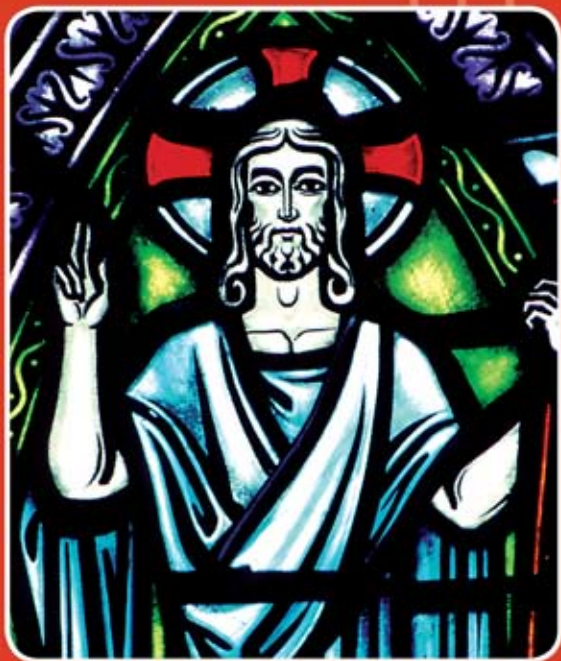


saint mary's press

# The Paschal Mystery

*A Primary Source Reader*



Lorraine L. Kilmartin

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The publishing team included Gloria Shahin, editorial director; Jeanette Fast Redmond, development editor. Prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary's Press.

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# Contents

**Introduction . . . . . 7**

**Part 1: Our Need for Salvation . . . . . 9**

**1 The Bible: Inspired Text . . . . . 10**

Excerpt from “Introduction to the Bible,” in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, by Dianne Bergant, CSA

**2 God’s Continuous Creation . . . . . 17**

Excerpt from “Can God and Evolution Co-exist?”  
by George Coyne, SJ

**3 Created in the Image of God . . . . . 23**

Excerpt from the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Excerpt from “Image and Likeness,” by Barbara A. Kathe, PhD

**4 Original Sin: The Human Condition . . . . . 30**

Romans 7:15–24

Excerpt from *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, by the Second Vatican Council

Excerpt from Devotion I, “*Insultus morbi primus*,” by John Donne

**Part 2: Christ: A Promise Fulfilled . . . . . 37**

**5 God’s Unbroken Promises . . . . . 38**

Sirach 44:17—45:3

Psalms 89:19–38

Isaiah 55:1–11

Ezekiel 36:16–17,18–28

**6 The Ancient Prophecies Fulfilled . . . . . 46**

The *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55)

The O Antiphons from the *Lectionary for Mass*

Excerpt from *Seven Bells to Bethlehem: The O Antiphons*,  
by Oliver Treanor

**7 The Eternal Word Becomes Flesh . . . . . 55**

Excerpts from *Against Heresies*, by Saint Irenaeus

Excerpt from a Sermon, “In the Fullness of Time the Fullness  
of Divinity Appeared,” by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

**8 The Son Reveals the Father . . . . . 62**

Excerpt from an Interview, by Fr. Marie-Dominique  
Philippe, OP

**Part 3: Christ, the Light of the World . . . . . 69**

**9 Jesus Resists Temptation . . . . . 70**

Matthew 4:1–11

Excerpt from *The Gospel of Matthew*, by Daniel J.  
Harrington, SJ

**10 Parables of the Kingdom . . . . . 77**

Excerpt from *Parables: The Arrows of God*, by Megan  
McKenna

**11 The Miracles as Signs . . . . . 84**

Excerpt from *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology  
of Miracles*, by René Latourelle

<b>12</b>	<b>The Eucharist: Blessed Sacrament.</b> . . . . .	<b>91</b>
	Excerpts from <i>Meditations</i> , by Saint John Baptist de La Salle	
<b>Part 4: Christ, the Redeemer</b> . . . . .		<b>97</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>The Jews and the Death of Jesus</b> . . . . .	<b>98</b>
	Excerpt from <i>Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)</i> , by the Second Vatican Council	
	Excerpt from <i>God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching</i> , by the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops	
<b>14</b>	<b>Grounds for Belief in the Resurrection</b> . . . . .	<b>105</b>
	Excerpt from <i>The Eternal Galilean</i> , by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen	
<b>15</b>	<b>Why Christ Was Raised</b> . . . . .	<b>110</b>
	Excerpt from a Sermon, "Christ Is the Day," by Saint Maximus of Turin	
	Excerpt from a Sermon, "The Days Between the Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord," by Saint Leo the Great	
<b>16</b>	<b>Pentecost: Outpouring of the Holy Spirit.</b> . . . . .	<b>116</b>
	Acts of the Apostles 2:1–11	
	Excerpt from <i>May I Have This Dance?</i> by Joyce Rupp, OSM	
<b>Part 5: Our New Life in Christ</b> . . . . .		<b>123</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Life in Heaven</b> . . . . .	<b>124</b>
	"When Death Will Not Leave: A Husband's Journey Through Grief," by James R. Kelly	

<b>18</b>	<b>The Grace to Be Holy.</b> . . . . .	<b>130</b>
	Excerpt from <i>Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)</i> , by the Second Vatican Council	
	Excerpt from <i>Crossing the Threshold of Hope</i> , by Blessed John Paul II	
<b>19</b>	<b>Accepting Jesus' Teaching.</b> . . . . .	<b>137</b>
	Excerpt from <i>Christian Behaviour</i> , by C. S. Lewis	
<b>20</b>	<b>A Sacramental Life</b> . . . . .	<b>142</b>
	Excerpt from <i>Teens and Spirituality</i> , by Jerry Shepherd	
	Excerpt from "Living the Sacramental Life," by Anna Nicole Kyritsis	
<b>Part 6: Prayer and Our Life in Christ</b> . . . . .		<b>149</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Why We Pray</b> . . . . .	<b>150</b>
	Excerpt from <i>Challenges in Prayer</i> , by M. Basil Pennington	
<b>22</b>	<b>Learning to Pray</b> . . . . .	<b>156</b>
	Excerpt from <i>The Gift of Peace</i> , by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin	
<b>23</b>	<b>Praying the Psalms</b> . . . . .	<b>163</b>
	Excerpt from <i>The Cloister Walk</i> , by Kathleen Norris	
	Psalms 35:17–28	
<b>24</b>	<b>The Prayer Jesus Taught Us</b> . . . . .	<b>170</b>
	Excerpt from the <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	
	Excerpt from <i>Our Father</i> , by Bernard Häring	
<b>For Further Reading</b> . . . . .		<b>176</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> . . . . .		<b>177</b>

# Introduction

The history of salvation stretches all the way back to the beginning of time, and it extends into our lives today and on into the distant future. As that history has unfolded, it has revealed God's eternal Son, Jesus Christ, and the redemption he won for us through his life, Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

God first created a good world filled with people made in his own divine image. Then sin entered the world, and his plan seemed to be spoiled. But God did not give up so easily. That earth-shaking change in the world and in all of our relationships was followed not by darkness, but by hope. Despite humanity's disobedience, God made many overtures to his beloved people, reaching out again and again through the prophets, offering promises of salvation. Clearly we have a special place in his heart.

The most important figure in salvation history is Jesus, the eternal Son of God, born into human history when the time was right. Jesus came to reveal the living God to humanity. He lived among us and taught us. He suffered and died for our sins. And then he was raised from the dead and ascended into Heaven.

But salvation history does not end there. We take part in it too. God invites us to hope for Heaven and for a better world here on earth because Jesus' saving death has transformed a promise into reality. The Holy Spirit, promised by the Son and sent by his Father, encourages us, strengthens us, and empowers us. The Church continues to teach us what it means to be a follower of Jesus and shows us how God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—makes it possible for us to enter into the life of the Holy Trinity through faithful discipleship, Sacraments, and prayer.

The work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ—particularly through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension—is called the Paschal Mystery. This primary source reader explores the Paschal Mystery and all that God has done for us through his Son, Jesus Christ. But the readings here are not like the summaries and



explanations of others' ideas you would find in a textbook. Instead each selection expresses its author's own insights. You will read for yourself the words of theologians, poets, Church leaders, and saints. The readings include Bible passages, Church documents, sermons, excerpts from books, essays, even a radio address. Old Testament readings are the oldest selections here, with other selections reflecting our thinking about the Paschal Mystery through the centuries, right up to the twenty-first century.

Some of the selections in this book are easy to follow, telling a story or arguing a viewpoint. Others are more challenging, demanding careful reading—maybe even some rereading. At the end of each chapter, you will find reflection questions to help you think more deeply. Sidebars give more background about related topics and define difficult words too.

Of course, the readings in this book do not form a comprehensive discussion of salvation history. The other materials you use in your course will provide that. Instead this collection of primary sources is intended to provide background about some of the teachings you will study and to answer questions that may come up.

If you read the titles of all six parts in this book, you will find a brief overview of salvation history. Keep that big picture in mind as you read the individual selections. Answers to many questions we have about our faith become clear when we fit them into the context of God's ongoing plan for his beloved people: a plan that ultimately leads to our redemption through our participation in Christ's Paschal Mystery and the life of the Holy Trinity.

# **Part 1**

## **Our Need for Salvation**

# 1 The Bible: Inspired Text

## Introduction

When we want to learn about Jesus and about God's saving work, we turn to the Bible. But how do we know that the Bible is reliable? And how can we be sure that our understanding of its message is correct?

Biblical scholars can help us answer these questions. These men and women have spent a lifetime studying the Bible, most often in the languages in which the texts were first written: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Although much of their work may be too technical for the ordinary reader, we can gain access to their expertise by consulting a Bible commentary, a book that gathers the writings of respected experts in biblical scholarship. A Bible commentary, as the name implies, provides notes on each passage of the Bible. The observations vary widely, depending on the type of passage being considered. In a Bible commentary, you may read an explanation of some aspect of Hebrew culture, find the history of a biblical idea, or learn that scholars are arguing over how to translate a certain word.

You can also use a Bible commentary to learn more about broader issues in biblical study. Like a theological or biblical dictionary, a commentary may provide background articles on biblical history, literary genres (or types of writing), or important biblical concepts. You will also find an introduction to each book of the Bible, outlining current thinking on the book's specific history, genre, and overall message.

Many Bible commentaries exist, but one of the best known is the *Collegeville Bible Commentary*. It begins with an essay introduc-

ing the Bible, written by Dianne Bergant, CSA, a professor of biblical studies at Catholic Theological Union and one of the general editors of the commentary. The introduction discusses big-picture questions that readers may have, such as, How did the Bible develop? What does it mean to say the Scriptures are **inspired**? Why are there so many versions of the Bible? What tools can help us interpret the Bible's teachings?

In the following excerpt, Bergant examines biblical inspiration to address perhaps the most important question: How do we know that the Bible is trustworthy? Bergant explores the mechanism of inspiration—that is, how divine inspiration happens. She then turns her attention to how we can reconcile our belief that the Bible is divinely inspired with the fact that the Bible contains contradictions and scientific errors. Bergant also explains how modern biblical scholars think about this issue.

Second Timothy 3:16 proclaims, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” At the beginning of the excerpt, Bergant affirms Timothy’s proclamation, stating that the Bible was and *is* inspired.

We can use the approach described in this excerpt to recognize the trustworthiness of the Bible, especially when we encounter narratives that sound like fairy tales to our modern ears. If you keep in mind the distinction between religious truth and scientific or historical truth, as Bergant explains for us here, you will be astounded by the insights you discover when you read the Bible.

**inspired** Written by human beings with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to teach without error those truths necessary for our salvation.

# Excerpt from “Introduction to the Bible,” in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*

By Dianne Bergant, CSA

The Bible *was* inspired, for during its growth and development it continually formed a believing community. The Bible *is* inspired, for it has not ceased to perform this same wonder, giving witness even to this day to the community’s origin and continually awakening it to its purpose.

## Inspiration and Truth

When one claims that God is the author of the Bible, one is thereby making a statement about its truthfulness. Surely the word of God is trustworthy. God would not deceive the community, nor would God allow the community to be led astray by either the ignorance or the limited perspectives of the human authors. In following this train of thought, many people have insisted that the Bible is inerrant, or free from all error.

Such a claim raises several difficult questions.

### Who Wrote the Bible?

Many people ask who wrote the Bible. A better way to phrase the question might be, How did the Bible develop? You may already know that the Bible is actually a collection of texts that many different individuals wrote down over a period of some fifteen hundred years. Much of that content circulated for generations through oral tradition—that is, through storytelling—and those who wrote down the stories sometimes combined different versions of the material to make a unified whole.

How does one explain differing and even contradictory traditions? (Human beings were created after the plants and animals appeared—Gen 1:12, 21, 25, 27. Human beings were created while the earth was still uninhabited—Gen 2:5, 9.) Must one adhere to a perception of the universe that is contrary to scientific findings? (Light itself was created before the heavenly bodies that give off light—Gen 1:3, 16.) Can one reconcile conflicting chronology in the Gospel story? (Jesus cleansed the temple at the beginning of his ministry during one of his

several visits to Jerusalem—John 2:13–17. The cleansing occurred during his only visit, which took place just before his death—Matt 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48.)

Efforts to explain the inconsistencies found within the Bible have resulted in various methods of interpretation. Those who have opted for **fundamentalist** interpretations have frequently spurned historical and scientific evidence and have adopted the literal sense of the text, claiming that there are no real inconsistencies, for God can do even the impossible if need be.

Another approach attempts to reconcile the theory of inerrancy with the discrepancies present within the text. The Scriptures are taken quite literally until one comes upon a difficult passage. Then, believing that God's **Revelation** can be neither illogical nor inaccurate, the interpreter concludes that what appears to be an inconsistency is really meant to be interpreted allegorically. Thus, what could otherwise be seen as discordant is harmonized.

A third way of resolving the dilemma is to make a decision about the kind of truth the Bible is intended to reveal. Biblical scholars have done just that, distinguishing between historical and/or scientific truth and religious truth—not an easy decision to make. Historical, scientific, and religious references are found to be intertwined. It is not always clear why the authors expressed ideas as they did. If their historical and scientific references are not to be understood as accurate expressions of theological truth, were they merely the best literary and figurative constructions available? Or is the very human, very limited understanding of reality simply the platform from which they launched their profound theological search for God and upon which the drama of God's loving involvement unfolded? However these questions are answered, one must decide which

**fundamentalist** Based on the literalist meaning of the Bible's words. The interpretation is made without regard to the historical setting in which the writings or teachings were first developed.

**Revelation** God's self-communication through which he makes known the mystery of his divine plan. Divine Revelation is a gift accomplished by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the words and deeds of salvation history.

guidelines are to be followed when making the distinctions mentioned. Attempting to focus on what in the text is truly theological, critical biblical scholarship has taken great pains to be as honest as possible in applying literary and historical methods of research. In this way it has thrown new light on the question of the truthfulness of the Bible.

At this juncture something should be said about what is meant by “truth.” Is it to be understood as something akin to honesty, integrity, the antithesis of deception? Or does it also imply precision, accuracy of fact, freedom from mistake?

Contemporary scholarship insists that the Bible is indeed inspired by God, but inspired through the natural process of the growth and development of tradition. Since the Bible is not merely the record of God’s word but also of the human response to that word, the character of human authorship cannot be disregarded. Obvious discrepancies and apparent contradictions may be attributed to human error, but they may also result from those interpretations and reinterpretations produced by the living community over generations of tradition development. Both the needs of a specific community of faith and the particular insights it had into its religious tradition may also have influenced the quality or limitation of theological expression that emerged from the transmission of tradition. One would certainly not reject as either inadequate or in error the theology of Isaiah or Jeremiah simply because the prophets did not refer to or believe in the Trinity or in life after death.

The biblical traditions have been described as testimonies. . . . Those who hold that the words are inspired are more likely to revere the Bible itself as revelation. Others who believe that God is revealed primarily in the events of history are more inclined to regard the Bible as the interpreted testimony to those events. According to this latter view, the Bible is a witness to revelation: the basic difference between these two views, in essence, is the difference between what is said and what is meant. While both perspectives are indeed aspects of the same reality, they most certainly are not identical. Knowing what the Bible says is not the same as knowing what the Bible means.

A study of tradition development indicates that what the community cher-

**dynamic** Marked by continuous change.

ished was not primarily some specific expression of the tradition but rather the fundamental meaning of it. Were this not the case, the community consistently would have resisted any attempt at reformulation.

As stated earlier, the **dynamic** force operative in the development of the people was God's self-disclosure. The dynamic force operative in the development of the tradition was God's inspiration. The Bible claims to be not only a testimony to God's self-disclosure and to the community's transformation in the past, but also a unique occasion for a comparable disclosure and transformation in the present. To the extent that this claim is verified again and again,

the truthfulness of the Bible can be affirmed. It is not so much the accuracy of the words but rather the power of the message that bears witness

*“It is not so much the accuracy of the words but rather the power of the message that bears witness to its truthfulness.”*

to its truthfulness. The same Spirit that was operative in the formation of the Scriptures continues to bear witness to its truthfulness and to convince us of its inspired nature. Therein lies the authority of the Bible.



## For Reflection

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1. Bergant says that “God is the author of the Bible.” After reading this chapter, how do you understand this statement?
2. The author mentions three ways of responding to contradictions or inaccuracies in the Bible. Summarize these responses in your own words. In your opinion, which approach seems to have the most benefits or the fewest drawbacks?
3. Bergant asks if truth is parallel to honesty and integrity or if it also implies accuracy of fact. Give an example of a statement that is not factually accurate but still expresses a truth—such as a metaphor or slang expression. What does this exercise help you understand about truth in the Bible?
4. According to Bergant, “It is not so much the accuracy of the words but rather the power of the message that bears witness to its truthfulness.” In what ways does the power of the Bible’s message make itself known? How does that power demonstrate the Bible’s truthfulness?

## 2 God's Continuous Creation

### Introduction

Fr. George Coyne, a Jesuit priest, is the president of the Vatican Observatory Foundation and until 1978 was its director. Coyne has spent his life studying the material that clusters around young stars. In an interview on the PBS documentary *Faith and Reason*, he said that the distribution of this matter “resembles precisely the kind of process that we think took place with the birth of the planets around the sun.”

How is it possible for a Jesuit priest and an official of the Vatican to speak so matter-of-factly about the birth of planets? Should he not be telling us that God created the earth in seven days, as Genesis reports? We have all heard about clashes over textbook selection for the science classroom: on one side are Christians who reject evolution in favor of creationism, and on the other side are those who insist that evolution is a scientific fact.

In the article excerpted here, Coyne explains that all areas of human study can contribute to a larger body of knowledge, with different disciplines accepting and substantiating one another's findings. As a Catholic priest and a scientist, he believes it is important to reconcile two realities: theology's teachings about God's role in the universe,

#### **The Pope's Astronomer**

Did you know that the Vatican has its own astronomical observatory? It is the oldest astronomical institute in the world, dating back to 1582, when the Vatican assigned scientists and mathematicians to study the consequences of revising the calendar. Today the Vatican Observatory is located not far from Rome at Castel Gandolfo, the papal summer residence, with a second research center in Tucson, Arizona.

and science's teachings about evolution. Coyne has resolved what some see as a contradiction between the Genesis Creation accounts and science by painting a picture of a God who continually creates and nurtures the universe, rather than a God who, at a single fixed moment in time, created the universe as we know it today.

The Catholic Church has always had a high regard for science, while at the same time challenging scientific findings that contradict the revealed truth found in Scripture. As Blessed John Paul II said in a 1996 message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, apparent contradictions between science and Scripture must be resolved because "truth cannot contradict the truth" (2). But notice that the Pope did not say that we must reject scientific findings that contradict Divine Revelation. In fact, he explained that a rigorous approach to biblical interpretation is necessary to avoid making it "mean something which it is not intended to mean" (3).

In its efforts to understand the origins of humankind, the Church's teaching on evolution has itself evolved over the years. In his 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII wrote that nothing in Church teaching stood in the way of research into the question of the origins of the human body. He did, however, maintain that human souls "are immediately created by God" (36). Much later, in a 2005 audience, Pope Benedict XVI endorsed the theory of intelligent design, a model that allows for the evolution of species but theorizes that the process itself is directed by God.

Most recently, before a 2009 conference sponsored by the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*, Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, a Vatican official, clarified in an interview that although the Church had been hostile to the theory of evolution in the past, it had never officially condemned the theory. As for intelligent design, news releases about the conference indicated that the topic would be discussed, but only as a "cultural phenomenon," not as a scientific theory (*The Telegraph*, Feb. 11, 2009).

Do these attempts to respond to scientific findings about evolution mean that the Church is confused about its own teaching? Coyne would likely not think so. Instead, he may see in them a sign that the teaching office of the Church is open to integrating findings from other disciplines into her own understanding of the revealed truth of Scripture.

## Excerpt from “Can God and Evolution Co-exist? Reflections of a Jesuit Scientist”

By George Coyne, SJ

Evolution as a scientific explanation of origins is often viewed as **atheistic**.

It is not.

Science, by its very methodology, is completely neutral with respect to religious considerations. But if one does believe in God, creator of the universe, can scientific knowledge be helpful in supporting and nurturing that belief?

I would like to discuss how a believing scientist like myself views, based on scientific knowledge, the nature of God and the nature of the human being. Such knowledge is basic to any discussion of faith, and I hope such knowledge complements that derived from philosophy and theology. Several criteria exist to determine the **veracity** of scientific theories, such as predictability, repeatability of experiments, simplicity or economy of explanation. There is, however, a growing awareness among scientists of another criterion: “unifying explanatory power”—not only are the observations at hand explained, but the attempt to understand is also in harmony with all else that we know, even with that which we know outside of the natural sciences. . . .

The **supposition** is that there is a universal basis for our understanding and, since that basis cannot be self-contradictory, the understanding we have from

**atheistic** Denying the existence of God.

**veracity** Truthfulness.

**supposition** An assumption that is taken for granted.

one discipline should complement that which we have from all other disciplines. One is most faithful to one's own discipline, be it the natural sciences, the social sciences, philosophy, literature, religious thought etc., if one accepts this universal basis. This means in practice that, while remaining faithful to the strict truth criteria of one's own discipline, we are open to accept the truth value of the conclusions of other disciplines. And this acceptance must not only be passive, in the sense that we do not deny those conclusions, but also active, in the sense that we integrate those conclusions into the conclusions derived from our own proper discipline.

So, what do we know in this regard from the sciences? It is clear from all of the sciences, including geology, molecular biology, paleontology, comparative anatomy, cosmology and others, that evolution is an intrinsic and proper characteristic of the universe. Neither the universe as a whole nor any of its ingredients can be understood except in terms of evolution. We human beings came to be through evolution, and evolution is a daily happening. As the universe expanded from the Big Bang and evolved, stars were born and stars died. Since stars are born and sustain themselves by creating a thermonuclear furnace whereby light elements are continuously converted into heavier elements, when they die the stars pour out to the universe these heavier elements. And then a second generation of stars is born, not now of pure hydrogen but of the enriched chemistry of the universe. The universe is being continuously enriched with heavier elements. This process continued until, through increasingly complex chemical combinations, the human being came to be. Our sun is a third generation star, and we are literally born of stardust.

This process of being generated by and living with the universe continues every moment of our lives. We are constantly exchanging atoms with the total reservoir of atoms in the universe. Each year 98 percent of the atoms in our bodies are renewed. Each time we breathe we take in billions and billions of atoms recycled by the rest of breathing organisms during the past few weeks. Nothing in my genes was present a year ago. It is all new, regenerated from the available energy and matter in the universe. My skin is renewed each month and my liver each six weeks. Human beings are among the most recycled beings in the universe.

. . . But what relevance does all of this scientific knowledge have to our relationship to God and to faith?

**immanence** State or quality of being able to be experienced.

The religious believer is tempted by science to make God the “explanation.” We bring God in to try to explain things that we cannot otherwise explain. “How did the universe begin?” “How did we come to be?” We latch onto God, especially if we do not feel that we have a good and reasonable scientific explanation. He is brought in as the Great God of the Gaps. I have never come to believe in God by proving God’s existence through anything like a scientific process. God is not found as the conclusion of a rational process like that. I believe in God because God gave himself to me. That was not a miracle. It does make sense that there is a personal God who deals with me and loves me and who has given himself to me. I have never come to love God or God to love me because of any of these reasoning processes. I have come to love God because I have accepted the fact that he first made the move towards me. This is what faith is, a personal relationship of love with God, and it must be the source of our pursuit of justice.

Although God transcends the universe, he is working in it through his providence and continuous creation. This stress on God’s **immanence** is not to place a limitation upon God. Far from it. It reveals a God who made a universe that has within it, through evolution, a certain dynamism, as seen by science, and thus participates in the very creativity of God. God emptied himself so that he could share his infinite love with his creation. . . .

*“Neither the universe as a whole nor any of its ingredients can be understood except in terms of evolution.”*

If they respect the results of modern science, religious believers must move

away from the notion of a dictator God, a Newtonian God who made the universe as a watch that ticks along regularly. Perhaps God should be seen more as a parent or as one who speaks encouraging and sustaining words.

Scripture is very rich in these thoughts. . . . Theologians already possess the concept of God's continuous creation. To explore modern science with this notion of continuous creation and of God's emptying of himself would be an enriching experience for theologians and religious believers.

## For Reflection

---

1. What does Coyne mean when he writes that one measure of accuracy for our knowledge is "unifying explanatory power"?
2. Coyne suggests that constant and ongoing change in the universe allows the universe itself to actively participate in the creativity of God. How can you apply this statement to yourself as a sharer in God's creativity?
3. Coyne writes that God is not found by means of a reasoning process. How does he explain the basis of his own belief in God?

# 3 Created in the Image of God

## Introduction

In the Bible, God clearly expresses his intentions for human beings at the first mention of our creation: “Then God said: ‘Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26).

Verse 27 explains:

God created mankind in his image;  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

There is no missing the point: the majestic Creation hymn that forms the opening chapter of the Bible makes it clear that God modeled human beings, male and female, on the Divine. What does it mean to say that we are created in the image of God?

In the first reading in this chapter, from the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, the U.S. bishops describe God’s image as a “dynamic source of inner spiritual energy” (p. 67). This energy draws us like a magnet, so that we want to understand and embrace truth and seek to know and love God. When we long for a connection with God, we experience what it means to be created in the image of God.

The *Catechism for Adults* also points to essential human characteristics that result from our creation in the image of God. Notice that each in its own way relates to the concept of harmony or unity. Just as God is a unity of persons in the Blessed Trinity, we who are created in God’s image long for harmony in every sphere of life.

In the second reading in this chapter, Barbara A. Kathe, a religious writer and retired professor at Saint Joseph College in



Connecticut, explains, in an article from the journal *Spiritual Life*, her understanding of what it means to be an image of God. Kathe's thinking is related to the ideas in the first reading, though her vocabulary is different. Instead of describing a dynamic force that draws us, she uses a simpler term: *love*. She suggests that one attribute of God is most significant for human beings—God is infinite love. Kathe also reminds us that the human experience of God, as expressed both by the biblical writers and in daily life, is an experience of love and faithfulness. Again and again, through the biblical story of salvation, through the Sacraments of the Church, and through graces we each receive, God reveals himself as steadfast love.

Kathe also explores the more complex concept that God reveals himself as more than a being who loves; God reveals himself as someone who actually is Love. God has revealed that the Holy Trinity is a communion of the three Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The relationship that binds them together is love. If God is Love, and we are created in the image of God, then we most clearly reflect that image when we love ourselves, our neighbors, and God. And because being an image of God is not a marginal human quality but rather an essential one, then we are most truly human when we clearly reflect who God is: when we love.

Although the two readings in this chapter offer different perspectives on what it means to be an image of God, both emphasize that being made in his image means that we are always being drawn to share in God's life, and that his life is love.

## **Excerpt from the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults***

**By the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

### **Created in God's Image**

*God willed the diversity of his creatures and their own particular goodness, their interdependence, and their order.*

*He destined all material creatures for the good of the human race. Man, and through him all creation, is destined for the glory of God.*

—CCC, no. 353

“God created man in his image . . . male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27). In figurative and symbolic language, Scripture describes God’s creating the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and placing them in Paradise. They were created in friendship with God and in harmony with creation. The Church teaches that theirs was a state of original holiness and justice, with no suffering or death (cf. CCC, no. 376; GS, no. 18).

The first man and woman were **qualitatively** different from and superior to all other living creatures on earth. They were uniquely made in the image of God, as are all human beings, their descendants. What does this mean? God’s image is not a **static** picture stamped on our souls. God’s image is a dynamic source of inner spiritual energy drawing our minds and hearts toward truth and love, and to God himself, the source of all truth and love.

To be made in the image of God includes specific qualities. Each of us is capable of self-knowledge and of entering into communion with other persons through self-giving. These qualities—and the shared heritage of our first parents—also form a basis for a bond of unity among all human beings. To be made in God’s image also unites human beings as God’s stewards in the care of the earth and of all God’s other creatures.

Another important aspect of our creation is that God has made us a unity of body and soul. The human soul is not only the source of physical life for our bodies but is also the core of our spiritual powers of knowing and loving. While our bodies come into being through physical processes, our souls are all created directly by God.

God created man and woman, equal to each other as persons and in dignity. Each is completely human and is meant to complement the other in a communion of persons, seen most evidently in marriage.

**qualitatively** In a manner related to characteristics or qualities.

**static** Fixed, motionless.

Finally, we need to recognize that God created the first humans in a state of original holiness and justice, so that we are able to live in harmony with his plan. By his gracious will, he enabled us to know and love him, thus calling us to share his life. Our first parents also had free will and thus could be tempted by created things to turn away from the Creator.

## Excerpt from “Image and Likeness”

By Barbara A. Kathe, PhD

### Created in the Image of Love

“In the image of himself, in the image of God” (Gen 1:27), we were created. The meaning of that image and likeness is to be found in love, for God is love. . . . We know the power of those things that inhibit our growth in Christ, which transforms us from indifferent and unlovely beings into our true being: love. But we also know that the love of Christ compels us, and it transcends the self-absorbed anguish that blinds us to the Love that gives us life and meaning.

We are not made in the image of the world, but rather through grace we experience an inner drive to discover the image of God in ourselves. Christ encourages and promises us, “Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (Jn 15:9, 19). If we keep the

“ *Our loving is a participation in the immensity of the love of the Holy Trinity itself.* ”

spirit, as well as the word of the commandments, we will mirror Christ. Jesus makes charity the new commandment. By loving his own “to the

end” (Jn 13:1), he makes manifest the Father’s love that he receives: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. . . . This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:9, 12). Why is it that Christ *commands* us to love as he has loved? It is because love reveals who he is and who we are meant to be.

## Bringing Forth God's Image

Image and likeness: it is a phrase that can be misunderstood. God's likeness is not something that we humans can hear, see, sense, or recreate. What is it then? Essentially, God is God and, as such, necessarily beyond our comprehension. We cannot *know* God and can only describe his attributes **analogically**. We are able to experience God and translate our personal experiences into descriptions that we can comprehend. For us, then, God is infinite Love, Goodness, Wisdom, Power, Mercy—all of these and more. But understandably, the attribute on which we focus most—because we are so often needy and lonely and human—is that of love:

The God of our faith has revealed himself as He who is; and he has made himself known as “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6). God's very being is Truth and Love.<sup>1</sup>

It would follow, then, that the reason our true being is revealed when we love is that Christ, who is the image of God's very love for us, brings it forth in us.

Our loving is a participation in the immensity of the love of the Holy Trinity itself, who eternally creates, generates, sustains, and acts in love. But it was only through our redemption by Christ that this participation was won. Each of us has experienced God's love directly through the Redemption, through our individual creation, through Divine mercy, through the Eucharist, and through the graces and mercies we receive every day. Herein lies the mystery of our being, the reason for our existence, and the meaning that sifts through life itself: *The image and likeness of God is Love.*

The image in which we have been cast is Love. Our likeness to God is most vibrant when we are most like God in actions that proceed from love. The very essence of our being is love because Divine Love dwells within us, and we reflect—sometimes radiantly,

**analogically** Based on an analogy; in this context, the theological principle that even when a comparison can be made between God and humans, God is still more unlike humans than similar to them.

sometimes dimly—that Love which graces us with goodness, humility, and compassion. If we are centered in Christ and respond to the graces that are poured upon us, we will know God as love and we will reach out to others in love. So long as we are self-centered, we will not understand what it means to say that God is love. So long as we are self-centered, we will not be truly human. Our lives will be filled with misplaced ambition, power seeking, and violent or manipulative behavior.

## **An Insistent Pull to Transformation**

Some time ago I met an aged woman, very wise and prayerful. She surprised me one day by revealing her past so that I might understand more fully the limitless boundaries of God's love and mercy. As a young person, Liv had wandered through many dark alleys in life: drugs, alcohol, promiscuity. . . . She was consumed with ambition and, by disregarding the talents and needs of others, she manipulated her way to become the chief operating officer of a large international corporation. Although centered on herself and often ruthless in her actions, she frequently felt a nagging tug toward God. Over the years, this insistent pull became stronger and

stronger until she could no longer ignore it. Liv finally began to pray, returned to the sacraments, and discovered God living within her and in others. She spoke to me of God's great patience, forgiveness, and mercy, and rejoiced in his love for her. She had found that Love "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3: 14). Today . . . her experience of God's love remains intense, personal, and far reaching. Despite her now frail and aged body, she is radiantly alive, loving and kind, clearly empowered as a channel of grace for others by the Love in which her life is now centered.

### **The Bathroom Mirror**

You cannot see your own image in the bathroom mirror after a hot shower, when the mirror is fogged up. Once the surface has been cleaned off, your image is again reflected in the mirror. The Creation narrative in Genesis tells us that we are images of God. That is our essential nature, what we are, at heart. But like a fogged-up mirror that cannot reflect our image, we do not always reflect God's image as he intended. God's promise of salvation is a promise to fully restore his image in us.

Like Liv, each of us is offered graces for our own renewal and transformation. The real transformation, the true image that we seek, is the one in which we were created. It is through the discovery of God's image within us that change begins. Christ shows us how to share his humanity by choosing works of humility, love, compassion, and truth. Christ taught, healed, comforted, and sought justice. . . .

Christ's teachings outline a way of life that is permeated with love, both love of God and love of neighbor. Only by loving can we imitate Christ. When we love, God abides in us. When we love, God enlightens us. When we love, God strengthens us. Openness to grace for even the first effort to be poor in spirit, just, merciful, a peacemaker or to practice justice, or any of the beatitudes leads to a fuller understanding of Christ, and a deeper relationship with him and with others.

## Endnote

1. *Catechism*, Pt. 1, Art. 231.

## For Reflection

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1. The first reading, from the *Catechism for Adults*, identifies several human characteristics associated with being created as images of God. In your own words, summarize these characteristics. Which one are you most aware of in your own life?
2. According to the second reading, in what ways does God continually show love for humanity?
3. What did Liv, the prayerful woman who revealed her past to Kathe, discover late in life? How did this discovery change her?
4. At the end of her reading, Kathe lists graces that can come to people who love. Which of these gifts would you most like to receive from God? Why?

# 4 Original Sin: The Human Condition

## Introduction

One way to think about Original Sin is to recognize it as part of the universal human experience. Have you ever felt caught in a struggle between good and evil as you faced a personal decision? Have you found yourself doing something that you swore you would never do again? Have you wondered why your conscience does not jump in to prevent you from doing something wrong before it is too late? Welcome to the human race! These experiences are among the effects of Original Sin described in the three excerpts here.

The first excerpt is from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans. In one of the best New Testament descriptions of the effects of Original Sin, this saintly leader of the early Church—a man who heard the Risen Christ address him personally—expresses his disgust with his own behavior: “I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate” (Romans 7:15). Every person on earth can say the same about himself or herself at times. The excerpt ends with a rhetorical question: Who will save me? Paul, of course, knows the answer—an answer he shared with anyone, anywhere in the Roman world, who would listen to his preaching about the Risen Christ.

The topic of Original Sin is also the subject of the second reading, from one of the documents of the **Second Vatican Council**, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*—also known by its Latin name, *Gaudium et Spes*. In this excerpt the Council restates the teaching that humanity (referred to as “man” in some Church documents) was originally holy and did not experience the effects of evil and sin as we do today. The Council

affirms what the Book of Genesis relates: when God created man, male and female, he saw that they were good, just like all of creation. But our first ancestors, as that biblical narrative tells us, allowed themselves to be seduced by evil. The excerpt goes on to explain how Original Sin touches our daily lives, and it assures us that God offers release from the bondage of sin through Jesus.

The last excerpt in this chapter is a devotional reflection from John Donne, the great metaphysical English poet who wrote during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—around the same time as Shakespeare. Donne offers a vivid metaphor for Original Sin, an image that will be familiar to anyone who has ever built a fire. God, he says, placed a glowing coal of immortality in our hearts—but instead of breathing gently on it to coax it into flame, we blew it out. Donne recognizes that God has given each of us a conscience to help us avoid sin, but he wonders why we do not listen to our conscience. Because Donne was writing in Elizabethan times, his language can seem archaic, but read carefully to get the full impact of his humorous exaggeration as he describes our “miserable condition.” Like Saint Paul, Donne acknowledges that it is Jesus who ultimately will save us from our misery.

As bleak as these descriptions of the human condition may be, each contains the seeds of hope. The state of Original Sin is a universal human condition that involves struggle—but as we become more aware of that struggle, these readings point out, we also become more aware of our need for God.

### **Second Vatican Council**

Vatican II was the ecumenical or general Council of the Roman Catholic Church that Pope John XIII convened in 1962. It continued under Pope Paul VI until 1965. Among the many issues it addressed, the Council clarified the role of the Church in the world, called for a revision of the liturgy, and revived the central role of Scripture in the life of the Church. Few areas of Church life remained the same after Vatican Council II.



## Romans 7:15–24

What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I concur that the law is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if [I] do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So, then, I discover

“ *I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate.* ”

the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner

self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body?

## Excerpt from *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*

### By the Second Vatican Council

13. Although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very onset of his history man abused his liberty, at the urging of the Evil One. Man set himself against God and sought to attain his goal apart from God. Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, but their senseless minds were darkened and they served the creature rather than the Creator (cf. *Rom.* 1:21–25). What divine revelation makes known to us agrees with experience. Examining his heart, man finds that he has inclinations toward evil too, and is engulfed by manifold ills which cannot come from his good Creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things.

Therefore man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains. But the Lord Himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out that “prince of this world” (*John* 12:31) who held him in the bondage of sin (cf. *John* 8:34). For sin has diminished man, blocking his path to fulfillment.

The call to grandeur and the depths of misery, both of which are a part of human experience, find their ultimate and simultaneous explanation in the light of this revelation.

## Excerpt from Devotion I, “*Insultus morbi primus*” [The First Alteration, the First Grudging, of the Sickness], in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*

By John Donne

### Meditation

. . . O miserable condition of man! which was not imprinted by God, who, as he is immortal himself, had put a coal, a beam of immortality into us, which we might have blown into a flame, but blew it out by our first sin; we beggared ourselves by hearkening after false riches, and infatuated ourselves by hearkening after false knowledge. . . .

### Expostulation

. . . My God, my God, why is not my soul as **sensible** as my body? Why hath not my soul these apprehensions, these **presages**, these changes, these **antidates**,

**sensible** In this context, having the ability to perceive or detect something.

**presages** Predictions or foreknowledge.

**antidates** Anticipations about the future; literally, “dates before dates.”

**importune** To beg or pester someone for something.

these jealousies, these suspicions of a sin, as well as my body of a sickness? Why is there not always a pulse in my soul to beat at

the approach of a temptation to sin? . . . I stand in the way of temptations, naturally, necessarily; all men do so; for there is a snake in every path, temptations in every vocation; but I go, I run, I fly into the ways of temptation which I might shun; nay, I break into houses where the plague is, I press into places of temptation, and tempt the devil himself, and solicit and **importune** them who had rather be left unsolicited by me. I fall sick of sin, and am bedded and bedrid, buried and putrified in the practice of sin, and all this while have no presage, no pulse, no sense of my sickness. . . . Thou hast imprinted a pulse in our soul, but we do not examine it; a voice in our conscience, but we do not hearken unto it. We talk it out, we jest it out, we drink it out, we sleep it out; and when we wake, we do not say with Jacob, *Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not*: but though we might know it, we do not, we will not. But will God pretend to make a watch, and leave out the spring? to make so many various wheels in the faculties of the soul, and in the organs of the body, and leave out grace, that should move them? or will God make a spring, and not wind it up? . . . we have received our portion, and misspent it, not been denied it. We are God's tenants here, and yet here, he, our landlord, pays us rents; not yearly, nor quarterly, but hourly, and quarterly; every minute he renews his mercy. . . .

## Prayer

. . . Thy voice received in the beginning of a sickness, of a sin, is true health. If I can see that light betimes, and hear that voice early, *Then shall my light break forth as the morning, and my health shall spring forth speedily* (Isaiah 58:8). . . . O my God . . . keep me still established, both in a constant assurance, that thou wilt speak to me at the beginning of every such sickness, at the approach of every such sin; and that, if I take knowledge of that voice then, and fly to thee, thou wilt preserve me from falling, or raise me again, when by natural infirmity I am fallen. Do this,

O Lord, for his sake, who knows our natural infirmities, for he had them, and knows the weight of our sins, for he paid a dear price for them, thy Son, our Saviour, Christ Jesus. Amen.

## For Reflection

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1. What do the readings mean when they suggest that sin is a kind of slavery or bondage?
2. Each reading uses images or physical representations to describe our human struggle with sin. Summarize some of the images. Which speaks most clearly to you, and why?
3. The reading from the Second Vatican Council and the devotion by John Donne both refer to God's role in our struggle with sin. How do they say God helps us?

