



## PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE YEAR OF FAITH

Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith



### INTRODUCTION

With the Apostolic Letter of 11 October 2011, *Porta fidei*, Pope Benedict XVI declared a *Year of Faith*. This year will begin on 11 October 2012, on the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, and will conclude on 24 November 2013, the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King.

This year will be a propitious occasion for the faithful to understand more profoundly that the foundation of Christian faith is “the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”[1] Founded on the encounter with the Risen Christ, faith can be rediscovered in its wholeness and all its splendor. “In our days too faith is a gift to rediscover, to cultivate and to bear witness to” because the Lord “grants each one of us to live the beauty and joy of being Christians.”[2]

The beginning of the *Year of Faith* coincides with the anniversaries of two great events which have marked the life of the Church in our days: the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, called by Blessed Pope John XXIII (11 October 1962), and the twentieth of the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, given to the Church by Blessed Pope John Paul II (11 October 1992).

The Council, according to Pope John XXIII, wanted “to transmit doctrine, pure and whole, without attenuations or misrepresentations,” in such a way that “this sure and immutable teaching, which must be respected faithfully, is elaborated and presented in a way which corresponds to the needs of our time.”[3] In this regard, the opening words of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* remain of primary importance: “Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires,

by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, (cfr. Mk 16:15) to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church.”[4] Beginning with the light of Christ, which purifies, illuminates and sanctifies in the celebration of the sacred liturgy (cfr. Constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and with His divine word (cfr. Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*), the Council wanted to elaborate on the intimate nature of the Church (cfr. Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen gentium*) and its relationship with the contemporary world (cfr. Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*). Around these four Constitutions, the true pillars of the Council, are arranged the Declarations and Decrees which address some of the major challenges of the day.

After the Council the Church – under the sure guidance of the Magisterium and in continuity with the whole Tradition – set about ensuring the reception and application of the teaching of the Council in all its richness. To assist in the correct reception of the Council, the Popes have frequently convoked the Synod of Bishops,[5] first instituted by the Servant of God, Paul VI, in 1965, providing the Church with clear guidance through the various post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations. The next General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to be held in October 2012, will have as its theme: *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI has worked decisively for a correct understanding of the Council, rejecting as erroneous the so-called “hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” and promoting what he himself has termed “the ‘hermeneutic of reform’, of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.”[6]

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in this same vein, is both an “authentic fruit of Vatican Council II”[7] and a tool for aiding in its reception. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1985, convoked on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council and to measure its reception, suggested the preparation of a Catechism in order to offer the People of God a compendium of all Catholic doctrine and a sure point of reference for local catechisms. Pope John Paul II accepted this proposal as a desire which “fully responds to a real need of the universal Church and of the particular Churches.”[8] Compiled in collaboration with the entire Episcopate of the Catholic Church, this Catechism “truly expresses what could be called the symphony of the faith.”[9]

The *Catechism* includes “the new and the old (cfr. Mt 13:52), because the faith is always the same yet the source of ever new light. To respond to this twofold demand, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the one hand repeats the old, traditional order already followed by the Catechism of St Pius V, arranging the material in four parts: the *Creed*, the *Sacred Liturgy*, with pride of place given to the sacraments, the *Christian way of life*, explained beginning with the Ten Commandments, and finally, *Christian prayer*. At the same time, however, the contents are often expressed in a new way in order to respond to the questions of our age.”[10] This *Catechism* is “a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.”[11] The content of faith finds “its systematic and organic synthesis in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded and proposed in her two thousand years of history. From Sacred Scripture to the Fathers of the Church, from theological masters to the saints across the centuries, the *Catechism* provides a permanent record of the many ways in which the Church has meditated on the faith and made progress in doctrine so as to offer certitude to believers in their lives of faith.”[12]

The *Year of Faith* is intended to contribute to a renewed conversion to the Lord Jesus and to the rediscovery of faith, so that the members of the Church will be credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in the world of today - capable of leading those many people who are seeking it to the “door of faith.” This “door” opens wide man’s gaze to Jesus Christ, present among us “always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). He shows us how “the art of living” is learned “in an intense relationship with him.”[13] “Through his love, Jesus Christ attracts to himself the people of every generation: in every age he convokes the Church,

entrusting her with the proclamation of the Gospel by a mandate that is ever new. Today too, there is a need for stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith.”[14]

At the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI,[15] the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in consultation with the competent Dicasteries of the Holy See and with the contribution of the *Committee for the Preparation of the Year of Faith*,[16] has drawn up this *Note*, with some recommendations for living this time of grace, without precluding other initiatives which the Holy Spirit will inspire among Pastors and faithful in various parts of the world.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

“I know him in whom I have believed” (2 Tm 1:12). These words of St Paul help us to understand that faith is “first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed.”[17] Faith which is a personal trust in the Lord and the faith which we profess in the Creed are inseparable; they focus on each other and they require each other. There exists a profound bond between the lived faith and its contents. The faith of the Witnesses and Confessors is also the faith of the Apostles and Doctors of the Church.

Thus, the following recommendations for the *Year of Faith* desire to aid both the encounter with Christ through authentic witnesses to faith, and the ever-greater understanding of its contents. These proposals are intended as examples to encourage a ready response to the invitation of the Holy Father to live fully this *Year* as a special “time of grace.”[18] The joyous rediscovery of faith can also contribute to consolidate the unity and communion among the different bodies that make up the wider family of the Church.

### I. ON THE LEVEL OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

1. The main ecclesial event at the beginning of the *Year of Faith* will be the XIII General Assembly of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops, convoked by Pope Benedict XVI in October 2012, dedicated to *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. During this Synod, on 11 October 2012, there will be a solemn celebration of the beginning of the *Year of Faith*, in remembrance of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

2. In the *Year of Faith* pilgrimages of the faithful to the See of Peter are to be encouraged, to profess faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in unity with him who today is called to confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith (cfr. Lk 22:32). It is also important to promote pilgrimages to the Holy Land, the place which first saw the presence of Jesus, the Savior, and Mary, his Mother.

3. During this *Year*, it will be helpful to invite the faithful to turn with particular devotion to Mary, model of the Church, who “shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues.”[19] Therefore, every initiative that helps the faithful to recognize the special role of Mary in the mystery of salvation, love her and follow her as a model of faith and virtue is to be encouraged. To this end it would be proper to organize pilgrimages, celebrations and gatherings at the major Marian shrines.

4. The next World Youth Day, in Rio de Janeiro in July 2013, will offer a special occasion for the young to experience the joy which comes from faith in the Lord Jesus and communion with the Holy Father, in the greater family of the Church.

5. It is hoped that many symposia, conferences and large gatherings will be held, even at the international level, to encourage encounters with authentic witness to the faith and to promote understanding of the contents of Catholic doctrine. Noting how, still today, the Word of God continues to grow and spread, it will be important to give witness that “all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfilment”[20] in Christ Jesus and that faith “becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life.”[21] Some conferences should be particularly dedicated to the rediscovery of the teachings of Vatican Council II.

6. The *Year of Faith* will offer a special opportunity for all believers to deepen their knowledge of the primary documents of the Second Vatican Council and their study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This is especially true for candidates for priesthood, particularly during the propedeutic year or in their first years of theological studies, for novices in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, as well as for those in a period of discernment for joining an Ecclesial Association or Movement.

7. This *Year* will provide an auspicious time for a more attentive reception of the homilies, catechesis, addresses and other speeches and documents of the Holy Father. Pastors, consecrated persons and the lay faithful are invited to renew their efforts in effective and heart-felt adherence to the teaching of the Successor of Peter.

8. During the *Year of Faith*, in cooperation with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, various ecumenical initiatives are to be planned, aimed at “the restoration of unity among all Christians” which “is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council.”[22] In particular, there will be a solemn ecumenical celebration in which all of the baptized will reaffirm their faith in Christ.

9. A *Secretariat* to coordinate all of the different initiatives promoted by various Dicasteries of the Holy See, or other events relevant to the Universal Church, will be established within the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. This *Secretariat* should be informed timely of the main events and can also suggest appropriate initiatives. The *Secretariat* will open a dedicated website with the goal of making available useful information regarding living out the *Year of Faith* more effectively.

10. At the conclusion of this *Year*, on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, there will be a Eucharist celebrated by the Holy Father, in which a solemn renewal of the profession of faith will take place.

## II. ON THE LEVEL OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES[23]

1. Episcopal Conferences, in light of the specific mission of the Bishops as teachers and “heralds of the faith,”[24] can dedicate a day of study to the topic of faith, its personal witness and its transmission to new generations.

2. The republication in paperback and economical editions of the Documents of Vatican Council II, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its *Compendium* is to be promoted, as is the wider distribution of these texts through electronic means and modern technologies.

3. A renewed effort to translate the documents of Vatican Council II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* into languages which lack a translation is desirable. Initiatives of charitable support to enable translations into the local languages of mission countries, where the local Churches cannot afford the expense, are to be encouraged. This should be done under the guidance of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

4. Pastors should work to promote television and radio transmissions, films and publications focusing on the faith, its principles and content, as well as on the ecclesial significance of the Second Vatican Council. This should be done using the new styles of communication, especially on the popular level, making these things available to a wider public.

5. The Saints and the Blessed are the authentic witnesses of the faith.[25] It is, therefore, opportune that Episcopal Conferences work toward the dissemination of a knowledge of the local Saints of their territory, also by modern means of social communication.

6. The contemporary world is sensitive to the relationship between faith and art. It is, therefore, recommended that Episcopal Conferences maximize the catechetical potential – possibly with ecumenical cooperation – of the artistic patrimony of the region entrusted to their pastoral care.

7. Educators in centers of theological studies, seminaries and Catholic universities should be encouraged in their teaching to demonstrate the relevance within their various disciplines of the contents of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and of the implications derived from them.

8. It would be useful to arrange for the preparation of pamphlets and leaflets of an apologetic nature (cfr. 1 Pt 3:15), which should be done with the help of theologians and authors. Every member of the faithful would then be enabled to respond better to the questions which arise in difficult contexts – whether to do with sects, or the problems related to secularism and relativism, or to questions “arising from a changed mentality which, especially today, limits the field of rational certainties to that of scientific and technological discoveries,”[26] or to other specific issues.

9. It is hoped that local catechisms and various catechetical supplements in use in the particular Churches would be examined to ensure their complete conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. [27] Should a catechism or supplement be found to be not totally in accord with the *Catechism*, or should some lacunae be discovered, new ones should be developed, following the example of those Conferences which have already done so.

10. The *Year of Faith* will also be an appropriate time to examine, in collaboration with the Congregation for Catholic Education, the *Ratio* of formation for future priests, ensuring that the contents of the *Catechism for the Catholic Church* are present in their theological studies.

### III. AT THE DIOCESAN LEVEL

1. It is hoped that each particular Church would have a celebration of the opening of the *Year of Faith* and a solemn conclusion to it, in which to “profess our faith in the Risen Lord in our cathedrals and in the churches of the whole world.”[28]

2. It would be desirable that each Diocese in the world organize a study day on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, particularly for its priests, consecrated persons and catechists. On this occasion, for example, the Eastern Catholic Eparchies could hold a meeting with their priests to give witness to their specific experience and liturgical tradition in the one faith in Christ. Also, in this way, young particular Churches in mission territories would be able to give renewed witness to that joy of faith which is so often particular to them.

3. Each Bishop could devote a pastoral letter of his own to the topic of faith, keeping in mind the specific pastoral circumstances of the portion of the faithful entrusted to him, reminding them of the importance of the Second Vatican Council and of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

4. It is hoped that in each Diocese, under the leadership of the Bishop, catechetical events will be organized, especially for the youth and those searching for a sense of life, helping them to discover the beauty of ecclesial faith, promoting encounters with meaningful witnesses to the faith.

5. It would be appropriate for each particular Church to review the reception of Vatican Council II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in its own life and mission, particularly in the realm of catechesis. This would provide the opportunity for a renewal of commitment on the part of the catechetical offices of the Dioceses which - supported by the Commissions for Catechesis of the Episcopal Conferences - have the duty to care for the theological formation of catechists.

6. The continuing education of the clergy can be focused during this *Year of Faith* on the documents of Vatican Council II and on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, treating such themes as "the proclamation of the Risen Christ", "the Church - sacrament of salvation", "the mission of evangelization in the world today", "faith and disbelief", "faith, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue", "faith and eternal life", "the hermeneutic of reform in continuity" and "the *Catechism* in ordinary pastoral care."

7. Bishops are invited to organize penitential celebrations, particularly during Lent, in which all can ask for God's forgiveness, especially for sins against faith. This *Year* also provides an appropriate occasion in which all can approach the Sacrament of Penance with greater faith and more frequently.

8. It is hoped that there will be a renewed creative dialogue between faith and reason in the academic and artistic communities, through symposia, meetings and days of study, especially at Catholic universities, in order to demonstrate that "there cannot be any conflict between faith and genuine science, because both, albeit via different routes, tend towards the truth." [29]

9. It is also important to promote encounters with those persons who, "while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are nevertheless sincerely searching for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of their lives and of the world," [30] taking as an example the dialogues of the *Courtyard of the Gentiles*, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Culture.

10. The *Year of Faith* can be an opportunity to pay greater attention to Catholic schools, which are a perfect place to offer to students a living witness to the Lord and to nurture their faith. This can be done by making use of good catechetical tools, like the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *Youcat*.

#### IV. AT THE LEVEL OF THE PARISH/COMMUNITY/ASSOCIATION/MOVEMENT

1. In preparation for the *Year of Faith*, all of the faithful are invited to read closely and meditate upon Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*.
2. The *Year of Faith* "will also be a good opportunity to intensify the *celebration* of the faith in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist." [31] In the Eucharist, mystery of faith and source of the new evangelization, the faith of the Church is proclaimed, celebrated and strengthened. All of the faithful are invited to participate in the Eucharist actively, fruitfully and with awareness, in order to be authentic witnesses of the Lord.
3. Priests should devote greater attention to the study of the documents of Vatican Council II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, drawing from them resources for the pastoral care of their parishes – catechesis, preaching, Sacramental preparation. They should also offer cycles of homilies on the faith or on certain specific aspects such as, for example, "the encounter with Christ", "the fundamental contents of the Creed", and "faith and the Church." [32]
4. Catechists should hold more firmly to the doctrinal richness of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and, under the direction of their pastors, offer guidance in reading this precious document to groups of faithful, working toward a deeper common understanding thereof, with the goal of creating small communities of faith, and of giving witness to the Lord Jesus.
5. It is hoped that there will be a renewed commitment in parishes to the distribution of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and of other resources appropriate for families, which are true domestic churches and the primary setting for the transmission of the faith. This might be done, for example, during the blessing of homes, the Baptism of adults, Confirmations and Marriages. This can contribute to the deepening of Catholic teaching "in our homes and among our families, so that everyone may feel a strong need to know better and to transmit to future generations the faith of all times." [33]
6. The promotion of *missions* and other popular programs in parishes and in the workplace can help the faithful to rediscover the gift of Baptismal faith and the task of giving witness, knowing that the Christian vocation "by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate." [34]
7. During this time, members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and of Societies of Apostolic Life are asked to work towards the new evangelization with a renewed union to the Lord Jesus, each according to their proper charism, in fidelity to the Holy Father and to sound doctrine.
8. Contemplative communities, during the *Year of Faith*, should pray specifically for the renewal of the faith among the People of God and for a new impulse for its transmission to the young.
9. Associations and Ecclesial Movements are invited to promote specific initiatives which, through the contribution of their proper charism and in collaboration with their local Pastors, will contribute to the wider experience of the *Year of Faith*. The new Communities and Ecclesial Movements, in a creative and generous way, will be able to find the most appropriate ways in which to offer their witness to the faith in service to the Church.
10. All of the faithful, called to renew the gift of faith, should try to communicate their own experience of faith and charity [35] to their brothers and sisters of other religions, with

those who do not believe, and with those who are just indifferent. In this way, it is hoped that the entire Christian people will begin a kind of mission toward those with whom they live and work, knowing that they “have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man.”[36]

## CONCLUSION

Faith “is the lifelong companion that makes it possible to perceive, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us. Intent on gathering the signs of the times in the present of history, faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world.”[37] Faith is both a personal and a communal act: it is a gift from God that is lived in the communion of the Church and must be communicated to the world. Every initiative for the *Year of Faith* should be designed to aid in the joyous rediscovery of the faith and its renewed transmission. The recommendations provided here have the goal of inviting all of the members of the Church to work so that this *Year* may be a special time in which we, as Christians, may share that which is most dear to us: Christ Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind, Universal King, “leader and perfecter of faith” (Hb 12: 2).

*Given in Rome, at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 6 January 2012, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.*

**William Cardinal Levada**

*Prefect*

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*Secretary*

[1] Benedict XVI, Enc. Letter, *Deus caritas est*, 25 December 2005, n. 1.

[2] Id., *Homily on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord*, 10 January 2010.

[3] John XXIII, *Address of the solemn opening of the Ecumenical Vatican Council II*, 11 October 1962.



[4] Conc. Ecum. Vat. II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen gentium*, n. 1.

[5] The Ordinary Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops have treated the following topics: *The preservation and strengthening of the Catholic Faith, its integrity, vigor, development, historical and doctrinal coherence* (1967), *The ministerial priesthood and justice in the world* (1971), *Evangelization in the modern world* (1974), *Catechesis in our time* (1977), *The Christian Family* (1980), *Penance and reconciliation in the mission of the Church* (1983), *The vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world* (1987), *The formation of priests in actual circumstances* (1991), *Consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world* (1994), *The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the hope of the world* (2001), *The Eucharist: source and summit of the life and mission of the Church* (2005), *The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church* (2008).

[6] Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia*, 22 December 2005.

[7] Id., *Porta fidei*, n. 4.

[8] John Paul II, *Address on the closing of the Second Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 7 December 1985, n. 6. The same Pope, in the initial phase of this Synod, during the *Angelus* of 24 November 1985, said: "Faith is the principal foundation, it is the cornerstone, the essential criterion of the renewal willed by the Council. From faith come custom, the style of life and practical direction in every circumstance."

[9] Id., Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei depositum*, 11 October 1992, n. 2.

[10] *Ibid.*, n. 3.

[11] *Ibid.*, n. 4.

[12] Benedict XVI, *Porta fidei*, n. 11.

[13] Id., *Address to the participants in the meeting organized by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization*, 15 October 2011.

[14] Id., Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*, n. 7.

[15] Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 12.

[16] This *Committee*, formed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, according to the mandate of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, includes among its members: Cardinals William Levada, Francis Arinze, Angelo Bagnasco, Ivan Dias, Francis E. George, Zenon Grocholewski, Marc Ouellet, Mauro Piacenza, Jean-Pierre Ricard, Stanisław Ryko and Christoph Schönborn; Archbishops Luis F. Ladaria, and Salvatore Fisichella; Bishops Mario del Valle Moronta Rodríguez, Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Raffaello Martinelli.

[17] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 150.

[18] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*, n. 15.

[19] Conc. Ecum. Vat. II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen gentium*, n. 65.

[20] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*, n. 13.

[21] *Ibid.*, n. 6.

[22] Conc. Ecum. Vat. II, Decree, *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 1.

[23] The following recommendations made for Episcopal Conferences are also offered, in an analogous way, to the Synods of Bishops of Patriarchal and Major Archepiscopal Churches, as well as to the Assemblies of Hierarchs of the other Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*.

[24] Conc. Ecum. Vat. II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen gentium*, n. 25.

[25] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*, n. 13.

[26] *Ibid.*, n. 12.

[27] John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei depositum*, n. 4.

[28] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*, n. 8.

[29] *Ibid.*, n. 12.

[30] *Ibid.*, n. 10.

[31] *Ibid.*, n. 9.

[32] Cfr., Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010, nn. 59-60, and 74.

[33] *Id.*, Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*, n. 8.

[34] Conc. Ecum. Vat. II, Decree, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2.

[35] Cfr. Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*, n. 14.

[36] Conc. Ecum. Vat. II, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 1.

[37] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Porta fidei*, n. 15.