Origin	Subscribers	Total Views	Uploads
<i>Ascension Presents</i>	Clergy & Laity	U.S.A.	2014-09-17	447 000	59 354 326	906
<i>Bishop Robert Barron</i>	Clergy	U.S.A.	2007-02-10	373 000	65 981 568	888
<i>Breaking in the Habit</i>	Clergy	U.S.A.	2015-05-17	153 000	14 227 787	379
<i>Brian Holdsworth</i>	Laity	Canada	2009-05-25	59 600	4 162 022	152

Measured at: 2020-12-01

Table A shows the content creators, these are *Ascension Presents*, *Bishop Robert Barron*, *Breaking in the Habit*, and *Brian Holdsworth*. Two of these represent larger Catholic organizations for online ministry, these are *Ascension Presents* and *Word on Fire*. The former is an organization represented on screen by different presenters (lay people, priests, friars, and sisters), the latter is represented by its figurehead Bishop Robert Barron, whose name is on the channel.

The other two channels are represented by creators without an extensive online ministry. *Breaking in the Habit* is the personal channel of Franciscan friar (O.F.M) and priest Fr. Casey Cole, and *Brian Holdsworth* is the self-titled channel of a layman and independent creator. The creators are consistently from North America, speak English, and are predominantly represented on screen by male presenters; the geographical uniformity means that the focus of issues will be on a North American context, though the reach of the content is global.

As described in section 2.2, the materials were selected for themes (issues covered by most of the channels) established through method triangulation, as well as intentionality of address (aimed at public issues). Some material was eliminated due to space constraints which led to the exclusion of some themes, e.g., abortion and pornography; and the exclusion of some accounts because the creator had already been allotted an account for that theme. A list of excluded material can be found in Appendix C.

It needs to be noted that the material is only hosted by YouTube, the creator/channels are the publishers and can remove or edit the selected materials at their own discretion.

#### 2.4.2. *Secondary Material*

The theoretical framework is supported by materials published between 2000-2020 and is to be considered among the most recent and relevant in the field, it includes Harold Breitenberg Jr. (2003) “To Tell the Truth: Will the Real Public Theology Please Stand Up?”; Linell Cady (2014) “Public Theology and the Post Secular Turn”; Ted Peters (2018) “Public Theology: Its Pastoral, Apologetic, Scientific, Political, and Prophetic Tasks”; Scott Paeth (2016) “Whose Public? Which Theology? Signposts on the Way to a 21st Century Public Theology”; as well as Katie Day’s and Sebastian Kim’s (2017) *A Companion to Public Theology*.

These have been used to center the category of public theology in its epistemological context and to distinguish it from similar fields e.g., Christian ethics and political theology. They elucidate how theology can function in contemporary culture and why, in an increasingly social media literate cultural system, it is pivotal to look at and attempt to understand the articulations of theology within this type of public arena.

#### 2.5. Disposition

The content will be presented through six themes, starting with a focus on the audiovisual aspects of the performances and concluding with an assessment of the measurable interaction. The bulk of the analysis will consist of 24 accounts dealing with six public issues. These will be presented in order of publication, not by creator.

Each account will be summarized and analyzed after the theological tasks of public theology and each theme will conclude with a summary.

Theme 1: Composite Content as a Coherent Performance on YouTube

Theme 2: Perspectives on Political Division and Inequality

Theme 3: Perspectives on Racism and Civil Unrest

Theme 4: Perspectives on Contemporary Social Norms

Theme 5: Perspectives on the Coronavirus

Theme 6: Passive and Active Interaction on YouTube

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Theme 1: Composite Content as Coherent Communication on YouTube

Public theology is “performed” (Day and Kim 2017, 17), in this study it is performed on YouTube and the choice of platform makes it a form of computer-mediated communication (CMC). That means that it attempts to create interaction through audiovisual means in a social space marked by physical distance, indeterminate audiences, and asynchronicity (interaction is not simultaneous) (Dynel 2014, 37-38). As computer-mediated interaction, a recorded performance, public theology becomes composite content that is composed of multiple layers merged into a unified presentation.

The primary element is the manifest content, the speech-act, where the theological perspective on a public issue is addressed. Interconnected with this are secondary elements of latent content, these are part of what is “connected and co-associated” with the accounts (Prior 2014, 364), e.g., how audio or visual cues are used in the performance. The coherence of the performance must consider these two layers of communication to fully understand how public theology functions on YouTube and how it seeks its intended publics.

The analysis will consider latent elements throughout each account but will begin by considering those characterized as formal features. This represents an overall structure of the account and how they contribute to the way the content can be characterized as public theology.

#### Title and Thumbnail

The title and thumbnail constitute the initial performative elements, they are the first impression of the content’s aesthetic expression while also indicating its substance.

Titles serve this function by being descriptive or provocative in relation to the public issue it intends, e.g., *Why Can’t the Church Ordain Women?* (A11) is descriptive, it indicates the intention of the content while making it easy to find (searchable) on the platform. Titles like *Racism Isn’t That Complicated* (A8) or *Bruce Jenner and Transgenderism* (A18), are more provocative as the former appears to simplify a complex public issue, while the latter may stir a public scepticism regarding the Church’s stance on the issue.

The purpose of the titles is to enable the interaction, i.e., engage the public in the content published by attracting attention. It does this in conjunction with the thumbnail.

The thumbnail is the first visual impression of the performance, it often reiterates the title and combines this with a visual aspect. Images are recruited to serve a descriptive function and are commonly paired with an image of the presenter to create a quasi-introduction that alerts the viewer with whom interaction formally occurs.

Table B shows how they indicate the situation of address, three presenters represent clergy (a bishop, a priest, and a friar) and the thumbnails show through their religious attire that they are speaking from a formal position of authority. The lay presenter's situation of address is informal, reflected in the non-religious attire.

Table B. Thumbnails from Theme 2 (Accounts 1-4)



Source: YouTube channels: "Bishop Robert Barron"; "Brian Holdsworth"; "Breaking in the Habit"; "Ascension Presents".

Table B further shows the stylistic function of thumbnails, demonstrating how the title – or a version of it – is recruited into the image, while other images or facial expressions provide a visual connection to the topic.

The style of the thumbnails is identifiable to each creator and can be considered primers for the public they seek to engage, they are thus the first part of computer-mediated public theology, intending to arouse interest and interaction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> After the conclusion of this study, it was noted that channel *Bishop Robert Barron* were in the process of altering the thumbnails, creating a more uniform appearance to the content. Thumbnails described in this study may be subject to change at the creator's discretion.

## Intros and signature melodies

Three out of four creators (*Ascension Presents*, *Bishop Robert Barron*, *Brian Holdsworth*) make use of formal introduction sequences set to music, this is another performative layer reiterating the title and introducing the public to the presenter and the aesthetic of the channels' communicative style.

The larger channels (*Ascension Presents*, *Bishop Robert Barron*) utilize uncredited melodies which appear composed for their specific use, these are paired with title cards that introduce the name of the presenter, the channel's logo, and the title of the account. In accounts from 2020 these have been considerably elongated and elaborated upon, indicating that they serve a valued purpose.

Brian Holdsworth follows a similar format, with the distinction of mostly using a melody featuring vocals (chanting "Hallelujah") and a credited composer (Paul Jernberg). As the only layman, this melodic chanting enhances the sacral atmosphere of the accounts and may alert the uninitiated viewer to the theological intent (a similar task is served by the religious vestments of the other presenters).

The channel *Breaking in the Habit* only uses a signature melody in three of the accounts covered, these are included in the series "Catholicism in Focus", a series introduced by a jaunty upbeat tune which, also uncredited, appears to have been composed for the channel. The channel's other accounts do not use a specific intro sequence at all. This differentiation indicates that the intro sequence is part of the communicative act and connected to the type of message the creator wishes to convey. When it merges public issues with specifically doctrinal matters it uses an upbeat melody to give the presentation a lighter mood; but when it engages with public issues from a less doctrinal and more generally theological view, it does not.

The introductions reveal how an audiovisual performance includes elements that are theoretically redundant (has no immediate bearing on the manifest content), but which serve the communicative intent towards the public by branding the content with an identifiable aesthetic that maintains a certain standard of production.

Prior to these intro sequences, some accounts use "teasers", this is a portion of manifest content (speech-act) that is separate from the main part of the account and which serves to introduce the topic and prepare the public for the content.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the continued analysis the manifest content of teasers will be included in the account summaries.

Teasers reveal how public theology on social media adopt a manner of CMC by creating a preparatory segment of introducing issues and intentionality of topic (e.g., critique or caution). This is a manner of guiding the public to the manifest content in an accessible manner that would not be necessary in, e.g., direct interaction and which in other forms of publication may look different.

The usefulness of teasers is suggested through the observation that in accounts from 2020 all four creators have adopted this mode of presentation, while prior to 2017 it is only used by *Ascension Presents*.<sup>3</sup>

The introductions, in full, are conversational openings that tacitly acknowledge the elective nature of the platform, allowing the public to form an understanding of the manner of address and intention, before opting for further interaction with the content.

### Visual Aspects: Setting, Body Language, and Added Media

The choice of setting for an account presents a deliberate aesthetic that contributes to the characterization of public theology by announcing a mode of address. Through settings that are generally non-authoritative, neutral, or homey, it is indicated how the creators choose to engage the public by embracing a role of speaking *with* rather than *to* the public (Day and Kim 2017, 11). They de-emphasize, without eliminating, the religious overtones that may be alienating to the parts of the public that are from another, or without, a faith tradition.

An informal and homey type of setting is used by three of the creators (*Ascension Presents*, *Brian Holdsworth*, and *Breaking in the Habit*), as they appear to use their own residences, filming in either an office area or the living room in front of a fireplace.

*Breaking in the Habit* occasionally utilizes a green screen to create a non-disruptive background for clarifying doctrinal texts and quotes that appear on screen. It serves the purpose of guiding the public through Church teachings that they may be unfamiliar with and enables a wider public accessibility for the content. It also shows how the setting can aid the performance on social media.

Bishop Barron stands out as more formal; the setting is an office, but it is unclear if it is private or official. It also changes throughout the accounts, but it is notable that the bishop is consistently filmed in front of bookcases, creating an impression of education and erudition rather than overt religiosity.

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<sup>3</sup> In the full sample of accounts selected.

The setting is also important because the body language of the presenters is generally limited by the fact that they are seated during the performance. This means that the visuals are somewhat static and partially relies on the setting to generate interest in what is happening on the screen. The accounts often recruit additional visuals that generate a sense of movement (keeps the viewer alert) while contributing to the meaning of the manifest content, these will be further detailed in each account.

In terms of latent content, the limits of body language make other modes of communication noticeable, e.g., the manner of eye-contact. The three more informal creators notably rely on direct eye-contact with the viewer, this creates a pseudo-connection that mimics a direct dyadic and personal interaction between presenter and public.

Again, Bishop Barron deviates by avoiding eye-contact with the viewer, the performance is directed towards someone who is slightly to the side of the camera, creating a distance to the viewer that appears to imitate the experience a lecture, rather than participating in a personal conversation.

These modes of communication show that the performances utilize a multiplicity of layers to create a deliberate form of approach that reveals how each creator desires to interact with the public and how they manage the communicative constraints of the platform.

## Outros

The outro sequence, together with the intro, bookends the accounts and often plays a similar melody to announce the conclusion of the manifest content. Frequently it is a separate clip or a standard greeting, reused in multiple accounts.

The most significant part of the outro sequence is that the creators encourage the public to active interaction, e.g., by urging them subscribe on YouTube, by urging them to like or comment on the account, but also posting links to their other social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, and podcasts). This denotes the conversational intention, extending beyond passive interaction (watching only) and inviting the public to engage on YouTube in dialogue or otherwise signal (like/dislike) their reactions to the topic. The outro thus serves as a reminder that the account intends to be part of public discourse, again, speaking with not to the public.

## Time span

Table B.1. Time-span of accounts in minutes

A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	A11	A12
10:16	10:40	08:39	08:03	08:30	06:43	09:07	12:32	01:57	06:51	09:09	09:34
A13	A14	A15	A16	A17	A18	A19	A20	A21	A22	A23	A24
08:20	09:38	09:21	13:09	07:40	08:18	11:15	10:12	15:32	13:46	07:58	07:55

On Table B.1. one can see how the time span of the accounts generally do not surpass 15 minutes. This appears to adhere to social media practices where content is often low-cost in terms of time investment, i.e., enabling the public to engage with the content in a minimal amount of time.

As it requires that the topics are dealt with in a straightforward communication, this brevity also supports public theology's rejection of jargon and its emphasis on accessibility (Breitenberg 2003, 66; Peters 2018, 163). This dispensation of intricacy enables the accounts to address complicated issues without making high demands on the public's pre-existing knowledge of theological concepts or other forms of discourse. It thus generates content likely to be comprehensible to a wider public.

The discourse is distinctly theological but, as the further analysis will show, finds a manner of address that emphasizes a common language in the form of cultural examples, attempting to find common ground with "various conversation partners" (Kim 2017, 12).

This short-style format, reliant on direct address (interaction between presenter and audience only), is prevalent among all four creators as the chosen format for tackling public issues.<sup>4</sup> The creators do produce confessional content, but these deviate in setting, mode of address (interviews, including a third-party that further distances presenter and viewer), and uses a long-style format.

The short style thus informs the characterization of public theology by creating an accessibility for those who are interested in the issue, but who may not be convinced of the benefits of a theological perspective. It allows them to engage without making demands on their time or their pre-existing level of expertise.

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<sup>4</sup> A9 from Bishop Barron deviates as it includes a third party (interviewer), but as it bears the distinctive subtitle "A video from Bishop Robert Barron", seen on all the short-style accounts from the creator, it has remained in the study.



## Theme Summary

There is a recognizable structure in the accounts, they often conform in formal features while maintaining an individual aesthetic. They are deliberate and aware of how to effectively navigate the limitations of computer-mediated communication by creating a communicative act that attempts to be conversational and which invites to further interaction.

As composite content the accounts are aesthetically conscious, are condensed and accessible, and they intend to attract attention and interaction. These latent aspects serve to create a coherent form of communication that visually, structurally, and audibly, informs and supports the manifest content this study now turns to.

### 3.2. Theme 2: Perspectives on Political Division and Inequality

Table C. Account titles and date of publication

Perspectives on Political Division and Inequality			
	Creator	Title	Published
Account 1	Bishop Robert Barron	<i>God, Equality, and the Founding of America</i>	2020-07-09
Account 2	Brian Holdsworth	<i>The Authorities Can't Save You</i>	2020-08-14
Account 3	<i>Breaking in the Habit</i>	<i>Boycott Walmart?</i>	2020-08-17
Account 4	<i>Ascension Presents</i>	<i>Why Are We So Divided Right Now?</i>	2020-10-07

#### A1. “*God, Equality, and the Founding of America*”

**Presenter:** Bishop Robert Barron

**Thumbnail:** Photo of Bishop Barron against the background image of an American flag.

Text, “A video from + Robert Barron” and title of account.

**Intro:** A clip from the end of the account used as a teaser. A theme sequence set to strings starts to play while the camera pans over the details of the Bishop’s study, this includes a guitar, a bust of Dante, and a portrait of St. Thomas Aquinas. As the music culminates the background is blurred, title appears on screen.

**Setting:** Official study.

**Account Summary:** Examines the correlation between the claims of Thomas Jefferson in the *Declaration of Independence* and the claims of religion. Jefferson’s claims are initially

contrasted with the philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle, this to portray how the elitist systems of antiquity were devoid of concepts like equality and inalienable rights.

The argument is that something “happened” between antiquity and Jefferson’s claim that it is *self-evident* that, “all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights”.

Argues that religion is the origin of the idea that all men are *created* equal and endowed with rights by their *creator* (emphasis to indicate tone of the presenter). That this is evident as human beings are *not* equal in e.g., beauty, wealth, or skill; they are only equal when perceived as children of God. Thus, removing God from the claims of liberal democracy allows inequality to dominate and it quickly leads to the rights of people being alienated, demonstrated in openly atheistic regimes of the past century.

Therefore, one should be wary when people try to drive a wedge between liberal democracy and God, as they are “mutually implicative”, and that the founding of America finds its truth in the simultaneous actions of Thomas Jefferson and Junipero Serra. The latter is a Spanish friar who founded missions on the coast of California, around whose statues there has been a controversy.

The conclusion is that these two men show that democracy and evangelization go hand in hand.

**Outro:** Bishop Barron, against a grey background, thanking the viewer for watching and encouraging them to subscribe and share the account. An outro melody plays, and the *Word on Fire* logo shows.

**Recruits into it:** The political philosophies of Thomas Jefferson, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, as well as the atheistic philosophies of Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia, Mao’s China, Pot’s Cambodia, and Castro’s Cuba, these latter examples evoking historical images of tyranny and human suffering. It concludes with Junipero Serra.

**Visuals:** Portraits of Thomas Jefferson and Junipero Serra.

**Context of topic:** Published in July 2020, shortly after Junipero Serra’s statues were vandalized as a refutation of his missionary activities in indigenous communities (*Los Angeles Times*, 2020-06-20; *Sacramento CBS local*, 2020-07-05).

**Account Conclusion:** The account intends a positive vision of the Christian value foundation of liberal democracy, and addresses this through the perceived emergence of a disconnect in contemporary society between this foundation and its religious roots.

It recruits the examples of classical political philosophy and atheistic political systems to contrast these with the examples of Thomas Jefferson and Junipero Serra. It thus grounds its argument in historical examples of ideas and practices that are meant to impress upon the public the significance religious values have had on the formation of political philosophy and its manmade systems.

The attacks on Serra's statues, only briefly mentioned, appears to connect to the examples of Stalin et al. and is meant to evoke the worst-case outcomes of the cultural and political process of removing God and religious values from political ideals.

Without direct references to biblical or well-known Christian sources, the account presents an apologetic claim that Christian values protect equality which is based in Jefferson's understanding of rights. It further stresses that the just ordering of society can only find a coherent and objective cause for human equality in the metaphysical, as the physical reality negates the absolute equality that is treasured in contemporary society.

The account thus creates a positive political vision of Christian values (Peters 2018, 174) meant to unify the public in equality and protect liberal democracy. But it bases its arguments in secular sources, contrasting their negativity with the positive aspect of the metaphysical.

The argument does not appear to seek converts, as public theology tends not to do (2018, 164), but rather to use theology to illuminate how "self-evident" values like equality are properly contextualized by religion, and how the political vision of common good needs a foundation that transcends the merely secular.

Through these means the theological tasks the account fulfils are apologetic and political.

## *A2. "The Authorities Can't Save You"*

**Presenter:** Brian Holdsworth

**Thumbnail:** Orange toned background image of perfectly lined up soldiers, the title printed above them, image of presenter to the right.

**Intro:** Presenter steps back from the camera and sits down in a green chair, introduces the topic as the signature melody begins to play. The background turns white as logo and title appears and the presenter steps into frame and smiles.

**Setting:** Private office.

**Account Summary:** Argues that common ideas of authoritarianism (dictators, war, genocide) are too limited. That authoritarianism also concerns appeals that seem harmless, like “the science is settled”, but which demand submission to a truth claim.

Through G.K. Chesterton it is argued that it is not preferable for a nation to do things perfectly (rule by experts) if this is at the price of passivity and obedience of all the rest. It argues that power is intoxicating and breeds desire for more, stating that, “that’s how greed and lust works, unless there is an ethical imposition in the way...” Indicating a lack of such an imposition.

It suggests that media spin and power biases can hinder reliable conclusions on topics of public interest, and that authority easily transforms knowledge into manipulation. The primary example is President Donald Trump’s suggestion of hydroxychloroquine as a potential treatment of COVID19. This was negated by a scientific study that was later retracted and further refuted by another study. But political interest and media bias had already shaped the opinion of the mainstream narrative against the drug.

The account cautions that during times of crisis there needs to be extra focus on not letting power go unchecked, especially when there are attempts to “justify some sweeping imposition” based on vague statements. It argues that one should not see authoritarianism everywhere, but that it is important to recognize that there are revolutionary people looking for opportunities to acquire power.

It stresses that it was circumstantial crises that enabled revolutionaries to insinuate themselves and utilize discontent and polarization to disastrous effects in World War I, Hitler’s Germany, and the revolutions of France and Russia.

**Outro:** A separate clip where the presenter asks viewers to comment, subscribe, like, and go to his Facebook page. It rebukes YouTube, arguing that subscribing is not enough anymore because it wants to “tell you what to watch”, and subscribers must now also click a “bell” notification to be alerted to new content.

**Recruits into it:** G.K. Chesterton (author, Catholic convert), The Lancet (science magazine), and Donald Trump (45<sup>th</sup> president of the U.S.A.) these are all connected to the current situation, illuminating abuses of power.

The French Revolution, World War I, Germany during Hitler's regime, and the Russian Revolution are used as cautionary examples of extreme political escalation ignited by relatively minor or unrelated events.

**Visuals:** Drawing of G.K. Chesterton, a screenshot of an online article concerning hydroxychloroquine, and news clips from riots in America, 2020 illustrating a revolutionary mindset.

**Context of topic:** Published in August 2020 and concerns the Coronavirus lockdowns and the uncertainty of how to prevent and cure the virus.

**Account Conclusion:** The title of the account is somewhere between provocative and descriptive, it functions as an introduction to the topic which "challenges allegiance to pseudo-ultimates" (Peters 2018, 161). In this case the authorities, i.e., the worldly institutions whose potential abuses of power it strongly fears and critiques, especially under the circumstances of the Coronavirus.

The suggestion of the title is that the authorities does not have salvatory capabilities but something else does. However, while it uses the examples of cardinal sins (lust and greed) it does not name them as such; similarly, instead of a distinctly religious source, it recruits an author to argue that faith in worldly powers is a threat to the individual's ability to freedom and flourishing, including the freedom to dissenting opinion and action.

Like A1 it thus relies on secular sources to direct positive attention towards the religious through a critique of the present, most strongly through co-associations to historical examples of human alienation and political polarization where conflict turned violent. It uses clips from contemporary riots to illustrate what happens when a political side becomes a matter of ultimate concern (salvation or destruction).

Interwoven with this is a critique of how political bias is influencing sources of credibility, like science, preventing them from genuine results. This is demonstrated in the example of hydroxychloroquine which it perceives as having been dismissed because of who supported it, rather than the scientifically tested effectiveness of it.

The account primarily fulfils a prophetic task which condemns the empirical reality (Peters 2018, 174-176), especially the perception of authority as salvific, connecting to this a discussion on how science can be misused and abused due to power-interests. It somewhat contrasts this with an implicit positive political vision that urges people to challenge sources of power and hold on to higher values (ethical impositions) to protect the rights of citizens. It can thus be said to fulfil a prophetic, a scientific, and a political task.

### A3. “Boycott Walmart?”

**Presenter:** Fr. Casey Cole

**Thumbnail:** Presenter in his habit, encircled by a blue line, sitting at a desk holding up an open palm over which the *Walmart* logo has been inserted.

**Intro:** n/a

**Setting:** At a desk in front of a brick wall.

**Account Summary:** Discusses the complex moral dilemmas of engaging with the economy and the specific challenges of big companies like *Walmart*. It delves into the history of *Walmart*'s questionable practices, then counters this with what defenders of the company say is good about it.

It suggests that consumers are presented with the option of implicitly supporting big companies with repeated human rights violations, which also increase wealth inequality and engages with other unsustainable practices; or they can choose to boycott even though it will hurt the employees and the communities supported by the presence of these companies.

Argues that there is a third option – to be a voice of reform. To recognize that companies will not change on their own and that consumers have previously influenced the practices of e.g., *McDonalds* (improved meat) and *Nike* (distancing from sweatshops).

States that, “Working conditions, labour rights, equitable pay, environmental sustainability, it all matters”, and argues that Catholics have an important role in building community. That a commitment to Christ means honouring the dignity of *all* and includes a preferential treatment for the poor.

**Outro:** A brown background on which Fr. Cole's other social media accounts are listed.

**Recruits into it:** *Walmart* and *Amazon* as examples of big corporations; *McDonalds*, *Nike* are utilized to demonstrate both harmful practices of big business and their potential for change. Mentions a documentary on *Walmart*, possibly *Walmart: The High Cost of Low Price* (2005). Also mentions the collapse of a *Walmart* factory in Bangladesh, likely in 2013.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in August 2020 it potentially connects to the seven-year long bribery investigation into the Walmart corporation which concluded with a financial settlement in June 2020.

**Account Conclusion:** The account explains the complexity of choice and the multiple layers of suffering surrounding big corporations and the consumerism that fuels their supply. It does so with the intent to illuminate how, in the intersection of impoverished workers in communities in America and the disadvantaged laborers abroad who supply the products, the individual consumer's choice becomes a matter of great significance.

This reveals a “glocal” perspective, a term coined by Clive Pearson (Peters 2018, 159), indicating how global and local concerns are deeply intertwined, and that a troubling division between wealth and poverty is revealed both within America and outside of its borders.

Thus, choice becomes a privilege not awarded to all, placing a responsibility on consumers to act with social interest in mind. This is framed as a special interest to Catholics whose pastoral concerns includes a “preferential option for the poor” (2018, 161); but the overall intentionality of the account is a positive vision of reform, an action of betterment that extends beyond the ability of Catholics and emphasizes the shared responsibility of each consumer.

Gradual reform, negating radicalism, and based in debate and consensus is one of the foundational methods of public theology (Kim 2017, 13-14), in this account this is a non-drastic approach that starts with the consumer and shows how theology may function by emphasizing the needs of community over self-interest. It shows how gradual reform is preferable to the alternatives as it is the only option that may potentially serve all parties, i.e., the consumer, the worker, and the corporation.

Through recognition of their own importance in the chain of production and consumption, the consumer has a capability to choose social solidarity over individual interests, without entirely abandoning the latter.

The account thus serves an apologetic, pastoral, and a political task, focusing on the shared human condition, the meaning and responsibility of building communities, and the positive vision of social solidarity.

#### *A4. “Why Are We So Divided Right Now?”*

**Presenter:** Fr. Mike Schmitz

**Thumbnail:** Close-up of presenter with a nonplussed expression. Text, “We are Divided and Distracted”.

**Intro:** Teaser introducing topic, followed by a signature melody and an expanding square flashing through images of each presenter from the channel, concluding with Fr. Schmitz. Fades to white and the title appears surrounded by a yellow border.

**Setting:** Private living room in front of a fireplace, in the background a framed image of what appears to be the Virgin Mary.<sup>5</sup>

**Account Summary:** Argues that though humans are created for community, the primary challenges to unity and purpose are division and distraction. It argues that humans are “distraction machines” who can be distracted by anything from chores to social media. But that in a democracy a citizen is primarily required to do three tasks - get informed, converse about the information and form opinions, and then vote in elections. All else functioning as distraction.

It argues that there is a difference between a “circle of interest” and a “circle of influence”, and that people get caught up in a wide sphere of interest when they ought to focus on meaningful action, i.e., what is within their personal power of influence.

In the political community, it suggests that focus ought to lie on what unites rather than what divides. It contrasts the motto of the college where the presenter works, which is “our diversity is our strength”, with that of the U.S., “e pluribus unum”, to argue that diversity

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<sup>5</sup> Same setting in all accounts featuring Fr. Schmitz.



only becomes a strength when it is transcended by cohesion, as individuals are united in families, families in communities, communities into cities, and so on.

To overcome division, the path towards unity is to encounter others with kindness, engage in conversation, and attempt to find commonality.

**Outro:** Fr. Schmitz urges people to let him know in comments below what they think, continues to speak as the video shrinks and is placed in the top right corner of the screen as it splits into a blue and white side. On the left recommendations to more videos on the channel appears, on the right the original video and below a link to *Ascension Press*' purchasable materials.

**Recruits into it:** The mottos seen above.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in October 2020, before the Presidential Election in America.

**Account Conclusion:** The account constructs a positive vision of what lies within the responsibility of citizens in a democratic nation, rooting this in commitment to information, influence, and interpersonal relationships.

It does not seek consensus but rather the ability of diverse ideologies, through people, to “mutually inform one another and function together cooperatively in society” (Paeth 2016, 472).

It addresses this by relating it to a tendency to distraction, tacitly pointing to the problems of e.g., social media and its forms of social communication. While it can contribute beneficially with knowledge of events, it also can cause quick chain reactions of enflamed emotions. These often serve to distract and divide as it is outside the influential capacity of the voter and hinders meaningful dialogue and exchange of information.

The internet does not always promote balanced interpersonal relationships as it naturally creates a barrier between people in the elimination of direct contact, and it can prevent unity to form out of diversity. The goal of a political community is thus social solidarity through respectful dialogue and unity through shared commonality that transcends that which divides.

The account, published shortly before an election, fulfills a political task and, like the other accounts, it engages with a public issue but does not focus on overt religious content. This may widen its appeal by focusing on that which unites (desire for less polarization) rather than that which divides (religious affiliations or lack thereof).

### *Theme Summary*

Table C.1. Summary of theological tasks (Theme 2)

Theological Tasks	
Account 1	Apologetic, Political
Account 2	Political, Prophetic, Scientific
Account 3	Apologetic, Political, Pastoral
Account 4	Political

The accounts of this theme are diverse but in response to the question “show us what theology can do”, their cumulative response is the suggestion that it can provide a unifying moral foundation which protects the values of equality without necessitating homogeneity.

From the perspective of a diverse and pluralistic culture, theology is presented as a valuable co-producer in the national community’s self-perception and its ultimate guiding values. Personal interest is reframed as personal responsibility and social solidarity through the individual’s understanding (conviction) and honoring (with action) the shared human condition and equal right to flourishing.

A1 addresses the metaphysical logic behind human rights; A2 shows a skepticism against partisanship that harms the common good and interpersonal relationships, by hindering truth and alienating political opposition; A3 stress the individual’s responsibility to contribute to the common good even in mundane tasks such as shopping; and A4 stress the citizenry’s responsibility to transcend superficial divisions and distractions. They indicate how public theology is interested in all aspects of human life (Day & Kim 2017, 11), suggesting that the values Christ may inform choice of purchases as well as of vote.

They are all grounded in concrete issues, e.g., the vandalization of statues; political restrictions due to the Coronavirus; the practices of big corporations; and the presidential election. Through this topicality they demonstrate the rapidity with which the theologians can contribute to public discourse on issues.

Table C.2. shows a summary of what is recruited into the accounts, revealing that they are primarily secular examples which illuminate how the accounts perceive the contemporary condition as problematic.

The negative examples, e.g., World War I, revolutions, or the elitist political ideals of antiquity, serve to elevate the Christian value system in comparison. They are used to demonstrate the negative consequences of overreliance on man-made systems to the neglect of the divine (ultimate) and transcendent values which may aid the production of a genuine common good.

Table C.2. Reference Summary of Theme 2

<b>Christian References</b>	<b>2</b>
A1: Junipero Serra	1
A3: Preferential treatment of the poor (Christian obligation)	1
<b>Cultural References</b>	<b>22</b>
A1: Thomas Jefferson; Plato; Aristotle; Cicero; Adolf Hitler; Josef Stalin; Mao Zedong; Fidel Castro; Pol Pot	9
A2: President Donald Trump; <i>The Lancet</i> ; Two unnamed scientific studies;	8
A3: French Revolution; Russian Revolution; Hitler's Germany, WWI	3
A4: <i>Walmart, McDonalds, Nike</i>	2
A4: Motto of the U.S.A.; motto of unnamed college	2
<b>Christian/Cultural References</b>	<b>1</b>
A2: G.K. Chesterton	1

### 3.3. Theme 3: Perspectives on Racism and Civil Unrest

Table D. Account titles and date of publication

Perspectives on Racism			
	Creator	Title	Published
Account 5	Bishop Robert Barron	<i>On Charlottesville and America's Original Sin</i>	2017-08-25
Account 6	Ascension Presents	<i>NFL National Anthem Protests</i>	2017-10-04
Account 7	Breaking in the Habit	<i>I'm a bit racist. And so are you.</i>	2020-05-13
Account 8	Brian Holdsworth	<i>Racism Isn't that Complicated</i>	2020-06-06

A5. “*On Charlottesville and America’s Original Sin*”

**Presenter:** Bishop Robert Barron.

**Thumbnail:** Split image of Thomas Jefferson on the left and presenter on the right.

**Intro:** Black background, text “Bishop Barron comments on Charlottesville”. A simple musical theme plays.

**Setting:** Seated in front of a black bookcase.

**Account Summary:** The account connects the events in Charlottesville, Virginia to Thomas Jefferson and his house Monticello. These are contrasted as simultaneously representing the best and the worst of America, with Monticello being a visual representation of America’s “original sin”, describing that hidden below the line of sight of the mansion are the hovels where Jefferson’s slaves lived. This displays the tension between an ideal and the racial ideologies that is said to have exploded in the Civil War; the Civil Rights movement; Ferguson (2014); and Charlottesville (2017).

The presenter stresses that the phrase original sin is deliberate because the problem is *theological*, a denial of the *imago dei* in other people, and thus needs a theological solution. This resolution to superficial divisions was recognized by St. Paul, and centuries later by Martin Luther King, in the Christian cross.

The cross reveals the worst of humanity, in it all sins are revealed, and all the dysfunctions of humanity are put on display. But it also reveals how despite the sins of humanity, God’s mercy swallows them through Christ.

**Outro:** Black background, text “for more information go to [www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org)”.

**Recruits into it:** *Unite the Right*-rally (described as “the events” in Charlottesville), the Civil War, Civil Rights, and Thomas Jefferson are all recruited to show the contrast between the idealism of America and the failings to live up to them. St. Paul and Martin Luther King are used to show how theology is the solution.

**Visuals:** A series of images related to Charlottesville, the Monticello and Thomas Jefferson, including images of the slave hovels. Image of a slave being whipped is used to illustrate a story about Jefferson whipping a slave.

A series of images used to visualize the conflicts that have emanated from racial tension, images of dead bodies from the Civil War; Civil Rights protests; unrest in Ferguson, Missouri; and the KKK attacking a black man.

Image of Jesus being crucified is used as a visual aid to how the worst of humanity. Then a photo of Martin Luther King giving a sermon, the camera pans up to show a large cross above him.

**Context of topic:** The account was published in August 2017 after the *Unite the Right* rally in Charlottesville, which turned violent when protestors and counter-protestors clashed.

**Account Conclusion:** By the brief mention of “the events”, the account assumes common knowledge of the rally and uses it as a stepping off point to address a contemporary resurgence of racial tensions.

In a condemnation of the present, as much as the past, it posits racism as part of the struggle between good and evil which has plagued humanity since the fall. Through this it contrasts the ideal that humans can recognize and form political structures after, but which they appear unable to properly live up to in the broken state of the world.

The stress on the need for a theological solution, along with the recruitment of St. Paul and Martin Luther King, establishes a positive political vision that finds an objective truth of equality in the cross and the shared human creation by God. This vision, while grounded in equality and love, also forces humanity to confront its worst sides and seek mercy from it.

It stresses the need for metaphysical truths to be infused in political systems and racial relationships, and recognizes that humanity is a shared condition, sharing the weakness of sin as well as the promise of salvation, and that it is through people’s recognition of this that the present can be changed.

The theological solution is thus, as seen in A1, to ground equality in the metaphysical and to measure the failings of humanity against the prophetic values of Christianity, rather than in partisan or parochial political interests (Kim 2017, 18).

The tasks the account can be said to fulfil are prophetic (condemning), political (positive), and apologetic (using Christian symbols to illuminate the shared human condition).

## A6. “NFL National Anthem Protests”

**Presenter:** Fr. Mike Schmitz

**Thumbnail:** Presenter looking intently into the camera with a furrowed brow, one fist in front of his face as if covering a cough.

**Intro:** White screen on which the title appears, set to instrumental theme.

**Setting:** Living room.

**Account Summary:** Addresses the events of American NFL players kneeling during the national anthem and the emotions strongly associated with this from those on the side of the protestors and those who find the protests objectionable.

The presenter uses his own right to protest outside abortion clinics to suggest that when encountering a protest each person has two choices, either trying to understand the reasons behind it or to dismiss it.

Argues, through G.K. Chesterton, that America is the only country founded on a creed, the flag and anthem are representations of the creed which makes it important to understand whether protestors “don’t believe in the creed” or whether they believe in it but recognize that there is a “gap between the ideal and what’s real”.

While affirming that there are real injustices, the presenter argues that the problem starts in people's hearts and uses St. Paul to stress that before people start telling others what to do, they need to get their “own house in order”.

He quotes Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn saying that “the dividing line between good and evil passes through the human heart”. This is used to stress that everyone needs to start with themselves, ask God for help to become the person the world needs them to be.

**Outro:** White background, link to *Ascension Presents*’ webpage.

**Recruits into it:** GK Chesterton (author, Catholic convert); Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (author, Russian Orthodox); and St. Paul (1 Timothy 3:1-5) used to emphasize the moral responsibility of the individual.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in October 2017 in reaction to NFL-players kneeling during the National Anthem, to protest police brutality against African Americans.

**Account Conclusion:** Tackles a concrete and controversial issue connected to racial relations in the U.S., as suggested in its acknowledgement that there were strong feelings on both sides. It does not express an overt support for the protests but reframes the matter to take focus away from the protestor's actions (which the public cannot control) and place focus on the reactions (which is within the control of the individuals of the public).

It takes a pastoral approach that reflects on how the individual ought to react in the face of something they may find objectionable or offensive, with the conclusion that the sum of their reactions responds to either good or evil in their heart. The reaction is either based in love and enables the individual to encounter a protest with openness to its issue, or it is based in a rejection of the other and their pain.

It enhances personal choice in how to respond to a political Other, tacitly suggesting that information and interaction is more important than judging the rectitude of their action.

By using the presenter's own right to protest for a pro-life cause the matter is contrasted between two political perspectives. It can be considered a position rooted in an apolitical stance as it appears to argue for the right of protest, regardless of the political perspective of the protestor.

The connection to pro-life protests could also be a manner of contextualizing the issue for parts of the audience that may lean towards a pro-life position.

Through Solzhenitsyn it echoes Vatican II's assessment that worldly problems are connected to the "basic imbalance which is rooted in the heart of man" (John Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 10); the use of a cultural source, rather than a doctrinal, indicates the intention towards a wider audience that may be hostile towards clear confessional expressions.

It fulfils a political task that appears to seek a positive vision which recognizes that patriotism is not inherently problematic but becomes problematic when it produces narrow-minded protectionism and reluctance to dialogue. The upset to the disrespect of the creed, national anthem, and flag, cannot excuse or tolerate any damage the interpersonal bonds with other citizens by attempting to control, dissuade, or otherwise restrain their right of action. The tasks fulfilled are thus pastoral and political.

A7. *"I'm a bit racist. And so are you."*

**Presenter:** Fr. Casey Cole

**Thumbnail:** A background split between a black and white side, presenter in the middle, standing with both hands on his neck, head tilted back and eyes gazing upwards in distress.

**Intro:** n/a

**Setting:** In front of a dark wall decoration covering the whole background.

**Account Summary:** The account argues that it is erroneous to think of racism as a binary issue, something you either are or are not, or that external factors (having black friends, doing charitable work) can disprove racism.

It suggests that racism exists on a spectrum and is expressed in many ways that does not involve overt violence or hatred, e.g., in the assumption that one's own experiences are normative while remaining largely disinterested in minority experiences. According to the presenter most racism is the "subtle indifference" or "wilful ignorance" of the Other.

It further suggests that "relational blocks" prevents people from living in solidarity with one another and that *everyone* is susceptible to prejudiced thinking, including those publicly speaking against it. The presenter stresses that there are no exculpating factors, saying, "I don't care how nice of a person you are; you can still think and do things that cause immense suffering in the human family."

To understand and combat racism, people need to start by looking inside themselves, at the parts they would rather not acknowledge, and which are not ready for the Kingdom of God. They also need to look at the current order of society and its structural systems and recognize that there is a need for change, that the systems are not working as they should. It is stressed that it is important to see the individual, not the group, and not to see people as social threats. That it is the responsibility of everyone to work to "uphold the dignity of all of God's family", to prepare themselves to live in complete solidarity with those who are not like them.

**Outro:** Brown background image with a list of Fr. Cole's other social media accounts.

**Recruits into it:** n/a

**Visuals:** n/a



**Context of topic:** Published in May 2020, shortly after the shooting of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020, which sparked discourse on systemic racism in the American justice system.

**Account Conclusion:** In its suggestion that racism ought not be viewed as a binary matter, the account recruits into it a contemporary form of discourse connected to identity politics. This attempts to undo binary perspectives on e.g., gender and race, by placing it on a spectrum. It thus merges the prophetic vision of the Kingdom with a social analysis reflecting a liberal form of discourse, extracting from it the language it needs without necessarily adopting its ideals. This may reflect an immersion in popular discourse and awareness of what is comprehensible to a wider public.

The account further judges the tendency of people to hide behind external actions (charity), associations (black friends), as well as internal obfuscations (being “nice”), in attempts to evade personal responsibility to genuinely contribute to an improved racial situation by embracing true solidarity.

Its judgement of the present failure to live up to the ideals of the Kingdom serves both a prophetic task as well as an apologetic in its stress that this is a flaw all of humanity shares, and must continue to struggle with, as no one is immune from in-group biases and internal prejudices.

It fulfils a political task by using the Kingdom as a positive vision against which not only interpersonal relationships ought to be measured, but also the political systems of government. As seen in A3, by the same creator, gradual reform through debate is a signature of public theology; here this is expressed as reform rooted in personal transformation and extending upwards to political systems. It uses the Kingdom as a positive model towards which reform ought to be measured, i.e., finding complete solidarity in transcendent and metaphysically infused values, the tasks fulfilled are thus apologetic, political, and prophetic.

#### *A8. “Racism Isn’t that Complicated”*

**Presenter:** Brian Holdsworth

**Thumbnail:** Photo of black woman walking into a building surrounded by white journalists. Text, “Better understanding racism”. Image of presenter to the right.

**Intro:** Same as A2.

**Setting:** Private office.

**Account Summary:** Addresses tensions concerning race in society and argues that all people of “good will” object to racism and its various expressions, but that there are problems in current culture and how it responds to perceived injustice. That language used by politicians, activists, and media, deliberately prevents people from coming together and intentionally exacerbates the issue.

Argues that racism is not only a sin of action but of *motivation*, and while the former can be judged the latter cannot. The presenter uses Thomas Aquinas to establish that this kind of judgement of motivation reveals contempt, rather than love, of one’s neighbour. It further suggests that this type of judgement enables people to get caught up in a “currency of injustice”, fuelled by an appetite for revenge and escalation, and which media and online discourse encourages.

Suggests that there is a need to be more discerning and to learn to see individuals outside of the “superficial categories” that are imposed on them by politicians, media, or activists’ groups that purports to speak for a whole race.

There is a stress that the biblical wisdom of “eye for an eye” is often misunderstood and that what it really means is restraint and proportionality, that Jesus did not mean that we could not judge the explicit action of others, but that the injunction against judging meant that one cannot judge the internal motivations or culpability of another.

The solution to racism is for people to start with themselves and shed any notions of racial superiority for their own group, and then to give their neighbour the benefit of a doubt concerning what motivated their perceived actions.

**Outro:** Same as A2.

**Recruits into it:** Martin Luther King, Justin Trudeau, Hitler, Thomas Aquinas, David Dorn (retired police officer killed during BLM protests). Likely, Black Lives Matter as the activist group wishing to speak for a whole race.

**Visuals:** Photo Martin Luther King giving a speech. A screenshot of the definition of “racism”. An image of David Dorn. News footage from American riots in 2020, of Justin

Trudeau speaking in parliament, and of a black man and of an elderly black woman, both of whom had their property destroyed during the riots.

**Context of topic:** Published in June 2020, during the protests in the wake of the killing of George Floyd on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and the media discourse around the Black Lives Matter-movement.

**Account Conclusion:** Like A7 it addresses the problems of social unity which are blocked by expressions of racism, with the distinction that this account is also polemical against the institutions and actors it perceives as maintaining racial tensions for political purposes. This includes media narratives, activist groups, and progressive politicians.

The polemic implies that racial distinctions are social constructs, and the account serves an apologetic task that seeks to counter these political constructs, perceiving and portraying racism as a symptom of division in the broken state of the world but not as a natural part of the human condition.

In an apologetic manner it argues, through Thomas Aquinas, that the neighbour must be viewed as another self and that in terms of retributive justice, even in the case of wrongdoers, is a judgement that belongs to God, and that no other human can justly perceive the internal guilt of another.

It thus points to how, in the present, sin (action) often breeds more sins (the judgement of that action), and only increases division and hate. That the theological answer is to see past divisions that serve political interests, rather than shared interests of common good. Through this focus on illuminating a positive vision in the potential to shed racial categories, and how to improve the present through Christian understanding of correct judgement, enabling a social unity grounded in neighbourly love and charity, the account fulfils an apologetic and political task.

## Theme Summary

Table D.1. Summary of theological tasks (Theme 3)

Theological Tasks	
Account 5	Apologetic, Political, Prophetic
Account 6	Pastoral, Political
Account 7	Apologetic, Political, Prophetic
Account 8	Apologetic, Political

The accounts in this theme are centered around the central point of mankind's shared nature and origin as equally created by God, which is complimented by personal responsibility to look inside oneself and scrutinize the prejudices blocking solidarity with the Other.

This theme is more overtly confession-informed than the previous and there are clear attempts to re-sacralize public discourse, directing it away from "health, wealth, and pleasure" (Peters 2018, 173) and towards a sacred order, using language that seeks to make the Kingdom of God comprehensible to a wider audience through an emphasis on love of the neighbor.

What they seek are personal and interpersonal reforms, putting an emphasis on personal reflection and transformation. Racism is thus portrayed as a reaction stemming out of the broken state of humanity with everyone bearing a responsibility to face this brokenness within themselves.

They vary in their approaches somewhat, A5 has a missiological edge to it and its solution to racism may be somewhat obscure to a non-believer. Its metaphysical emphasis of seeing the shared creation with a racialized other does however urge for personal reform, and action, against perceived injustices. A6 urges for openness and dialogue, through the example of protests, to encounter the Other only after confronting the propensity towards evil within the Self. A7 speaks to reforms of self, and in extension to the political systems surrounding the individual, recruiting into it a contrast between majority and minority experiences that suggests that there is a certain systemic presence of injustice in American culture. A8 contrasts this, it agrees with the necessity to start reforming oneself and to reject racism, however its language suggests a perception that the idea of systemic injustices is a political construction only breeding further injustices.

The latter two indicate deviating perceptions from each other, but what they all share is that they look to the inadequacies of political systems as emanating from human sin. They reveal how, in public theology, the positive vision of political theology (solutions to racism)

and a prophetic judgement of current injustices complement each other (Peters 2018, 176), finding a balance between condemning and uplifting.

The reference reliance still leans towards the cultural and when overt Christian references are made, they are often general e.g., the biblical citations are placed in parenthesis in Table D.2. because they are not specified by the presenters.

When religious sources may be used there is a tendency to rely on Christian thinkers who also function as cultural references, like authors or political leaders (Chesterton, Solzhenitsyn, or King). This reflects that public theology needs to adjust its language to be able to engage a public that is increasingly pluralistic, global, and secular (Paeth 2016).

As before, when Christian references are used, they anchor the positive vision that the presenters wish to counterbalance negative cultural references with.

Table D.2. Reference Summary of Theme 3

Christian References		7
A5:	St. Paul (Gal 3:28); Jesus Christ; The Cross	3
A6:	St. Paul (1 Tim 3:1-5)	1
A7:	Kingdom of God	1
A8:	St. Thomas Aquinas; Jesus (Matt 5:38-42)	2
Cultural References		11
A5:	Unite the Right Rally; American Civil War; Civil Rights; Thomas Jefferson; The KKK; Ferguson Riots (2014)	6
A6:	NFL Protests (USA)	1
A8:	Prime Minister Justin Trudeau; David Dorn; BLM (not named); unnamed riot victims	4
Christian/Cultural References		4
A5:	Martin Luther King	1
A6:	G.K. Chesterton; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn	2
A8:	Martin Luther King	1

### 3.4. Theme 4: Perspectives on Social Norms

#### 3.4.1. Female Ordination

Table E. Account titles and date of publication

Perspectives on Social Norms: Female Ordination			
	Creator	Title	Published
Account 9	Bishop Robert Barron	Why Won't Catholicism Allow Women Priests?	2009-05-19
Account 10	Ascension Presents	#askFrMike Confirmation and Female Priests?	2016-03-02
Account 11	Brian Holdsworth	Why Can't the Church Ordain Women	2018-07-20
Account 12	Breaking in the Habit	Why Can't Women Be Ordained in the Catholic Church	2020-05-25

A9. *“Why Won’t Catholicism Allow Women Priests?”*

**Presenter:** Bishop Robert Barron

**Thumbnail:** Background image shows a female priest performing the liturgy, to the right an image of (then) Fr. Barron. Text, “A video from Fr. Robert Barron”.

**Intro:** n/a

**Setting:** Unspecified office environment.

**Account Summary:** Argues that female ordination is a “famously complicated issue”, but that people are too focused on institutional power and that a priest’s role is to serve the laity and make it holy. That they are servants of sanctity whose importance can be overstated and that the ultimate figure of power within the church is the saint.

Saints allow the power of Christ to move through them and transform them, which is the true power to change the world. Sainthood, it argues, is also open to everyone. There are no institutional obstacles, and it suggests, through Thomas Aquinas, that it is simply about willing and wanting it. Stresses that two of the most powerful Catholics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century were women.

**Outro:** n/a

**Recruits into it:** St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernadette of Lourdes, and St. Thérès of Lisieux as examples of how to become a saint and of powerful female figures within the Church.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in May 2009, no obvious issue beyond recurring debates surrounding the question.

**Account Conclusion:** The account proclaims a prophetic judgement on the this-worldly perception of power, specifically institutional power and its functions. But it places this within a positive vision that reframes the question of female ordination into a question of how power is defined and why.

It places focus on the “eternal over the ephemeral” (Peters 2018, 173) and provides an apologetic alternative through sainthood, grounded in the examples of the two female saints

mentioned, as well as Thomas Aquinas. The grandeur of sainthood is reduced to a matter of will and presented as a plausible human experience based only on the individual's readiness to submit to personal transformation by embodying the teachings of Christ.

It avoids the consideration that sainthood and its power often occur after death, but this consideration is subject to the same kind of prophetic critique as it reveals an emphasis on institutional power in the present, rather than transformation through eternity.

The account, through these means, fulfils an apologetic, prophetic, and political task, which attempts to reframe the vision of institutional power after eternal ideals.

It is notable that this is the oldest account of the study (2009) and it deviates in format by time (1:57 min), by including a third party (an interviewer), by a different setting, by showing the bishop in a standing position, and by lacking an outro. Its lack of deliberate production quality appears to suggest that the content evolved over the years, perhaps with the evolving demands of the platform.

#### *A10. "#askFrMike Confirmation and Female Priests"*

**Presenter:** Fr. Mike Schmitz

**Thumbnail:** Presenter smiling into the camera, title included.

**Intro:** Teaser about the topic before a white title card on which the title appears as an instrumental theme plays.

**Setting:** Living room.

**Account Summary:** The account primarily deals with question of confirmations sponsors; this analysis will thus focus on the part of the account concerning the question at hand.

It stresses that this is often a heart issue not a head issue, meaning that reasons will not be convincing as they are intellectual rather than emotional. Urges those hurt by the message to know that the Church is not saying that they are considered less as women.

The argument of female priests is centred around what it means to be a priest in the Old Testament, that it is a role not associated with capability or fulfilling a specific function but rather with fatherhood. That the Church cannot ordain women because they cannot be fathers.

Argues that the question has been exacerbated by the diminishing of religious orders for women in society, that 60 years ago churches had both "fathers" (priests) and "mothers"

(religious sisters), but that in the present most parishes have the experience of being single-parent households, lacking “mothers”. Urges that the Church desperately needs mothers, that a woman with a vocation should become a sister, but that it is a distinct role.

**Outro:** Same as A6.

**Recruits into it:** Biblical tradition of fathers serving the role of priest.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in March 2016, no immediately obvious issue beyond recurring debates surrounding the question.

**Account Conclusion:** The account utilizes the Biblical example of priesthood’s intimate connection to fatherhood, in this manner it risks alienating a contemporary audience, which it appears to acknowledge in its appeal to viewers to recognize that this does not mean that women are less than men.

It accepts the biblical tradition without further commentary and fulfills an apologetic task that asserts a traditional perception of the human condition that there are two sexes serving complimentary roles, arguing that a woman may fill other religious roles.

There is an implicit reflection on the meaning of this division of human nature which appears as purposeful, timeless, and universal. This may not immediately connect to a wider secular audience, but part of the purpose of public theology is to serve a “corrective” (Cady 2014, 294) to the values of shared common life it perceives as erroneous in contemporary social norms. Using scripture to inform the natural relationship, and roles, between the sexes the account thus fulfills an apologetic task.

*A11. “Why Can’t the Church Ordain Women Priests?”*

**Presenter:** Brian Holdsworth

**Thumbnail:** The background is an artwork of the virgin Mary, colorized in shades of green and yellow. Over this an image of the presenter and the text “Female Priests?”



**Intro:** Teaser introduction as instrumental music plays, a white title card appears, then the “BH”-logo and a credit to the sponsor *uCatholic*. These are replaced by the title of the video to the left, presenter steps into the frame from the right.

**Setting:** Private office, seated on a black couch.

**Account Summary:** Starts with the concept of a “strong female character”, arguing that this is often used as a selling point for contemporary movies, but that it typically means a female character possessing traditionally male traits like physical strength and capability of violence.

This is connected to gender stereotypes which are social constructs based on a biological reality supported by modern science, as gender is not arbitrary. It suggests that femininity in contemporary culture is being suppressed as something *less* when masculine traits are treated as the norm females must adjust to.

It further suggests that the priesthood has been elevated as glamorous because it has been exclusively male and because the focus is on the honour, not the tremendous sacrifices priesthood requires.

Argues that the sexes are different and that theologically the male priesthood is based on Jesus’ example with the disciples, which may not be clear to us in the present, but that arguments trying to disprove that fall into heresy. These arguments suggest Jesus only picked male disciples because it was a social convention, and they ignore that he ignored many social conventions of his time, but – more grievously – implicates him as a sinner by suggesting that he complied with sexism (a sin), which would make Jesus a sinner.

The final argument is that there are other positions of power women can inhabit, but that they already hold the most powerful position in the church through motherhood. The presenter suggests that he feels the animosity of the audience by making such a comment in contemporary culture which devalues motherhood. But argues that it is a role that is far more formative than any encyclical or magisterial teaching can hope to be.

**Outro:** Presenter in front of a white background, thanking people for watching and encouraging them to like and subscribe and to come find him on Facebook and Twitter. Thanks sponsor *uCatholic* and urges anyone who wishes to support the creation of accounts to support his business as a digital media and marketing expert.

**Recruits into it:** References to popular entertainment featuring warrior women. The male apostle tradition and an article on gender differences.

**Visuals:** A variety of clips from tv-series and movies featuring strong female characters, e.g., *Wonder Woman* (2017) and *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), contrasted with clips from movies showing the unglamorous side of male roles, e.g., men preparing the lifeboats for the women and children in *Titanic* (1997). Includes a screenshot of article in *Science Magazine* by Michael Price on brain differences between men and women (April 2017). Painting of Jesus in Mary's arms surrounded by mourning women. A portrait of Jesus and one of Jesus clearing out the Temple, indicating his lack of conformity to social conventions.

**Context of topic:** Published in July 2018, no obvious issue beyond recurring debates surrounding the question.

**Account Conclusion:** The account addresses the issue by describing the clash between current cultural perceptions of sex and gender with traditional perceptions. It combines a scientific and apologetic task that argues for the complementary nature of sex in humanity, and bases this in scientific research. Appearing to ground its claims in a contemporary discourse that is valued more than traditional perspectives.

It critiques the undervaluation of traditional femininity and gender roles that it perceives in contemporary culture, and while it does not deny other institutional roles for women, its emphasis is on motherhood. This is further suggested in its recruitment of Mary, mother of Jesus, into the thumbnail and added visuals.

It undertakes a political task by affirming a positive view of Church tradition against a secularized view of what gender equality ought to look like, i.e., an affirmation of difference. Like A9 it suggests that the current perspective of power (institutional) is skewed against more deeply transformational powers (motherhood, in this case).

As such it too appears to serve a corrective purpose, defending the practice of male ordination by elevating the dimorphic human condition, positing this as a scientific fact. It elevates gender difference as positive form of equality to structure society around, and through its arguments serves an apologetic, scientific and political task.

*A12. "Why Can't Women Be Ordained in the Catholic Church"*

**Presenter:** Fr. Casey Cole

**Thumbnail:** Image of female priest at the altar. Text, “Women Priests?”

**Intro:** Teaser introduces the topic and series “Catholicism in Focus”. Cuts to a graphically designed sequence set to upbeat music showing the words “Christian”, “Catholic”, and “Friar” appearing on a line each with three symbols representing each word, concludes with the title “Catholicism in Focus”.

**Setting:** A green screen given a dual toned and textured background in neutral colours.

**Account Summary:** States that female ordination came to be a mainstream issue with the Women’s Liberation movements of the 1960’s-70’s, and that while many Protestant and Anglican churches have relented to the demand, the Catholic and Orthodox churches have persisted.

The presenter states that female ordination is “never going to happen”, that while this is widely known it is less clear *why* and has led to bad theology excluding women from other positions of power.

In John Paul II’s *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994) the reasons given were based in tradition, primarily Jesus’ selection of male apostles which has remained the “constant practice of the Church”.

It argues that the Church has no authority to change what is a perceived command and is acting in accordance with God’s plan. Even if women are *capable* of being priests, i.e., they are not inferior or incapable, priesthood is and will remain male only. But that the Vatican is looking into the ordination of female deacons.

The diaconate has biblical support for women and has erroneously been viewed as a step towards priesthood, the account argues that the *Lumen Gentium* (1964) teaches that it is an ordination into a ministry of service, not priests in training.

Argues that though there are further limitations, there are also opportunities and that the important question is whether women are considered enough for the roles they are eligible for and encouraged to leadership within the church.

The presenter stresses that he knows it is not the same, and if female voices are “legitimately desired in the Church?”, stressing that he will do his best “to see that they are.”

**Outro:** Theme music plays as Fr. Casey disappears from the screen and is replaced by three buttons on the bottom right corner for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter with an urge to follow “CaseyOFM”. To the left two video recommendations from the channel appears.

**Recruits into it:** *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Romans 16:1-2, Canon Laws (129, 135, 1421, 483, 514), *Lumen Gentium*, the women's liberation movement.

**Visuals:** Image of female priests and images from women's liberation protests.

There are images of the magisterial documents mentioned, images portraying the hierarchical orders of the Church, and text highlighting doctrinal points and laws mentioned, all serving as added visual aids.

There is a series of images featuring women serving in Church services as lectors, cantors, ushers, extraordinary minister of communion, and acolytes. This is contrasted with two old photographs featuring only young boys as acolytes.

**Context of topic:** Published in May 2020, plausible context a resurgence for the topic after the Amazon Synod 2019 where a permanent diaconate for women was voted for (Hansen, *America Magazine*, 2019-11-11).

**Account Conclusion:** The account recruits into it both teachings from Vatican II, Pope John Paul II, and Canon Law, taking a doctrinal approach to the question. It explains the practices of the Church while supporting alternative institutional roles for women. The perception of a command given is a clear reason for the practice, though it may not be convincing outside of the tradition.

While it suggests that the Church has persisted against the demands of contemporary views, its desire to include women in other institutional roles appear to reveal how public discourse *has* influenced the Church's practices. The suggestion of the presenter that there have been "bad theologies" reveals an awareness of injustice, and these are countered with positive alternative solutions, urging for institutional reform it perceives to be within the Church's capabilities.

It thus, to a greater extent than the others, appears to be willing to defend tradition while also opening for discourse on how women have been treated by the Church and how it ought to be changed. It fulfils an apologetic and political task that corrects both Church and culture according to its perception of divine intentions.

## Subtheme Summary

Table E.1. Summary of theological tasks (Theme 4.1.)

Theological Tasks	
Account 9	Apologetic, Political, Prophetic
Account 10	Apologetic, Pastoral
Account 11	Apologetic, Political, Prophetic
Account 12	Apologetic, Political

The question of gender equality in the priesthood is met by a uniform negation of female ordination but a negation executed through different means. Either by de-emphasizing the importance of institutional, worldly, power (A9); by invoking the idea of command (A11, A12); or by maintaining the complimentary differentiation between male and female social roles (A10 and A11).

Three use the Bible, with two focusing on the example of Jesus and male apostles (A11, A12) and one on the Old Testament (A10). Only one account makes a clear doctrinal case for a wider institutional participation by women in the Church (A12), though none deny this possibility as an alternative.

It is notable that there are no immediate contextualizing circumstances in most of these accounts, however, the repeated addressing of the issue (2009, 2016, 2018, 2020) indicate that the public has a considerable interest in it and that it requires continued commentary. The increased length of the responses similarly indicates and increased awareness for nuance and depth in how to harmonize the traditional view against contemporary culture.

All accounts contrast the question by pointing to flaws of perception in current culture concerning ideas of power and of gender equality, the arguments are thus rooted in gender-

Table E.2. Reference Summary of Theme 4.1.

<b>Christian References</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>A9:</b> St. Thomas Aquinas; St. Bernadette of Lourdes; St. Thérès of Lisieux	3
<b>A10:</b> Priestly tradition from the <i>Old Testament</i>	1
<b>A11:</b> Male Apostle tradition from the <i>New Testament</i>	1
<b>A12:</b> Male Apostle tradition from the <i>New Testament</i> ; Pope John Paul II; <i>Ordinatio Sacerdotalis</i> ; <i>Lumen Gentium</i> ; <i>Romans</i> 16:1-2; Canon Laws 129, 135, 1421, 483, 514	10
<b>Cultural References</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>A10:</b> Cultural influences causing a drop in religious sisters Science Magazine, <i>Wonder Woman</i> , <i>Vikings</i> , <i>Game of Thrones</i> , <i>Iron</i>	1
<b>A11:</b> <i>Man</i> , <i>Titanic</i> , unnamed war movie	7
<b>A12:</b> Women's liberation movement	1

based discourse, and the accounts position themselves as an alternative vision for understanding equality. This counterclaim is rooted in a perception of affirming difference in function but not difference in value.

Seen in Table E.2. the references lean towards the religious in this subtheme, partly due to the doctrinal case made in A12, but also due to the defensive position of the accounts against the contemporary cultural perceptions. The reference system still functions to illustrate a corrective against current culture and its views on equality and the role gender plays in common and sacred life.

### 3.4.2. Family

Table F. Account titles and date of publication

Perspectives on Social Norms: Family			
	Creator	Title	Published
Account 13	<i>Bishop Robert Barron</i>	<i>On the Childfree Life</i>	2013-09-11
Account 14	<i>Breaking in the Habit</i>	<i>Sex in the Catholic Church</i>	2018-11-19
Account 15	<i>Ascension Presents</i>	<i>Are There Too Many People?</i>	2020-09-01
Account 16	<i>Brian Holdsworth</i>	<i>Everything depends on the family!</i>	2020-10-31

#### A13. “On the Childfree Life”

**Presenter:** Bishop Robert Barron

**Thumbnail:** Split image, on the left a couple walking on the beach, on the right an image of (then) Fr. Barron.

**Intro:** Black background, text “Fr. Barron comments on The Childfree Life”.

**Setting:** Seated at an angle in front of a brown bookcase.

**Account Summary:** Discusses a *Time* magazine article called “The Childfree Life” which uses the feminist slogan “having it all”, but which removes children from the equation. The presenter argues that the reasons given against children always relate to personal choice like one never wanted them, wanted a career, or the costs of childrearing, and that the childfree life is typically characterized in media as a luxurious freedom.

It quotes the comedian Margret Cho stating that babies scare her more than anything, and laughingly relates this to contemporary culture’s use of children in horror movies. This is put into context with the plummeting birth-rates in America and Europe and is contrasted

with traditional cultures where rites of initiation introduce young boys to a world of values. These values teach them that life is not about them but about how they can contribute to family, tribe, nature, and the divine.

In this context the presenter argues that there is an enormous focus in Western society on private desires, that freedom as an ultimate value is getting “rampant”. But that freedom is only a good in relation to truth and higher values.

It argues that private choice has become a “cancer in our society”, and that the reduction of child-rearing to a personal choice brackets the objective values that should contextualize how not having children affects family, culture, world, and the divine.

**Outro:** Black background, text “for more information go to [www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org)”.

**Recruits into it:** Article by Lauren Sandler from 2013. Unnamed initiation rituals.

**Visuals:** *Time* magazine cover featuring childless couple at the beach. A series of graphs covering declining birth-rates as well as the rising costs of raising a child. Portrait of the comedian Margaret Cho and covers from *The Omen* (1976) and *Orphan* (2009) to contextualize society’s anxiety around children. Uses a series of photographs from what appears to be African and South American ritual initiations.

**Context of topic:** Published in September 2013, following the article mentioned above.

**Account Conclusion:** The account reveals how public theology, in its relationship to culture, is both “descriptive, evaluative, and normative” (Breitenberg 2003, 61). It describes how higher values, and meaning, have eroded in Western cultures and are no longer being properly transmitted to future generations.

Through ritual initiations it connects normative values to religion, speaking to a change in attitudes and how an erroneous perception of autonomy has emerged and disconnected tradition and social norms from their meaning-making ability.

Meaning-making is associated to higher values and the account uses rite-based cultures to visually demonstrate how social values are passed down between generations. It implicitly stresses that while rites may look different cultures are built around them and fail without them.

This connection to different cultural expressions emphasizes Christian values but does so without the recruitment of overt religious examples, suggesting that the wider audience intended may not respond to examples perceived as parochial.

The account appears to perceive absolutized autonomy as a Western anomaly, subject to existential angst directed towards a general anxiety of self-sacrifice, like giving up private desires for the sake of someone or something else (children, society, God). Its overall condemnation serves a prophetic task through negative judgement on the contemporary perception of freedom.

It also serves an apologetic and pastoral task in its reflection on how the human condition requires contextualizing elements, as these enlarges responsibilities beyond the self and enables sustainable cultures that provide meaning as well as continuation of shared values.

#### *A14. "Sex in the Catholic Church"*

**Presenter:** Fr. Casey Cole

**Thumbnail:** White background with a black silhouette of a couple, a green circle with the word "Sex", and on the couple, "in the Catholic Church".

**Intro:** Same as A12, "Catholicism in Focus" signature theme.

**Setting:** Green screen used to create a textured green background.

**Account Summary:** Discusses how the Church's view on sex is often misunderstood as it clashes with wider society; that matters of sex remain controversial but that the religious, as moral leaders, have a lot to say as it relates to the building of a stable society.

Argues that the Church has always viewed sex as inherently good, but that it is a good connected to purpose, and this purpose is that it is unitive and procreative.

The unitive relates to the complimentary self-giving by the participants, meant to be part of the marriage act as a bonding experience. The procreative relates to a necessary openness to new life, perceiving fecundity as a gift and end of marriage. This excludes contraceptives as an option even within marriage.

Acts that do not fulfil both a unitive and procreative purpose may be precursors to an act that does but in isolation they are forbidden; as such IVF, contraception, and sexual acts between same-sex couples, are all forbidden as they eliminate one of the two ends.



The account argues that sex ought to be integrated with faith to enable responsible and moral engagement with it, and that reducing it to nothing more than pleasure is a misuse of its true purposes.

**Outro:** The signature melody plays as Fr. Cole thanks viewers for watching and reminds them that every aspect, even the most intimate moments reflect faith. But he suggests that if that is not to the viewer's liking, there is a lot of other content on the channel to check out. On screen links to Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook appears.

**Recruits into it:** *Catholic Church's Catechism* (§2366), and the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) used as doctrinal examples of the Church's position.

**Visuals:** Images of scantily models from ads representing how sex sells, contrasted with an image of a Catholic school girl and images of happy couples getting married, announcing their pregnancy, and after the delivery of a child, representing the good of monogamy. A rainbow flag with the words "same sex", and images of birth control pills, the IVF process, and an embryo tank represent misuses of purpose. An additional use of visuals is the insertion of text against the green background, allowing the viewer to read along and follow the more doctrinal points of the message.

**Context of topic:** Published in November 2018, no immediately obvious issue of context.

**Account Conclusion:** The account is an attempt to clarify the perceptions of sex in the Catholic Church juxtaposed to contemporary culture. Its emphasis is on how to understand the meaning of human sexuality and how to perceive it as something God-given.

It is somewhat defensive and deliberately contrasts visuals of overtly sexualized ads with wholesome images of family life and its most joyous moments, in what appears intended towards creating a context that speaks to emotion, perhaps more than to reason.

This visual elevation of the Church's values, and the stress on religious leaders as moral leaders, is also contrasted with other visuals related to contemporary norms, e.g., images of IVF and tanks of embryos, as well as a LGBTQ+ flag. These function to suggest that the Church's moral problems with these norms are their reductive view of pleasure which are perceived as self-serving and harmful, to individual and society, as they are separated from

purpose and subject to fleeting desires. The contrast is between valuing the desires of the individual and valuing the obligations of the individual relative to the social good.

By articulating an apologetic on the issue of sex the account encourages viewers to absorb and act on these moral teachings, it fulfils a political task through a vision that seeks to reform current standards to standards of divine creation (purposeful engagement with sexual acts) which, in extension, would reframe medical and social practices.

It is however notable that the presenter, at the end of the account, suggests that if viewers do not appreciate this message, the channel has other content they may enjoy. It thus does not try to force its truth claims on the public, but rather presents them as a superior option. In total the account fulfils an apologetic, political, and pastoral task trying to both illuminate and influence the public understanding of sex and what it means personally as well as communally.

### *A15. "Are there too many people?"*

**Presenter:** Jackie and Bobby Angel

**Thumbnail:** Image of the Angel's making doubtful grimaces. Text, "Overpopulation?"

**Intro:** A square flashes through images of the channel's presenters, stopping at the Angel's. Fades to white, the title appears.

**Setting:** The Angel's living room, in front of a fireplace.

**Account Summary:** The account is a Catholic response to fears of overpopulation, climate change, and the idea that having kids is selfish. It is grounded in a discussion on the theories of Thomas Malthus (in 1798), and the biologist Paul Erlich (in 1968), both feared the strain of population growth on resources and suggested that mass-starvation would be inevitable. It is suggested that these theories inspired political measures like abortion, killing the elderly, forced sterilization, and China's one-child policy.

This is countered with plummeting birth-rates in most countries, below growth population, and that the real problem is overcrowding (in cities) rather than overpopulation (in the world). It is argued that the problem of starvation is often due to war and political issues, not that resources are not available. They are available but are not being properly distributed to those who need it by those who possess them.

The response is an acceptance of human dominion of the earth, meaning responsible stewardship and that cultivating the earth is part of humanity's purpose. It is stressed that out of the 613 commandments in the Old Testament, the very first one is "be fruitful and multiply" and that then, as now, children are gift.

G.K. Chesterton is quoted, saying that, "the answer to anyone who talks about the surplus population is to ask him whether he is part of the surplus population, or if not, how he knows that he is not." This is used to show how contemporary population concerns invert the Christian emphasis on sacrificing self for others, and instead urges the sacrifice of others for self.

It is stressed that taking care of the earth is important but that saving souls is more important, and that current theories are being angled through an erroneous conception portraying humanity as the problem, which is "not only wrong scientifically, it erodes human dignity". There is concluding a stress that humans will exist forever, but the earth will not.

**Outro:** Same as A4.

**Recruits into it:** Thomas Malthus and Paul Erlich used to demonstrate errors of scientific predictions. *Animal Planet* to demonstrate how nature shows often conceptualize humans as a problem. G.K. Chesterton to demonstrate hypocrisy. *Genesis* to demonstrate the God-given value of children.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in September 2020, likely context the cultural debate surrounding the ecological effect of children, e.g., articles like "Human overpopulation: can fewer children really make a difference?" (*Science Focus*, January 2020) and "How climate anxiety is changing family planning" (*New York Times*, April 2020).

**Account Conclusion:** The account takes on the issue of children, like A13, but it weaves the discussion around contemporary concerns connected to climate change and overpopulation. In so doing it expands its perspective from a Western focus to a more "glocal" perspective (Peters 2018, 159) which looks at the inequalities of resource distribution, its causes, and misguided political measures that do not respond to the real issues it perceives.

Using Chesterton, it portrays the hypocrisy it condemns in the contemporary Western attitude, which views others – rather than self – as expendable. Meaning that while child-rearing concerns are often framed around the issues of climate and population, its proponents are not willing to compromise their preferred way of life (city living, resource wealth/consumerism), by investing in sustainable solutions (rural living, resource distribution).

This is perceived as due to the ideological commitment to erroneous ideas exemplified by Malthus and Erlich, out of which stems a dehumanization which devalues the foundational human rights to life and family and makes them subject to political intervention.

Using a biblical perspective, the account tacitly argues for a sort of theology of nature with responsible stewardship at its center and family building as a God-given right. Its emphasis is placed on the idea that contemporary culture does not understand the real issues nor the real solutions. It is guided by the confession-informed vision of saving souls and the intention is towards the reform of political and social systems with human dignity in focus, but without neglect of creation.

It is thus a multilayered critique that creates an alternative narrative to the contemporary narratives it objects to, with alternative solutions to global problems of poverty, starvation, and how to responsibly cultivate the earth.

The tasks it fulfills are, apologetic as it uses biblical wisdom to illuminate the human condition, it is also prophetic and political, condemning the current order while mounting a positive vision of its correction grounded in salvation theology. Finally, it is scientific, critiquing modern conceptions as being built on scientific predictions that have been proven wrong.

*A16. “Everything depends on the family!”<sup>6</sup>*

**Presenter:** Brian Holdsworth

**Thumbnail:** Blue/grey photo of woman with eight children, text “Traditional family is everything”, image of presenter to the right.

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<sup>6</sup> The account was originally titled “*Traditional family is everything*”.

**Intro:** Presenter steps back from the camera and sits down in a green chair, introduces the topic as signature melody plays, then cuts to a separate clip, logo and title appears on a white background and Holdsworth steps into frame and smiles.

**Setting:** Private office.

**Account Summary:** Argues that it is commonly acknowledged that desires and skills need to be controlled and refined for optimal use, but that sex is the one area where people do not say “I want to rule sex, rather than be ruled by it”. This is because of contraception’s promise of consequence free sex and a view developed for the past 100 years where pleasure has become elevated above the restrictions of marriage.

Argues that it is a lie that sex is consequence free and decreases the need for abortion, rather it enhances the need for it since no contraception is 100% safe, which leads to a lot of unexpected pregnancies.

That current culture from the pornography industry, to the pharmaceutical industry, and popular culture aimed at children, all exploit the desire for sex and prevents people developing the skill to rule it.

In extension this means the breakdown of traditional family which has wide social consequences by spreading ignorance, poverty, and crime – “the data bears this out so strongly” the presenter states. He stresses that traditional family is the pillar of civilization, and that seven of the Ten Commandments relate to social norms and the highest priority (above murder) is given to honoring one's parents. The meaning is that if one honors the adventure of parenthood, and if culture reinforces that, then society and civilization prosper.

**Outro:** In a close-up, increasing eye-contact with the viewer, the presenter thanks viewers for watching and recommends them to like and subscribe. As names of sponsors appear on the screen, it is suggested that the viewers can enlist at the website *Reinforcements* which has the mission to “renew and reinforce” the Church.

**Recruits into it:** The Ten Commandments. Visual reference to rap artist Cardi B.

**Visuals:** Image of newlyweds about to kiss at the beach. The cover of Cardi B’s 2020 single “W.A.P.” (Wet Ass Pussy) showing two topless women with their eyes closed sticking their tongues out. A series of clips from school, nature, and urban settings and a chaotic

intersection from an unnamed country illustrating the chaos that erupts when there are no clear rules.

**Context of topic:** Published in October 2020, no immediately obvious issue of context

**Account Conclusion:** Like A14, this account addresses the problems it perceives in contemporary attitudes to sex and interpersonal relationships.

It recruits into it a brief critique of abortion, arguing that the prevalence of contraception increases the need for a society to regulate childbearing via abortive mechanisms. Through this, and the example of how the pharmaceutical industry encourages unrestrained sexual activity, it refutes an uncritical reliance on medical science and negates the perception of it as necessarily good-willed and consistently beneficial to human flourishing. This challenge does not reveal an animosity towards medical science as such, but rather the consequences of practices it perceives as having financial and immoral interests.

Along with examples of pop culture, these critical assessments are used to condemn the trajectory of contemporary culture which is leading away from traditional values of family. The emphasis, as seen by the title (even suggested in the large family featured on the thumbnail), is on a positive vision of prosperous and stable societies being realized by the investment in, and support of, traditional family. This is associated with the with ability to withstand sexual temptations.

In using the Ten Commandments to counter point contemporary practices it, like A13, appears to stress the necessity of higher values and how theology, by representing these, can help contribute to the common good of society.

Through these means it fulfils an apologetic, scientific, prophetic, and political task; combining condemnation and criticism with an understanding of how Christian teachings can inform and improve on the current situation.

The account also reveals an attempt to recruit the (partisan) public to help strengthen the Church in society by subscribing to the creator's own webpage, encouraging viewers to action beyond active interaction with the content.

## Subtheme Summary

Table F.1. Summary of theological tasks (Theme 4.2.)

Theological Tasks	
Account 13	Apologetic, Pastoral, Prophetic
Account 14	Apologetic, Pastoral, Prophetic
Account 15	Apologetic, Political, Prophetic, Scientific
Account 16	Apologetic, Political, Prophetic, Scientific

This subtheme, like Theme 1, also reflects how public theology has an interest in all aspects of human life (Day and Kim 2017, 11), as it mounts a defense of traditional values in areas where the Church has lost authority in contemporary culture, stressing that these matters cannot be relegated to private choice nor can religion (Cady 2014, 294-295).

The cumulative message is that theology can point to higher values serving as a foundation for culture, with an understanding that sex and children have divinely ordered purposes and that restrictions are beneficial to the individual as well as society.

The primary target of critique appears to be the elevation of private choice and the acceptance of giving in to private desires. Though previous accounts have pointed to the importance of social solidarity, this theme posits it as a meaning-making context for culture, i.e., that social cohesion around values is necessary for civilizations to thrive.

That modern individualism has harmed the value systems of Western culture and has destabilized people's relationship to sex and family, but also to their perception of global concerns of nature and poverty. The suggestion is that theology, or religion, can provide an

Table F.2. Reference Summary of Theme 4.2.

<b>Christian References</b>	<b>5</b>
A14: <i>The Catholic Church's Catechism ; Humanae Vitae</i>	2
A15: <i>Book of Genesis ; The 613 Commandments of the Old Testament</i>	2
A16: The Ten Commandments	1
<b>Cultural References</b>	<b>26</b>
A13: Time Magazine; graph showing declining birthrates; Margaret Cho; three horror movies; various rituals of initiation	7
A14: Two sexualized ads; IVF; same-sex flag; contraceptives	5
A15: Thomas Malthus; Paul Erlich; China's one-child policy; abortion; euthanasia; forced sterilizations; Animal Planet	7
Cardi B "WAP"; contraceptives; free-love movement; driving; education system; pharmaceuticals linked to sexual performance; data on crime	
A16: causes	7
<b>Christian/Cultural References</b>	<b>1</b>
A15: G.K. Chesterton	1

anchor (restrictions and principles) for securing healthy social relationships, out of which can grow strong communities and civilizations, properly caring for the world in alignment with higher values.

Table F.2. shows how the accounts rely heavily on cultural references that demonstrate where contemporary culture has gone wrong and how it ought to be reformed. They consistently contrast social ills, the inability to transmit values through generations, and free-love practices, with the perceived goods of family as a foundational unit of society. Thus, to a greater extent than in other accounts, direct Christian references are made to illustrate where better values are to be found. It is notable that author G.K. Chesterton is referenced for the third time in this study, indicating his importance as a source of Catholic wisdom.

### 3.4.3. LGBTQ+

Table G. Account titles and date of publication

Perspectives on Social Norms: LGBTQ+			
	Creator	Title	Published
Account 17	Bishop Robert Barron	<i>Gay Marriage and the Breakdown of Moral Argument</i>	2013-04-10
Account 18	Ascension Presents	<i>Bruce Jenner and the Transgender Question</i>	2015-06-10
Account 19	Brian Holdsworth	<i>Responding to Fr. James Martin</i>	2018-12-15
Account 20	Breaking in the Habit	<i>Debunking Catholic Myths</i>	2020-05-06

#### A17. “*Gay Marriage and the Breakdown of Moral Argument*”

**Presenter:** Bishop Robert Barron

**Thumbnail:** (then) Fr. Barron in front of a background image showing a blue sign that reads “It’s time! For marriage equality”.

**Intro:** Black background, “Fr. Robert Barron comments on Gay Marriage and the Breakdown of Moral Argument”.

**Setting:** Seated front of a brown bookcase.

**Account Summary:** Grounded in *After Virtue* (2013) by Alasdair MacIntyre it uses the question of gay marriage to show how contemporary society has lost the ability to have coherent moral conversations, it suggests that groups no longer share a vocabulary and can only excoriate their opponents as bad people.



This is demonstrated through Justice Elena Kagan who stated, regarding gay marriage, that when a lawyer makes a moral argument her “red flags of discrimination” go up. That it is concerning that it is not *bad* moral arguments, but moral arguments as such, and that this leaves many Christians with the worry that anything they say will be labelled as hate speech because there is no room for argument.

Two signs reveal the loss of ability to make moral arguments. The first is an obsession with poll numbers, which are interesting from a social science perspective but do not say much about the moral rectitude of the question. It argues that in 1945 a majority would have been for bombing Japan to end the war, and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century a majority would have thought it morally acceptable to own slaves, perhaps using religious sources to prove it. These show that the majority opinion is not always morally right.

Secondly that there is a sentimentalizing of the issue, that while it is good that more people are out of the closet, as no one should have to live a lie, it means that more people fall into the logical fallacy that because they know a good person who is gay, therefore gay marriage is good. But that this does not follow, not everything a good person desires is good, thus no real argument has been made.

The presenter stresses that he is not making an argument either way, that the intention is to clear some of the confusion around the issue.

**Outro:** Black background, text: “For more information go to [www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org)”.

**Recruits into it:** Alasdair McIntyre and Justice Kagan as opposites in the consideration of moral arguments in society. Historical atrocities like the bombing of Japan and slavery used to stress that majority opinion is not always right.

**Visuals:** Cover of *After Virtue* (2013) and photo of author Alasdair McIntyre. Photo of Justice Kagan. Images of polls regarding opinions on gay marriage. Photo of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Photo of three slaves in chains.

**Context of topic:** Published in April 2013 as the U.S. Supreme Court was deciding on the legality of California’s constitutional amendment Proposition 8 (from 2008), which denied the right of same-sex couples to marry.

**Account Conclusion:** Anchored in the issue of same-sex marriage the account points to the problem of polarization by stressing the weakened ability to have coherent discussions with people of a different moral matrix. It reflects how this prevents public discourse to remain civil, coherent, and meaningful; and further prevents the proper exchange of ideas (arguments) to find a co-produced truth between different claims.

When it recruits the example of poll numbers into its discussion and states that religious reasons were used to defend slavery, it appears to acknowledge that public discourse, whether informed by theology or secular ideals, can be morally wrong. There is a suggestion that currently, secularism and religion exist in “symbiotic formation and mutually sustaining deficiencies” (Cady 2014, 309-310), which are increased by lack of dialogue and increase animosity. That neither contemporary values nor religious values alone can be the singular answer to a public issue, and that the symbiosis between must work to find a co-created truth “mediated through social processes” (Day and Kim 2017, 15).

Both must thus make allowances for opinions that diverge and find a middle ground, or excoriation of the moral Other is the only path forward. The tasks fulfilled are pastoral and prophetic, simultaneously reflecting on and condemning the state or moral arguments and how this effects public discourse on charged issues like gay marriage.

### *A18. “Bruce Jenner and the Transgender Question”*

**Presenter:** Fr. Mike Schmitz

**Thumbnail:** Presenter with a compassionate expression of, title appears.

**Intro:** n/a

**Setting:** Living room.

**Account Summary:** The presenter starts with an anecdote about how his nephew likes to pretend that he is a dog, but that when he does not want to stop his parents must step in and tell him to, which is the loving thing to do.

This leads to the topic of transgenderism and the assertion that this is not about judgement but an assessment that considers Bruce Jenner’s perception of gender identity inaccurate. By asking the audience how to describe how *feels* to be their own gender, it is suggested that it cannot be answered that people cannot know what it feels like to be the sex they are and even less another sex. It argues that sex is associated with gender stereotypes

which are arbitrary and culturally relative, but that the body reveals what you are, not identity traits.

Stresses that when it comes to perception not lining up with reality then it is the perception that must change, not reality, but states that, “when sex is involved, we all lose our minds”.

Comparisons are then made to disorders like body dysmorphia, eating disorders, and BIID (Body Integrity Identity Disorder) and how the medical community and public in these cases do not support drastic surgery to alter the external characteristics of the sufferer to align with the internal perception of their body.

Presenter reads from a print the research findings of Dr. John McCue of Johns Hopkins, not a “crack pot”, that sex change surgery produced “some satisfaction but that the disturbance remained”, and that those mediocre results invalidated such drastic and invasive surgery.

The loving response is that the external does not change the internal. However, that this is not a judgement and viewers are urged to love and to follow the example of Jesus and “walk with people”, to “get into their wound” and “their brokenness”. To be there and listen to those in pain.

**Outro:** White screen with link to *Ascension Present*'s webpage.

**Recruits into it:** Dr. John McCue, mental disorders like BIID and anorexia, all to contrast Bruce Jenner and perceptions of gender.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in June 2015 after the public transition of former athlete Bruce Jenner into Caitlyn Jenner and the surrounding cultural discourse concerning transgenderism.

**Account Conclusion:** The account reveals the difficulties of harmonizing contemporary culture and traditional Christian teachings. The presenter is soft spoken, indicating the sensitivity of the topic and how important it is on social media (lacking the personal element of interpersonal interaction) to have a presentation which communicates trust and connection with the public. It must be able to mitigate the potential for misunderstandings, e.g., the

intention of the introductory anecdote, by incorporating a manner of address that enables dialogue even when topics are sensitive.

It thus uses a gentle tone of approach and combines this by conversing with other fields of discourse (Peters 2018, 164-165) to bolster a traditional view with authoritative sources that are independent of religious teachings.

The recruitment of studies on mental disorders, like BIID and body dysmorphia, can be viewed as a deliberate attempt to nuance and legitimize what might otherwise be deemed as a regressive ideology.

It argues that gender stereotypes are arbitrary, but as it also stresses that biology determines gender identity it appears to agree with A11, which suggested that stereotypes are constructions based in biology.

This focus on biology further engages with the idea of understanding the human condition through the limits of the embodied experience. While it presses the need to acknowledge external realities over emotional perceptions, it concludes with an emphasis on responding to alternative reality perceptions with love.

By encouraging the viewers to follow the example of Jesus and embrace people in their current state it stresses the importance of interpersonal relationships and community. Like his stance in A4, the presenter thus argues for a social solidarity that emanates from the individual's choice in difficult encounters, i.e., that there is a responsibility to communicate with love, but that love can mean not agreeing with the experience of another.

It is a theological response that is likely provocative, however it fulfils a scientific, apologetic, and political task in its attempt to converse with medical science, to illuminate the human condition, and to posit a positive path forward in the encounter between the traditional and the progressive viewpoints on the issue.

### *A19. "Responding to Fr. James Martin"*

**Presenter:** Brian Holdsworth

**Thumbnail:** Background is an image of water rippled by droplets falling into it, rainbow colours. To the left an image of presenter looking concerned, glancing up to the right where the title of account is written. Below the title is an image of Fr. Martin.

**Intro:** Presenter steps back from the camera and sits down, introduces the topic as music plays. Then cuts to a separate clip as logo and title appears on a white background. The presenter steps into frame and smiles.

**Setting:** Private office.

**Account Summary:** Addresses the ministry of Fr. James Martin who is said to not need an introduction; the priest is known for having been critiqued by a cardinal due to his teachings on “LGBTQQIP2SA+ persons” (the presenter visibly struggles, with some sarcasm, to recall the letters).

Sympathy is expressed with the intention of Fr. Martin but there is a quick stress that *if* he means to “subvert or spread confusion about Church teaching”, then it is “pernicious”.

Argues that while some superiors have criticised Fr. Martin, his Jesuit superiors are said to approve of his teachings. This addresses the concern that there are divisive opinions within the clergy and that this may confuse lay people about what the Church really teaches. It suggests that this is partly due to Soviet infiltration into seminaries during the Cold War, and stresses that this was an actual program not a conspiracy theory. It also argues that both Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius X warned of this kind of division.

Then suggests that critique from a Cardinal is a serious injunction and that Catholics do not get to interpret Jesus for themselves, and if they wish to do so they ought not do it in the name of Catholicism (draws a parallel to Martin Luther).

Argues that a focus on inclusivity is futile unless it is clear what you are including people in, and that total inclusion is only possible if it is based on relativism, which is antithetical to the Church. Argues that *true* inclusion can only come from personal reform (of everyone) based on objective truth, that though Fr. Martin says that his teachings are based on the Gospels he appears to overlook that Jesus never “left” people where they were.

The presenter uses an analogy that the human condition is like drowning in a river and that the distinction lies in Jesus either reaching out and pulling people out of the river or leaning forward to high-five them as they drown in their own dysfunctions.

**Outro:** Presenter in front of a white background, urging viewers to like and subscribe, to support the channel by supporting his business, and thanking *uCatholic* for being a sponsor.

**Recruits into it:** Fr. James Martin, Bishop Joseph Strickland, Cardinal Mueller, Pope Pius X, Pope Leo XIII, Martin Luther. These all demonstrate tension within the Church and what it ought to authoritatively teach.

**Visuals:** Images of the people spoken of in the account, Bishop Joseph Strickland, Cardinal Mueller, Pius X, Fr. James Martin, Martin Luther. Also, religious imagery, like St. Peter's Basilica, and a painting of God and of Jesus. Screenshot of unnamed magisterial document condemning socialism. Added to this are several clips of Fr. James Martin with a watercolour rainbow mark behind him or from a news clip, giving a speech. Concludes with several clips of raging or swirling water and a hand striving to reach the surface.

**Context of topic:** Published in December 2018, after Bishop Joseph Strickland of the Diocese of Tyler, Texas, and Cardinal Gerhard Müller, criticized the teachings of Fr. James Martin SJ, author of *Building a bridge* (2017).

**Account Conclusion:** The account is concerned about a clerical divide in matters of LGBTQ+ and thus, in a distinctly confession-informed account, addresses and critiques the influence contemporary culture has over some representatives of the Church.

The connections made primarily relate to the people involved in a recent conflict, but also adds a suggestion of alien influences as the root of division in the Church (Soviet infiltration). It condemns what it perceives as a forewarned conflict meant to undermine the Church from within and notably argues for progressive Catholics like Fr. Martin to leave the Church, rather than to try to reform it.

It is the subject of LGBTQ+ and the discourse between the community and Church that makes this account relevant from a public issue perspective. As a lay person Brian Holdsworth produces public theology from the perspective of someone with daily experience of contemporary culture. He thus speaks from a grassroots level on how dissension within the clergy causes confusion and defends clear and reliable authority based on the personal reform of all, arguing for inclusion based on transformation rather than affirmation. It perceives the natural state of humans as one of brokenness, a state of fallenness that naturally leads away from rather than to the truth of God.

Without directly answering the question of how the Church ought to communicate with the LGBTQ+ community, though the initial tone appears somewhat derisive, its focus is on tradition and authority. In this manner it serves a prophetic task which condemns what it sees

as an erroneous path in culture, subverting the teaching of Jesus to affirm the values of worldly concerns, rather than vice versa.

It also serves a pastoral task through its reflection on what inclusion means, it states that it sympathizes with the intention of Fr. Martin yet disagrees with his manner of approach. How his intention could be carried out in a more appropriate manner is unclear, demonstrating the tension between Church and culture on this issue.

## A20. “*Debunking Catholic Myths*”

**Presenter:** Fr. Casey Cole

**Thumbnail:** White background, presenter sitting on a stool. Text, “Catholics aren’t Christians”, with a red “myth” stamped above it.

**Intro:** n/a

**Setting:** White background, created by greenscreen.

**Account Summary:** This account discusses several myths surrounding Catholicism but only the LGBTQ+ related questions will be considered.

It argues that it is a myth that the Church thinks that being gay is a sin, that this is explicitly disproved by the Catechism. It argues that Catholic Moral Theology distinguishes between thoughts, feelings, and dispositions on the one hand and actions on the other. Argues that dispositions from birth, e.g., same-sex attraction, are not sinful, only actions are.

The account refutes the perception that the sex scandal within the Church was caused by gay clergy as there is nothing to suggest that gay men would be more likely to be predators.

**Outro:** Brown background with the names of the channel’s other social media accounts. As it shows, the video is minimized and is moved to the upper right corner as presenter continues to speak (a format also used by *Ascension Presents* by 2020). He states that he hopes it was helpful and that if there are request for it to be a longer account for “Catholicism in Focus” to let him know in the comments.

**Recruits into it:** Catholic Catechism and the Church’s sex abuse scandal.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in May 2020, no immediately obvious context.

**Account Conclusion:** The account refutes a public perception of Catholicism seen even in the research this study uses, which notes that the Catholic Church is critiqued for “decrying homosexuality as a sin” (Day and Kim 2017, 14).

What this account attempts to show that same-sex attraction is not considered a sin and does so by clarifying the distinction between disposition and action. This serves an apologetic task by arguing for the Church’s teachings on the subject by stressing that the human condition, as an embodied experience. It agrees with the assessment that same-sex attraction is natural in the sense of being born with them.

However, it does not address that the Church’s perception on homosexual actions necessitates life-long abstinence for those born with the disposition and thus fails to engage with the public issue full.

### *Subtheme Summary*

Table G.1. Summary of theological tasks (Theme 4.3.)

Theological Tasks	
Account 17	Pastoral, Prophetic
Account 18	Apologetic, Political, Scientific
Account 19	Pastoral, Prophetic
Account 20	Apologetic

The accounts of this section indicate the difficulty of harmonizing contemporary culture with the traditional teachings of the Church.

Table G.2. reveals how the first two accounts, dealing with gay marriage and transgenderism, show a dominant reliance on what can be viewed as a shared language that attempts to find an accessible middle ground between the Catholic and contemporary perspective. They recruit examples from history, politics, and medical science into their encounter with values that are not in line with tradition and does so to enable dialogue between the different perspectives.



The last two accounts are among the most overtly confession-informed of the study, they come from a perspective of how Catholicism is being perceived or influenced by culture, and thus in a defensive position attempting to correct the relationship between Church and culture, rather than correct cultural perceptions only.

All four accounts, to some extent, express an anxiousness about the relationship between Church and culture from a conservative perspective. That is, there appears to be found in the references a desire to defend Church tradition against external pressures to reform to contemporary standards, pointing to what in contemporary culture needs to be reformed by the Church’s values, while also acceding to some of the values of the LGBTQ+ movements. This is expressed in the suggesting that it is good for people to come out of the closet and live authentically; in the insistence that transgenderism is not to be judged but met with love; in the tacit support of Fr. Martin’s intent of inclusion, even if not in full agreement; and finally, in the stress that being gay is not a sin, which indicates a shift toward a perspective that reframes same-sex attraction as something natural.

They appear to attempt to influence public opinion by being clarifying the conservative perception, but by also focusing on the necessity of dialogue and love of the neighbour.

Table G.2. Reference Summary of Theme 4.3.

<b>Christian References</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>A18:</b> To walk with people, in the example of Jesus Fr. James Martin; Bishop Joseph Strickland; Cardinal Müller; Pope Pius	1
<b>A19:</b> X; Pope Leo XII; Martin Luther	6
<b>A20:</b> <i>The Catholic Church's Catechism</i>	1
<b>Cultural References</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>A17:</b> Alasdair McIntyre; <i>After Virtue</i> ; Justice Elena Kagan; bombing of Hiroshima; slavery; National polls	6
<b>A18:</b> Transgenderism; Bruce Jenner; BIID; body dysmorphia; eating disorders; Dr. John McCue	6
<b>A19:</b> The cultural phenomenon of affirming personal preferences; Soviet infiltration in the Catholic Church	2
<b>Christian/Cultural References</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A20:</b> Sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church	1

### 3.5. Theme 5: Perspectives on the Coronavirus

Table H. Account titles and date of publication

Perspectives on the Coronavirus			
	Creator	Title	Published
Account 21	Brian Holdsworth	<i>What Good Might Come From This</i>	2020-03-28
Account 22	Bishop Robert Barron	<i>On the Coronavirus, Catastrophe, and Contingency</i>	2020-04-02
Account 23	<i>Breaking in the Habit</i>	<i>Is Our Freedom Being Taken Away?</i>	2020-04-22
Account 24	Ascension Presents	<i>Afraid of the Coronavirus?</i>	2020-08-12

#### A21. “What Good Might Come From This”

**Presenter:** Brian Holdsworth

**Thumbnail:** Background image is a close-up of virus particles, title printed over it. To the right an image of presenter with a photoshopped facemask.

**Intro:** Signature melody plays as presenter steps back from the camera and sits down in a green chair, introduces the topic. Cuts to a separate clip, where logo and title appears against a white background and presenter steps into frame and smiles.

**Setting:** Private office.

**Account Summary:** The presenter announces that this is an unscripted account from the heart. It argues that there have been two responses to the Coronavirus, one that is more hysterical and one that is sceptical, and that these appear to coincide with a wider polarization in society. Suggests that this is largely caused and fuelled by politics and rooted in what sources each side perceive as authoritative.

It argues that it seems as though people have forgotten their shared humanity and whom they perceive on the other side of the political spectrum. That this kind of polarization, fuelled by social media, could cause suffering far worse than quarantine; a suffering, “created by our own hate and hostility against people who deserve our love and respect.” Stressing that the devastating wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had little to do with what led up to World War I.

It counters this with that there is hope in the Corona-crisis, that it has the potential to bridge some of the polarization, that common suffering will remind people to look past political divides and towards common humanity.

That the public does not have to be so divided, even if they will not suffer equally materially, there is reason to hope for compassion and the recognition that people will suffer

this together, no matter ethnicity, background, wealth, or politics. That people ought to rally together by virtue of being “human beings lovingly created in the image of God”.

**Outro:** Thanks viewers for watching, urges that if they liked it subscribe and hit the bell button for notifications, or to like it, and if they wish to support the making of the content to support his business, Holdsworth Designs.

**Recruits into it:** World Wars I-II as examples of polarization turned into dehumanization of the other. The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election as an example of where the current polarization began.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in March 2020, concerns the Coronavirus and the political climate around it.

**Account Conclusion:** In speaking from the heart the account addresses a fear that has already been seen from this creator in A2, namely a fear of where political polarization is leading. It thus urges for a recognition of the “shared humanity”, recruiting into it the concept of *imago dei* and common creation. It thus uses Christian symbolism to reinforce the hope the pandemic, in its indiscriminate tragedy, will enable recognition of the other as another self, and deemphasize social tension caused by politics especially.

Further it serves a pastoral task by reflecting on the purpose of humanity being to love one another, concerned by what “our own hate and hostility” does to interpersonal relationships and society in extension. Using historical examples with the World Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the most evocative, seen in earlier accounts, it points to the dangers of alienation and Othering in human relationships.

Suggesting that the Coronavirus may have averted the eruption of a violent conflict, like the historical examples, the account indicates how close it perceives the current situation to be to such an occurrence.

There is a genuine fear of petty conflict which lies behind its attempt to construct a positive political vision of what the pandemic may bring, even if it is through suffering. The account envisions a common good found in a recognition of what humanity shares rather than what divides. Through these means it serves an apologetic, pastoral, and political task.

## A22. “On the Coronavirus, Catastrophe, and Contingency”

**Presenter:** Bishop Robert Barron

**Thumbnail:** Background image is a black map filled with red dots, indicating global spread of virus. To the right a photo of presenter. Text, title and “A video from + Robert Barron”.

**Intro:** Teaser with a clip from the end of the account, otherwise same theme as Account 1.

**Setting:** Official study.

**Account Summary:** The account argues that human beings are often lulled into a sense of security by the illusion of stability and material goods, but that this is shaken up by catastrophes and reminds people of what they already know. This is portrayed with examples of catastrophic events, including images of online articles. It argues that the Coronavirus has served as a reminder for people of their own contingency in the world, as it is something that cannot be seen yet can get into our system and “take us away”.

The realization of contingency led Jean Paul Sartre to a nihilistic view of life, that life is absurd, but that the better option is found in Thomas Aquinas who found a keen sense of the existence of God in contingency.

It suggests that people *know* that nothing carries within itself the explanation for its own being, that everything is contingent on preceding causes. There is a healthy instinct in humans to look for causes which “every scientist knows”, but that this cannot regress infinitely. It must come to a reality that is self-explanatory and does not rely on extrinsic causes, namely what people of all times have called God.

Aquinas is the natural and healthy option, seen in the fact that priests and “religious types” are often at hospitals and funeral parlours because it is in times of tragedy, sickness, and limitation that people have the keenest awareness of God and their own contingency. The idea that they would be there to provide an emotional crutch to people in need is dismissed as “Freudian”.

The presenter urges people not to rely on a contingent world but allow their hearts and minds to rise to a consideration of God.

**Outro:** Same as A1.

**Recruits into it:** Jean Paul Sartre and Thomas Aquinas as variations on how to consider contingency. Freudianism refers to common ideas of modern psychology. An anecdote from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is used as an example of human awareness of their own contingent existence, that something that was part of them, like hair, can go up in flames and disappear in a second.

**Visuals:** A series of inserts of online articles writing about various catastrophes in California. A photo of scientist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

**Context of topic:** Published in April 2020, concerns the spread of the Coronavirus.

**Account Conclusion:** The account uses the Coronavirus pandemic to elevate what it perceives as latent knowledge about the contingent state of creation. This is an account which has a more overt missiological intent than previous ones, reflecting a “conversation between missiology and public theology” (Kim 2017, 21).

As public theology the account is centred around a public issue and as previously seen does not insist that belief in God is the only answer to contingency, but that it is the best answer of many. It is focused on how to cope with life in a finite state of being and creates a dialogue between science and faith, perceiving the former as developed out of a natural urge to seek for a final, infinite, cause. In this manner it suggests that there is a need for scientific study, but that this must be complimented by the metaphysical as the physical alone is insufficient to explain the state of the world as well as the human condition.

It reflects on existential dread, critiquing a “Freudian” perspective focused on a shallow emotionalism rather than the deeply existential side of illness and death, and reframes the instinctive and acute awareness of one’s own end as a state of awareness towards of God.

Through these means it fulfils an apologetic, scientific, and pastoral task. But it is in urging the viewers to look beyond the material world, to search for infinitude and stability in God and suggesting that there is an objective anchor to reality, that it appears to combine these with a more distinct missiological aim. It posits the option of relying on the world only, but urges a consideration of God which, through the tasks it fulfils, appears to emphasize a sort of “shared wisdom” (2017, 19) between faith and empirical reality.

### A23. “Is Our Freedom Being Taken Away?”

**Presenter:** Fr. Casey Cole

**Thumbnail:** Presenter outlined by a blue line. In the left corner, also surrounded by a blue frame, is an image of a woman wearing an American flag tank top, holding a sign saying, “Defy fascist lockdown”.

**Intro:** n/a

**Setting:** A light blue wall, dark brown wall coverings and shelves.

**Account Summary:** Addresses lockdown protests in April 2020 and the individualistic, almost anarchist, freedom expressed by the protestors. This is viewed as antithetical to Christianity and a hypothetical scenario is used to show how the modern view of freedom tends to be associated with the *quantity of choices* it provides, while the Christian view of choice is associated with the *quality of choices*.

The hypothetical is posed yearly to students of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) and poses the question of who has the most freedom – a thirsty person with five choices of drinks (motor oil, hydrochloric acid, a lava lamp, Windex, a leaky battery), or a thirsty person with only one choice, a glass of water. The common reply is that the first person has most freedom. Yet from a Christian perspective it should be the second person, that having only one, but good, choice is preferable to multiple, lesser, choices.

The protests reflect a kind of freedom that desires multiple, lesser, choices as the loosening restrictions serves the protestors better than it serve the wider community. The one choice of staying at home, while limiting, is the best choice as it potentially prevents the spread of the virus and protects the vulnerable. That it is not about what the individual wants but about what God wants and that the heart of Christianity is, “the freedom to sacrifice ourselves, so that others may live”. This is given a visual contrast as an image of Jesus on the cross is posed next to a protestor’s sign reading, “Sacrifice the weak. Reopen.”

**Outro:** Same as A7.

**Recruits into it:** Anti-lockdown protests across America. A hypothetical scenario.

**Visuals:** A series of images from protests with a focus on their signs and the messages upon them, including a truck with “Jesus is my vaccine” written on it. This is combined with a

series of clips from the protests, similarly, focusing on the messages on the signs and the type of freedom they represent.

**Context of topic:** Published in April 2020, during lockdown protests in America.

**Account Conclusion:** The account takes an accepting stance towards restrictive Corona-measures. It recruits the example of Jesus and the ideal of self-sacrifice to strongly condemn the lockdown protests, from which it also extrapolates a critique of contemporary society's common understanding of what "freedom" means.

It utilizes a visual aid to underline this point, juxtaposing Jesus on the cross with a protestor's sign. Like Bishop Barron (A13) and the Angel's (A15) it problematizes the emergence of an unrestrained autonomy which causes a reluctance to self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Through this it also suggests that freedom is not a good unless it is anchored to objective values, which guides choices towards the good rather than the bad.

The protests thus appear to reflect a sense of freedom damaged by sin which serves passion and external pressures related to material concerns, rather than a genuine good. It appears to elevate prophetic values rather than partisan interests (Kim 2017, 18), i.e., supporting the surrender of political liberties, through the focus on the needs of others. However, as seen in A2 and A21, this can be perceived as a political stance with partisan intentions.

The perspective of the account does not appear to intend partisanship, it seems strongly focused on serving an apologetic task that wishes to elevate how society values the needs of others by illuminating and rectifying the concept of through Christian symbolism. Through this it also serves a prophetic task, condemning contemporary expressions of freedom, finding them inadequate to the example of Jesus.

#### *A24. "Afraid of the Coronavirus?"*

**Presenter:** Fr. Mike Schmitz

**Thumbnail:** Image of presenter furrowing his brow in consternation. Text, "Freedom from the fear of death".

**Intro:** Same as A4 and 15.

**Setting:** Living room.

**Account Summary:** Argues that the Coronavirus has revealed that there a widespread fear of death in society. In a playful tone of voice, the presenter asks the viewers if they forgot that the mortality rate of humanity “hovers around 100%”, while stressing that the virus did not create this fear, only made it visible.

Argues that under common circumstances this fear can be pushed out of people’s minds, but the virus has made it impossible for them to escape or distract themselves from it. Stresses that this fear was natural before Jesus, but as Hebrews 2:14-15 shows, there has been a liberation from this bondage, because after Jesus there is hope that death is neither the end nor the worst thing.

That the worst thing is separation from God, a possibility for all, but that living in fear is not the answer because life is not merely about staying alive. It stresses that through Christ one can live in hope, that this does not mean that one does not take reasonable precautions like wearing a mask or washing one's hands, but that these things are done with *hope*.

Argues that life is always a risk but that a life lived in fear is a way to stop living before it is over. The presenter stresses that he is not making light of the situation or what people have lost, but states that, “We can live in fear, or we can live in Christ”.

**Outro:** Same as A4 and 15.

**Recruits into it:** Hebrews 2:14-15.

**Visuals:** n/a

**Context of topic:** Published in August 2020, concerns anxiety around the Coronavirus.

**Account Conclusion:** This account, like A22, has a more overt missiological aim than others. It uses the pandemic to illustrate the need for Christ in the present, and more importantly, in eternity. It uses prophetic values to argue that life itself not of singular value and that its risks are worth taking because it is not the end. Though it does not use the philosophical language of Bishop Barron, it tacitly suggests that the only stability is to be found in that which transcends the contingent condition of creation.

Its pastoral reflection is less accessible than other accounts as the value of Christ and life after death may be alienating to viewers lacking a faith tradition. Public theology is,



however, distinctly theological and, though it may not be appealing, it can still be noted that the account is comprehensible, even to the viewer lacking general knowledge of e.g., the Bible. This is one of the instances when the presenter not only mentions, but directly cites and names a biblical passage.

In its stress that separation from God is possible for anyone, it appears to caution against assumptions of salvation (that being part of the faith tradition is not a guarantee) and re-emphasizes the essentiality of hope in the face of the unknown. In using a Christian understanding of creation to illuminate the condition and purpose of humanity the tasks it fulfils are apologetic and pastoral.

### *Theme Summary*

Table H.1. Summary of theological tasks (Theme 5)

Theological Tasks	
Account 21	Apologetic, Pastoral, Political
Account 22	Apologetic, Pastoral, Scientific
Account 23	Apologetic, Pastoral, Prophetic
Account 24	Apologetic, Pastoral

The accounts of this theme concern the Coronavirus and its effect on society. There are variations of responses to the virus, two accounts (A22, A24) address the fear of death it has revealed, both use this to produce a message infused with missiological intent. They thus reveal a focus that is aimed away from the penultimate present and towards ultimate concerns.

The other two accounts (A21, A23) show an inverted focus as both are directed towards political circumstances of polarization and lockdown restrictions. A23 objects to perceived selfishness in the reactions to political measures attempting to limit the contagion, it was published in April 2020 and does not appear to clash with the political vision of A21, which is primarily interested in envisioning a beneficial realization in relation to the common good (unity through the suffering caused by the virus). However, A21 was published in March while A2 (from the same creator) was published in October 2020 and touched upon the effects of the virus with less positivity. As it was not published until the end of the year, when the political restrictions had proven more long-lasting than previously anticipated, its perspective presents an interesting contrast to A21 and A23, worthy of note, as its circumstances must be considered slightly different from theirs. Together they appear to

show that public theology that adjusts itself on the way, i.e., reacts to the daily needs it meets in concrete public issues and formulates a response suitable to each issue.

What they all further show is that theology can inform and infuse a crisis with deeper meaning by stressing what humanity shares which is a finite embodied existence and a condition elevated by love for one’s fellow man and God. Finding the ability to do the former through the latter.

The connections made in the accounts lean towards the cultural, again historical, examples of catastrophes are used to present the dangers of polarization. They point to the uncertainty of life and community, suggesting that these are necessary conditions which can only be alleviated or balanced by ultimate considerations that stand above temporal conditions. Thus, they use Christian references to stress the commonality perceived as necessary for coping with the Corona-pandemic and cultural references as cautionary examples revealing the shared flaws of humanity, whether that is political polarization or reluctance to self-sacrifice.

Table H.2. Reference Summary of Theme 5

<b>Christian References</b>	<b>4</b>
A21: Imagio dei	1
A22: St. Thomas Aquinas	1
A23: Jesus on the Cross	1
A24: <i>Hebrews</i> 2:14-15	1
<b>Cultural References</b>	<b>15</b>
A21: Coronavirus; WWI; WWII; 2000 U.S. Presidential Election Coronavirus; Jean Paul Sartre; Freudianism; five articles on accidents in	4
A22: California	8
A23: Coronavirus; anti-lockdown protests	2
A24: Coronavirus	1
<b>Christian/Cultural References</b>	<b>1</b>
A22: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin	1

### 3.6. Theme 6: Passive and Active Interaction on YouTube

It has previously been stated that the publics of intent in this model are *public opinion* and *media*. Though it cannot be ascertained to what extent these are swayed, the approximate reach and interactive communication can be suggested.

Table I. demonstrates the numeric measurements of passive (watching) and active (comments, likes, dislikes) interaction, and contrasts this with the percentages of the active interaction.

Each view has been heuristically calculated as an individual viewer to elucidate approximately how large a portion of the passive interaction (viewing public) further

Table I.

Perspectives on Political Division and Inequality					Active Interaction in percentage		
	Views	Comments	Likes	Dislikes	Commented	Liked	Disliked
Account 1	55 025	298	2780	119	0,54%	5,05%	0,22%
Account 2	7466	205	842	22	2,75%	11,28%	0,29%
Account 3	39 027	670	2377	103	1,72%	6,09%	0,26%
Account 4	70 271	752	3813	48	1,07%	5,43%	0,07%
Perspectives on Racism					Active Interaction in percentage		
	Views	Comments	Likes	Dislikes	Commented	Liked	Disliked
Account 5	69 764	372	1552	136	0,53%	2,22%	0,19%
Account 6	127 865	590	3448	154	0,46%	2,70%	0,12%
Account 7	32 697	1299	2978	586	3,97%	9,11%	1,79%
Account 8	19 630	508	1812	83	2,59%	9,23%	0,42%
Perspectives on Social Norms: Female Ordination					Active Interaction in percentage		
	Views	Comments	Likes	Dislikes	Commented	Liked	Disliked
Account 9	280 190	1448	3809	357	0,52%	1,36%	0,13%
Account 10	129 077	499	2836	76	0,39%	2,20%	0,06%
Account 11	36 155	669	2419	132	1,85%	6,69%	0,37%
Account 12	139 100	2099	4948	443	1,51%	3,56%	0,32%
Perspectives on Social Norms: Family					Active Interaction in percentage		
	Views	Comments	Likes	Dislikes	Commented	Liked	Disliked
Account 13	210 359	2603	3779	739	1.24%	1.8%	0.35%
Account 14	197 379	574	3822	214	0.29%	1.94%	0.11%
Account 15	15 800	339	1132	28	2.15%	7.16%	0.18%
Account 16	10 492	203	1524	17	1.93%	14.53%	0.16%
Perspectives on Social Norms: LGBTQ+					Active Interaction in percentage		
	Views	Comments	Likes	Dislikes	Commented	Liked	Disliked
Account 17	691 783	7736	10 050	1157	1.12%	1.45%	0.17%
Account 18	977 694	5713	29 751	3952	0.58%	3.04%	0.4%
Account 19	154 718	1625	8231	447	1.05%	5.32%	0.29%
Account 20	428 589	8150	18 181	1180	1.90%	4.24%	0.28%
Perspectives on the Coronavirus					Active interaction in percentage		
	Views	Comments	Likes	Dislikes	Commented	Liked	Disliked
Account 21	9 674	174	803	22	1.80%	8.30%	0.23%
Account 22	218 053	408	5 153	130	0.19%	2.36%	0.06%
Account 23	23 854	690	1547	332	2.89%	6.49%	1.39%
Account 24	60 179	512	3 489	51	0.85%	5.80%	0.08%

Measured at 2020-11-06

engaged. A more precise number is difficult to establish as each view may include multiple viewers or repeated viewers.

The table illustrates that there is a considerable contrast between passive interaction and active interaction. Approximately 63% of the accounts (15 out of 24) surpass 50 000 views, and A18 shows a peak at nearly 1 000 000 views (*Ascension Presents, "Bruce Jenner and Transgenderism"*). But further interaction is minimal and somewhat consistent between the channels regardless of their size. The dislike ratio is mostly negligible only reaching above 1% twice in A7 and A23 from *Breaking in the Habit ("I'm A Bit Racist. And So Are You", "Is our freedom being taken away?")*, indicating negative emotions stirred by the issues.

The likes primarily range between 1-10%, only *Brian Holdsworth* demonstrates results above this in A2 and A16 (*"The Authorities Can't Save You", "Everything depends on the family!"*), which appears to correspond to a low number of views and may shift if passive interaction increases.

Comments hover around 1-3%, peaking at 3.97% in A7, mentioned above. This appears to indicate that the account's blend of theology and a social discourse, borrowing language from identity politics, is effective at generating interaction even if it cannot be said that this is a positive interaction.

Overall, the passive interaction far extends active engagement, suggesting that there are limited dividends to the outros where the creators appeal to further interaction. It is also plausible that passive interaction is the primary form of communication on YouTube and that further engagement occurs on the other social media sources the creators direct viewers to (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).

It is notable that topics on social norms, e.g., female ordination and LGBTQ+ issues, generate a considerable interaction with increases in all categories. These increases may indicate that these issues are part of an already active public discourse, and that by broaching these issues in a manner that is "genuinely public" (Cady 2014, 295), the accounts effectively engage a wide audience.

It may also indicate that the titles are provocative or descriptive enough to be searchable, i.e., that the public that is interested in these issues can easily find them on the platform. The increases, however, still reveal that proportionality is maintained and only a minimal portion of the public further interacts.

The measurements reveal that public theology, as computer-mediated communication, appears to be primarily formatted to create passive interaction. This means that the focus is on getting the public to select to view the content, i.e., mechanisms of attraction seen in

Theme 1, like title, thumbnail, introductions, issue, and references. The outro, in the light of these figures, suggest that the accounts hope for, but do not depend on (as they continue to create content), further and active interaction from the viewing public.

## **4. Conclusion**

The intention of this study has been to examine a sample of content from Catholic YouTube creators, to assess its content as public theology formulated for social media. The first question, intending to establish the content as public theology, used a minimum definition of what public theology is, the first part of which is that it extends beyond church and academy.

The presence on YouTube, a public social media platform, indicates that the creators of this study are deliberately looking to reach a contemporary audience through popular media tools. They are extending their theological message beyond both church and academy and are employing computer-mediated means of communication to reach an indeterminate audience in a non-traditional manner.

This generates a truly public discourse as the content is available to a global-user base of unknown origins. Its public nature is also due to a manner of address which often appears to de-emphasize the overtly religious content, aiming to find a common language through cultural examples, expressing traditionalism through a constructive juxtaposition with contemporary flaws. This is seen in both the manifest and latent content, where both reveal a tendency to minimize overt religiosity, potentially enabling engagement with a faith-sceptic public as well.

The second part of the definition is that public theology is interested in public discourse and public issues. The creators are shown to engage with public issues that are of interest to those both inside and outside of the faith-tradition. They are often, though not always, responses to current situations e.g., presidential elections, the Coronavirus, or civil unrest. They are also commentaries on cultural matters posing are issues between the Catholic Church and society, e.g., concerns related to gender perceptions (expressed in connection to female ordination), family, and LGBTQ+. In these cases, the issues are often serving a defensive task as they are in opposition to emerging normative stances.

The third part of the definition is that public theology ought to be comprehensible and persuasive to those within and outside of a faith tradition. This is demonstrated in the

accounts by the general reliance on nonexpert language and the informal address, mentioned above, which is supplemented by a use of cultural references. These anchors the discourse in shared knowledge, e.g., references to World Wars, totalitarian regimes, or slavery, all constitute a shared vocabulary that can be used to evoke certain feelings or mental images. This is further supplemented by using visual aids forming a visual rhetoric that enhances the point the presenter tries to make by guiding the viewer through the content, evoking emotions through imagery, e.g., contrasting the Monticello to slave hovels (A5), and thus appealing to the public through multiple layers of information.

The fourth part of the definition is that public theology does not position itself as authoritative. The accounts, while speaking from a theological perspective, are not authoritative in their performance. Rather, they often appear to attempt persuasion, presenting their perspective as the best *option*, but without denying the potential of other options.

The persuasive elements include a reliance on cultural references as seen above, which enables accessibility and reveals a cooperation with other fields of discourse, such as science, history, and popular culture.

Generally, overt references to religious sources are rare, they are present but not dominant. The exceptions are accounts which present doctrinal defenses, primarily from *Breaking in the Habit* and these often relate to issues where the Church is in a defensive position contrary to culture.

Even in these defensive forms of discourse however, e.g., female ordination and LGBTQ+ issues, the accounts rely on additional discourses to strengthen the claims of tradition, indicating an acceptance that theological truth cannot be handed down in the current public context but is co-produced with other authoritative sources.

The final part of the minimal definition of public theology is that it is performative and intended towards action. The accounts are deliberate and coherent performances, they also produce discourse that is geared towards action. Mostly this is aimed at gradual reforming practices, starting with the individual, i.e., what is within the control of the viewer. These suggestions to action include mundane choices in shopping; voting; and interpersonal interactions with political and racial Others in their daily lives.

These carry within them a gradualism grounded in conversation and consensus that, as mentioned, is characteristic of public theology (Kim 2017, 13-14). It intends the cultivation of a social solidarity that extends widespread reform and community building.

Beyond these elements of the minimal definition, the five tasks enumerated by Ted Peters have been used to anchor each account in specific theological intentions. The analysis shows that out of 24 accounts (see Table J.), 19 fulfilled an apologetic task; 11 a pastoral task; 15 a political task; 12 a prophetic task; and 5 a scientific task. No account fulfilled all five tasks, but this is unsurprising considering the limited scope of each account and that it is often framed around a single issue.

Table J. Concluding Summary of Theological Tasks

Theological Tasks Fulfilled		
Apologetic	A1, A3, A5, A7, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17, A20, A21, A22, A23, A24	19
Pastoral	A3, A6, A10, A13, A14, A17, A19, A21, A22, A23, A24	11
Political	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A9, A11, A12, A15, A16, A18, A21	15
Prophetic	A2, A5, A7, A9, A11, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17, A19, A23	12
Scientific	A2, A15, A16, A18, A22	5

The task fulfilled by most accounts was the apologetic task, this indicates an overwhelming focus on the shared condition of humanity and the concerns of establishing a community that is directed towards finding a common good that can recognize the racial, financial, and political Other as neighbor and equal.

This is complimented by the political task which is geared towards a positive vision measured against the kingdom of God. These two tasks often appear aimed at overcoming divides by stressing metaphysical claims as complimentary and illuminating to the physical reality of the penultimate present, seen especially in the accounts from *Bishop Robert Barron*.

The pastoral and prophetic tasks were fulfilled in 11 and 12 accounts, these often appear as complimentary perspectives combined with the political and apologetic tasks, and rarely fulfilled in isolation. They thus appear to function as nuance and contrast, i.e., where the prophetic condemns the political is positive, creating a balanced view that points to the problem as well as the solution; and where the pastoral reflects on existential questions, the apologetic stresses the shared universality of these questions and the social consequences of their answers. Together they present an ability to be critical, yet constructive.

The task that was seen the least was the scientific task. Discourse is not lacking but it is not the overwhelming concern, the accounts are conversant with science, but are often critical of the current perception of its truth-claims. It is plausible that other issues from the creators engage more deeply with this task.

The conclusion to the assessments of the content through these definitions is that the accounts are consistently amenable to their distinguishing marks and can be categorized as

public theology, even though a further exploration to its engagement with science could be beneficial.

The second question of the study has concerned in what manner this public theology is formulated for social media; it has relied on Content Analysis' ability to systematize what appears as large amounts of unstructured information and what the study has observed is that the latent elements, which may not immediately appear relevant, are part of how the accounts create a coherent computer-mediated performance.

Theme 1 specifically focuses on the assessment on the audiovisual elements that are part of the communicative process on the platform. These include thumbnail, title, setting, body language, added visual media, auditory inclusions, and time-span.

These are considered deliberate aspects recruited into the theological content because they were shown to be part of the way the creators attempt to engage the publics sought and to allow an accessible level of comprehensibility and meaning-making.

Some of the visual elements intend to create an attraction and connection with the public by signaling the intentionality the account and the presenter's situation of address relative to the public. They combine a sacralized ethos with a de-sacralized one and demonstrate how audiovisual elements interact, as the clerical presenters wear their religious attire but approach the audience from a neutral setting and utilize music that is not explicitly religious. While in the case of the layman, Brian Holdsworth, his informal situation of address is seen in setting and clothes but is balanced by using a signature melody that stresses the sacralizing intention of the content. It appears to suggest an awareness of how to attempt to create an appeal to a wide audience and to present a distinct theological perspective, but from a non-authoritative position.

It was problematic for the study that body language from the presenters was so limited. The most that can be said about it is that they rely on gestures, but that primarily body language relates to facial expressions and the manner of creating connection through eye-contact with the camera, creating a pseudo-proximity to the viewer through the physically distanced medium.

It is noted that Bishop Barron deviates, but his performative decision to keep his gaze away from the audience can also be an attempt to appear non-authoritative. As he represents a high position of authority within the Church, the act of creating an atmosphere of an erudite lecture minimizes the impression of being *lectured*, i.e., there is a distinction of listening to an open-ended discourse and being directly castigated by an authority figure.



The creators thus find different methods of communication that suits their style, but which is open, and inviting, to further dialogue as suggested both by the overall intention and the direct appeals in the outros.

The accounts also make use of added visual elements in the form of images, clips, or text printed on the screen; as a form of computer-mediated communication these introduce, explain, entertain, and create attention-effecting activity on the screen. As noted, body language is limited and for the performances to engage interaction for the duration of the time-span, they appear to recruit these added elements which guide the viewer through the manifest content. The added visuals build connections between cultural and religious ideas in a manner that does not place high demands on the potential level of knowledge or expertise in the theological field.

Examples of this are *Breaking in the Habit's* use of contrasting protestors signs with the image of Jesus on the cross, evoking the distinction in perception of freedom on an emotional level as well as a cognitive one.

*Bishop Robert Barron's* contrasting the philosophical term contingency with news articles demonstrating the fragility of life, thus contextualizing the term with explanatory elements, and connecting them to the logic of theism.

*Brian Holdsworth's* contrasting visuals of strong female characters in movies to suggest how masculine traits are being heralded over traditional femininity; and how less glamorous sides of war movies, with negative aspects of masculine roles, are suppressed.

A final example is how Fr. Schmitz of *Ascension Presents* recruits anecdotes and expressive facial expressions to contrast the cultural ideas of transgenderism with the traditional perspective he presents. He paints a visual, rather than adds it, but uses language that is evocative enough for the viewer to envision the visual, aided by the expressions he makes.

All of these are manners of contrasting reality, ideals, values, and cultural narratives between two different perspective, with favor for the theological but without a potentially confusing complexity. These co-associated images or expressions also suggests an intention to influence public opinion by engaging it on multiple levels, even subconscious ones, by connecting statements to visuals.

The auditory elements are not as noticeable, their inclusion in introductory and concluding structures of each account represent a quality of production that is creatively deliberate and functions to create a viewing *experience*. That is, interaction with the content

is intended to be not only accessible but pleasant; it is easy to follow but also aesthetically appealing and emotionally priming (e.g., can set an upbeat or a somber mood).

As the time span is limited these kinds of latent elements must be said to be essential aspects of the performance, had they been redundant it would not have been an effective part of the communication to include them rather than spending that time on manifest content. Thus, their inclusion is significant and, in combination with the low-cost of time commitment of each account, this study posits that they indicate how public theology on social media is adapted to overcoming the limitations of computer-mediated communication. Meaning that they function to bridge the physical divide between presenter and public, overcoming the asynchronicity of engagement, as well as the indeterminate make-up of who makes up the viewing public.

It can be said that, through the issue-specific focus on the accounts, public theology formulated for social media becomes something fragmented rather than systematic. The benefit of this is that the topical nature of the content has the advantage of quickly bringing a theological perspective to bear on public discourse.

But it also carries the risk of becoming irrelevant as the news cycle moves on, or it has the risk of not being properly informed as issues develop over time. The example of female ordination indicates that even if an issue does not appear immediately topical, it can still be of recurring interest to public discourse. However, the accounts concerned with the Coronavirus, including A2 which was not formally a part of Theme 5, may all prove to be strongly relative to the time of their publication as the circumstances surrounding the virus are developing as the pandemic and its restrictions continues to affect the public.

The single-issue accounts still represent a fragmentary form of public theology that is suitable to the platform as it allows the public to search and engage with issues of particular interest, i.e., does not require engagement beyond personal interest. It shows that the content must continue to create a point of attraction, appealing to publics that may chose not to interact at all.

Concerning the publics of address, *public opinion* and *media*, it has already been suggested that the presence on YouTube indicates that there is an awareness from the creators that social media shapes opinions, especially for young people. The potential reception of the content is difficult to assess because this is where the platform showed itself to be a blunt tool in terms of observation. Though it is interactive, YouTube appears less discursive than other platforms, suggested as all the creators in their outros link to their other social media platforms, using YouTube as a starting point.

Discourse is present on YouTube, but it is not dominant, as seen in Theme 6. Quantitative measurements were included in the study because they influenced the selection of the content but also to create an idea of how engagement with the content looked. The measurements revealed that interaction is primarily passive (watching only) and that only marginal portions actively interact (like, comment, dislike).

The minimal dislike ratio may suggest that there is a limited scope to the audience reach, i.e., that the intention to reach public opinion may primarily be able to appeal to an already sympathetic public. They suggest that the most effective interactions, both positive and negative, relate to LGBTQ+ issues.

It is the interactions, indicating the effect the accounts may have over public opinion, that informs the media public. The accounts often relate and react to issues covered by mainstream media (context of topic) but add a theologically based discourse appearing to re-sacralize the debate around these issues. There appears in the account an intention towards broadening the perspective of secular culture and reinvigorate public discourse with a theological angle. Thus, most of their arguments are framed to contrast why theology matters as a meaning-making source in wider society and why its divorce from public discourse has been detrimental to the public good. This is seen across all the creators, indicating a general coherence between these different theological voices. This intended public appears to attempt to fulfill a complimentary role to secular media sources and may hope to influence it through successful interactions with public opinion. It is thus dependent on success in the former to actualize its own potential influence.

The conclusion of this study is that the accounts represent a fragmented form of public theology specifically articulated after the needs of social media, it shows the public what theology can do in a contextually relevant manner that is comprehensible, engaging, and condensed.

It is content that functions on multiple levels as computer-mediated communication that intends dialogue between theology and society through popular means and reflects a complexity and openness suitable to engage a social media informed public.

#### 4.1. Further Research

This study only used a sample of content from the creators and each creator could beneficially be studied in isolation for a fuller understanding of their theological output. The

notable distinction between active and passive interaction, which made the assessment of the intended publics vague, suggests that an in-depth study from a response-focused methodology, looking into the nature of the social community of that platform and surrounding the creators, would be necessary to further engage with this matter.

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## **6. Appendixes**

## Appendix A: Accounts by Creator/Channel

### *Ascension Presents*

- A4. *“Why Are We So Divided Right Now?”*
- A6. *“NFL National Anthem Protests”*
- A10. *“#askFrMike Confirmation and Female Priests?”*
- A15. *“Are There Too Many People?”*
- A18. *“Bruce Jenner and the Transgender Question”*
- A24. *“Afraid of the Coronavirus?”*

### *Bishop Robert Barron*

- A1. *“God, Equality, and the Founding of America”*
- A5. *“On Charlottesville and America’s Original Sin”*
- A9. *“Why Won’t Catholicism Allow Women Priests?”*
- A13. *“On the Childfree Life”*
- A17. *“Gay Marriage and the Breakdown of Moral Argument”*
- A22. *“On the Coronavirus, Catastrophe, and Contingency”*

### *Breaking in the Habit*

- A3. *“Boycott Walmart?”*
- A7. *“I’m a bit racist. And so are you.”*
- A12. *“Why Can’t Women Be Ordained in the Catholic Church”*
- A14. *“Sex in the Catholic Church”*
- A20. *“Debunking Catholic Myths”*
- A23. *“Is Our Freedom Being Taken Away?”*

### *Brian Holdsworth*

- A2. *“The Authorities Can’t Save You”*
- A8. *“Racism isn’t that Complicated”*
- A11. *“Why Can’t Church Ordain Women?”*
- A16. *“Everything depends on the family!”*
- A19. *“Responding to Fr. James Martin”*
- A21. *“What Good Might Come From This.”*

## Appendix B: Images Recruited into the Accounts

### A1. *“God, Equality, and the Founding of America”*

Image 1: Portrait of Thomas Jefferson.

Image 2: Portrait of Junipero Serra.

### A2. *“Authorities Can’t Save You”*

Image 1: Drawing of G.K. Chesterton.

Image 2: Image of an online article debunking the drug hydroxychloroquine.

Clip 1: From 2020 riots in the U.S.A. showing protestors clashing with police and civil society.

### A5. *“On Charlottesville and America’s Original Sin”*

Image 1: Welcome to Charlottesville, Virginia – sign.

Image 2: University of Virginia – sign.

Image 3: Image of Monticello from a helicopter view.

Image 4: Close up of the Monticello.

Image 5: Jefferson’s office.

Image 6: Jefferson’s tombstone.

Image 7: Photo of Monticello.

Image 8-9: The hovels Jefferson’s slaves lived in.

Image 10: Photo of a slave from behind, his back covered in scarred welts.

Image 11: Portrait of Thomas Jefferson.

Image 12: Drawing of a slave owner whipping a slave.

Image 13: Image of dead bodies covering a battlefield of the Civil War.

Image 14: Photo from a Civil Rights protest where an officer is pushing back a black man as a police dog is jumping up to bite the man’s arm.

Image 15: Image of rioters throwing flares in Ferguson, Missouri.

Image 16: Photo of KKK members attacking a black man.

Image 17: Close up of black children in a church.

Image 18: Close up of Scripture.

Image 19: Jesus Christ on the Cross, close up.

Image 20: Jesus Christ on the Cross, zoomed out, including the people around him.

Image 21: Martin Luther King in church, a big cross above him.

A8. *“Racism isn’t that Complicated”*

Image 1: Martin Luther King in the middle of giving a speech.

Image 2: Definition of the word “racism”.

Image 3: Image of retired police officer David Dorn.

Clip 1: Riots in the U.S.A. during 2020.

Clip 2: Riots in the U.S.A. during 2020.

Clip 3: Justin Trudeau, prime minister of Canada, speaking on racism.

Clip 4: A black man whose house was burned down during BLM protests.

Clip 5: A black woman who had her shop destroyed during BLM protests.

A11. *“Why Can’t Church Ordain Women?”*

Image 1: 2017 online article, by Michael Price, “Study finds some significant differences in brains of men and women”.

Image 2: Black and white drawing of a woman, ca mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, helping her son to dress.  
Title of drawing: St. Patrick’s Day in America.

Image 3: The body of Jesus in Mary’s arms, surrounded by mourning women.

Image 3: Icon of Jesus.

Image 4: Jesus clearing out the merchants from the temple.

Clip 1: From the *Wonder Woman* (2017) movie, Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman walking over no-man’s land, unharmed by gunfire.

Clip 2: Scarlett Johansen as Black Widow beating a man twice her size in a boxing ring.

Clip 3: Warrior women from the HBO-series *Vikings* (2013).

Clip 4: Female knight from *Game of Thrones*.

Clip 5: Close up from men at war, uncredited movie.

Clip 6: Men preparing the lifeboats for the women and children, the *Titanic* (1997).

A12. *“Why Can’t Women Be Ordained in the Catholic Church”*

Image 1: A group of female priests, unknown denomination.

Image 2: Women’s liberation movement protests, ca 1960’s-1970’s.

Image 3: Women’s liberation movement protests, ca 1960’s-1970’s.

Image 4: Screen image of documents from [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) to the left, on the right a larger bold print of the title and publication of the document pictures: Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's declaration *Inter Insigniores*, 1976.

Image 5: Screen image of documents from [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) to the left, on the right title and publication date: *Ordination Sacerdotalis*, 1994.

Image 6: Rainbow colored bar table dividing up the seven major (3) and minor (4) orders within the Church hierarchy.

Image 7: Cartoon showing the relationship between deacon, priest, and bishop as linear. Shifts to reveal that it is not, that deacon and priests both respond directly to the bishop.

Image 8.1.: Woman serving as lector.

Image 8.2.: Woman serving as cantor.

Image 8.3.: Woman serving as usher.

Image 8.4.: Woman serving as extraordinary minister of communion.

Image 8.5.: Girls serving as acolytes.

Image 9: Two sepia images side by side of boys serving as acolytes.

### A13. "*On the Childfree Life*"

Image 1: *Time* Magazine cover, attractive couple lounging on a beach in blue swimsuits and sunglasses.

Image 2: Graph depicting plummeting birth-rates, 1960-2007.

Image 3: Graph of birth-rates between 1920-2010.

Image 4: Graph of fertility rates in Europe, 1950-2015.

Image 5: Graph of the rising costs of raising a child.

Image 6: Portrait of comedian Margret Cho.

Image 7: Cover of *The Omen* (1976).

Image 8: Image from uncredited movie, little girl with long dark hair in an institution.

Image 9: Cover of the movie *Orphan* (2009).

Image 10: A man jumping from a tower during an initiation rite, ropes tied to his ankles.

Image 11: Young man painted, being guided through a ritual by two older men.

Image 12: Young man with face tattoos.

Image 13: A man with tribal head-dress and paint, from behind.

Image 14: A man in red robes, with a spear.

Image 15: Two young men, painted white, sitting outside, an open African landscape behind them.

A14. *“Sex in the Catholic Church”*

Image 1: Model in revealing dress eating a burger.

Image 2: Shirtless male model on top of a horse.

Image 3: Catholic School girl looking confused.

Image 4: Three articles critiquing Catholic teaching.

Image 5: A man and woman with their hands linked by their pinkie fingers, an engagement ring on her hand.

Image 6: A couple in wedding attire leaning their foreheads together.

Image 7: A man kissing a woman’s forehead, jointly hold up a sonogram photo.

Image 8: Couple with a newly delivered baby, father kissing the child’s head as mother smiles at the father.

Image 9: Birth control pills.

Image 10: Two-scales and the title “Principle of Double Effect”.

Image 11: Rainbow flag with the words “same sex”.

Image 12: Image of fertilization in vitro.

Image 13: Embryo tank.

A16. *“Everything depends on the family!”*

Image 1: Newlyweds about to kiss at the beach.

Image 2: Cover of rap artist Cardi B’s single “WAP”, showing two topless women, covering their breasts with their hands, their eyes closed, and their tongues stuck out of their mouths.

Clip 1: Urban city from a window, snow falling.

Clip 2: Snowy woodland landscape, sunset.

Clip 3: Snowy landscape by lake, sunrise.

Clip 4: Man and woman swimming breaststroke.

Clip 5: Man swimming on his back.

Clip 6: Chaotic traffic intersection, unnamed country.

Clip 7: Couple getting married at sunset.

Clip 8: Teenagers taking notes at school.

Clip 9: Carpenter drilling.

Clip 10: Jogger in urban setting.

A17. “*Gay Marriage and the Breakdown of Moral Argument*”

Image 1: Cover of *After Virtue*

Image 2: Photo of Alasdair MacIntyre.

Image 3: Justice Elena Kagan.

Image 4: Image of poll numbers regarding opinions on gay marriage between 1985-2011, from pollsandvotes.com.

Image 5: The bombing of Hiroshima.

Image 6: Photo of three slaves in chains.

A19. “*Responding to Fr. James Martin*”

Image 1: Bishop Joseph Strickland.

Image 2: Cardinal Mueller, former prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith.

Image 3: Pope Pius X reading in a garden.

Image 4: Art depicting God.

Image 5: Art depicting Jesus.

Image 6: Photo of the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica.

Image 7: Screenshot of unnamed magisterial documents condemning socialism.

Image 8: Fr. James Martin against a rainbow watercolour splash.

Image 9: Portrait of Martin Luther.

Clip 1: Fr. Martin against a rainbow-coloured watercolour splash.

Clip 2: Fr. Martin talking at The Ignatian Family Teach-In, 2018.

Clip 3: Raging river.

Clip 4: Raging river.

Clip 5: Hand under water reaching for the surface.

Clip 6: Close up of swirling river.

A22. “*On the Coronavirus, Catastrophe, and Contingency*”

Image 1: Online article, unclear source, title “Southern California’s Thomas Fire now largest in state history”.

Image 2: Online article, unclear source, title “Children among dead in huge California mudslide, 43 people reported missing”.

Image 3: Online article, unclear source, title “Mass shooting at Borderline Bar and Grill in Thousand Oaks, California”.

Image 4: Online article, unclear source, title “Bodies of 33 victims of California diving boat fire recovered, still missing”.

Image 5: Online article, unclear source, title “California tests strict limits on daily life to halt the spread of coronavirus”.

Image 6: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

A23. *“Is Our Freedom Being Taken Away?”*

Image 1: Female protestor holding sign, reading “My body, my choice” a facemask is crossover, underneath it says “Trump 2020”.

Image 2: Female protestor holding sign, reading “Defy fascist lock down”, in the background a second woman with the sign, “There is nothing in the constitution that I have to forfeit my rights because you’re scared”.

Image 3: Female protestor holding sign, reading “Freedom is essential”, next to her a woman with the sign “Get us back to work”.

Image 4: Crowd of protestors, sign visible reading “Don’t use fear to steal our freedom”.

Image 5: Green truck parked in front of protestors, written on the side “Jesus is my vaccine”.

Image 6: Clipart image of a male and female profile, appearing in front of them a table. In front of the man a bottle of motor oil, hydrochloric acid, a lava lamp, a bottle of Windex, and a leaky battery appears. In front of the woman, a glass of water.

Image 7: Jesus on the cross.

Image 8: Protestor sign reading “Sacrifice the weak. Re-open. TN”.

Clip 1: From lockdown protests in April 2020, USA

Clip 2: Protestors. Sign reading, “End the Siege”.

Clip 3: Groups of protestors.

Clip 4: Black car, on the back window, written in white “That facemask you were duped into wearing symbolizes your losing your freedom of speech”.

Clip 5: Male protestor with two signs, reading “Give me liberty or give me COVID19” and “#Endlockdown”.

Clip 6: Three female protestors with signs reading, “Stop the killing of WA small businesses”, “End the shutdown”, “Data over dictators”, “Freedom”, and “Liberate Washington”.

Clip 7: Crowds of protestors, Trump flags visible.



## Appendix C: Excluded Materials

Material that was excluded due to space constraints, some entire themes were excluded, and some accounts were excluded as each theme was limited to one account per creator.

### **Excluded accounts from Theme 3:**

*Bishop Robert Barron - "On King, Aquinas, and our Nation's Future."* / 2020-07-16

*Breaking in the Habit - "Don't look away. Embrace the Pain and Discomfort."* / 2020-06-03

*Brian Holdsworth - "Harry Potter & Racism."* / 2020-06-12

### **Excluded accounts from Theme 4.2.:**

*Brian Holdsworth - "Why You Should Have Kids... and Lots of Them."* / 2017-11-11

### **Excluded account from Theme 4.3.:**

*Ascension Presents - "Can I attend a same-sex wedding?"* / 2020-09-15

### **Excluded accounts from Theme 5:**

*Bishop Robert Barron - "On The Coronavirus Quarantine."* / 2020-03-19

*Brian Holdsworth - "Coping with Anxiety During Coronavirus."* / 2020-03-21

*Breaking in the Habit - "Greed, Inequality, and a Pandemic."* / 2020-04-19

### **Excluded theme: Abortion**

*Ascension Presents - "Why Men are Also Responsible for Abortion."* / 2020-01-14

*Bishop Robert Barron - "On Planned Parenthood and the Loss of Human Dignity."* / 2015-07-29

*Breaking in the Habit - "The Flaw in the Abortion Argument."* / 2020-08-24

*Brian Holdsworth - "Defeating Pro-Life Arguments."* / 2019-05-18

### **Excluded theme: Intermarriage with non-Catholics**

*Ascension Presents - "Can a Catholic marry a non-Catholic?"* / 2018-05-23

*Breaking in the Habit - "Can a Catholic marry a non-Catholic?"* / 2020-05-04

*Brian Holdsworth - "Should You Marry a Non-Catholic?"* / 2018-10-13

**Excluded theme: Pornography**

*Ascension Presents* - “*Why You’re Watching Porn and How to Quit.*” / 2020-09-18

*Ascension Presents* - “*How to Quit Porn.*” / 2015-04-01

*Bishop Robert Barron* - “*On Porn and the Curse of Total Sexual Freedom.*” / 2016-06-09

*Breaking in the Habit* - “*The Horrifying Truth About the Porn Industry.*” / 2020-05-29

**Excluded theme: Progressive Culture**

*Ascension Presents* - “*That’s Offensive!*” / 2017-02-22

*Bishop Robert Barron* - “*The Limits of Tolerance.*” / 2013-06-06

*Breaking in the Habit* - “*What do we do with fallen heroes?*” / 2020-08-28

*Brian Holdsworth* - “*Progressives and Cancel culture.*” / 2020-07-10

**Excluded theme: Progressive Culture on Sex**

*Ascension Presents* - “*The Culture of Netflix & Chill.*” / 2018-04-11

*Bishop Robert Barron* - “*Bishop Barron on the Hook-Up Culture.*” / 2012-09-12

*Brian Holdsworth* - “*Liberal Hypocrisy on Sex.*” / 2019-03-30

**Excluded theme: Science**

*Ascension Presents* - “*We Are Not Cosmic Accidents.*” / 2018-10-03

*Bishop Robert Barron* - “*Is Religion Opposed to Science?*” / 2018-07-09

*Breaking in the Habit* - “*Can a Christian Believe in Evolution?*” / 2018-10-22

*Brian Holdsworth* - “*Darwin’s bald spot.*” / 2020-07-24

**Excluded theme: Secularized Morality**

*Ascension Presents* - “*Do all good people go to heaven?*” / 2020-12-19

*Bishop Robert Barron* - “*Why being good is not enough?*” / 2020-08-27

*Breaking in the Habit* - “*The Church’s Moral Standards Are Too High.*” / 2018-08-14

*Brian Holdsworth* - “*Can you be good without faith?*” / 2017-10-07