

saint mary's press

Who Is Jesus Christ?

A Primary Source Reader



Robert Feduccia Jr.
Maura Thompson Hagarty

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Introduction

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” (8:27). The disciples reply that others think he is John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus asks his disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” (8:29a). Peter replies, “You are the Messiah” (8:29b). If Jesus were with you and asked you the same question, how would you respond?

This primary source reader was created to help you deepen your understanding of who Jesus is and of his significance—for humanity in general and for your life in particular. The readings presented here are primary in the sense that they offer original ideas or express information in an original way. Of course, the most important primary source for learning about Jesus is the Bible. This reader is meant to complement—not replace—your reading of the Scriptures. It is also meant to complement your study of Jesus Christ in courses at school or in your parish.

On the pages that follow, you’ll find writings from as long ago as the first century AD and as recently as the first decade of the twenty-first century. The collection includes homilies, reflections, letters, poetry, theological explanations, creeds, liturgical prayers, findings from a study of teenagers and religion, and teachings from Ecumenical Councils. Authors include theologians and other scholars, bishops, popes, saints, and laypeople.

This reader has four parts. The first, “God and Revelation,” provides readings on Revelation, salvation and salvation history, faith, being a disciple of Christ, and other topics. The second part, “Jesus Christ’s Revelation about God,” begins with a reflection on how people today carry out Jesus’ command to love one another and continue his presence in the world today. Then part 2 explores the reality that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Part 2 ends with a reading about the first disciple, Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Part 3, “The Mystery of the Incarnation,” provides a number of selections

that explore Jesus' identity and ends with a reading intended to help you think about how theologians approach the study of Jesus Christ. The readings in part 4, "Jesus Christ Teaches Us about Ourselves," address topics such as what it means to be human, how we are called to live, and what the goal is of our lives.

As you read the selections, try to identify recurring themes that surface in the readings, such as love, communion, and light. Consider how these themes help you answer these questions: Who is Jesus Christ? What has he done for us? How are we called to respond to him? In answering these and similar questions, you will come to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and develop new insights about what it means to follow him.

Part 1

God and Revelation

1 Revelation: God's Self-Communication

Introduction

Catholics today commonly use the concept of Revelation to talk about God's relationship with humanity. The concept, however, didn't emerge as a way of talking about this relationship until the Middle Ages, and it didn't develop into a central concept in Church teaching until the eighteenth century. Since that time the Church's way of talking about Revelation has evolved. The three readings in this chapter were selected to help you explore this development and deepen your understanding of Revelation.

The first selection is an excerpt from *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology*, by Dermot Lane. Lane is a well-known theologian and president of Mater Dei Institute of Education, in Dublin, Ireland. He explores what the two most recent Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council I (1869–1870) and Vatican Council II (1962–1965), say about Revelation. This exploration sets the context for the second and third selections, drawn from these Councils' documents. The second selection is from *Dei Filius*, a document from Vatican Council I. This was the first Ecumenical Council held after the Enlightenment began. The third selection is from *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, 1965), a document from Vatican Council II.

Lane explains how Vatican Council II built on the First Vatican Council's understanding of Revelation. During Vatican Council I, the main view of Revelation was that it is a body of truths. God disclosed these truths, which then were handed on from generation to generation. Vatican Council II did not contradict Vatican Council I. Instead, it presented a more developed understanding of

God's relationship with humanity and clarified that Revelation is God's communication about himself and his love for humankind. This communication reached its fullness in Jesus Christ. Revelation encompasses statements of truth that capture what we learn through God's self-communication, but Revelation is not limited to these statements.

Excerpt from *The Experience of God*

By Dermot Lane

To appreciate the change in perspective that took place in the Church's self-understanding of revelation at the Second Vatican Council we must begin with a brief outline of the teaching of the First Vatican Council on revelation in 1870. Vatican I was the first Council to deal formally and explicitly with the theme of revelation. Prior to that, individual points about revelation had been dealt with in passing. The decree from Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, deals with the mystery of God, revelation, faith and reason. The immediate background to this decree was the existence of **fideism** and **rationalism** stemming from the Enlightenment as well as certain forms of **deism**. Against fideism it asserted the power of human reason to know God through reflection on created realities. In opposition to rationalism it

fideism From the Latin *fides*, meaning "faith," refers to a variety of theological positions that overemphasize faith and minimize reason. Fideism, which enjoyed a degree of popularity in the nineteenth century, was rejected by the First Vatican Council.

rationalism From the Latin *ratio*, meaning "reason" or "calculation," referring to a broad range of philosophical positions that maintain that human reason is the final determinant of truth.

deism From the Latin *deus*, meaning "god," refers to the belief that God exists and created the world but is no longer actively involved in the universe and human life.

affirmed the existence of supernatural revelation and the absolute necessity of this revelation for a proper understanding of the final end of the person. Within this context it talked about supernatural revelation in terms of the communication of divine mysteries, the doctrine of the faith, the deposit of faith and revealed truths. A sharp distinction was made between natural and supernatural revelation. Very little reference was made to the person of Christ as the source of revelation. The major emphasis was on revelation as a body of truths that have been handed down in Scripture and tradition. Yet it would be inaccurate to claim that Vatican I opted exclusively for a propositional view of revelation. It does state, in a rarely noticed sentence, that it pleased God “to reveal himself and the eternal decrees of his will.” Yet in spite of this it must be admitted that the predominant horizon of Vatican I on revelation was that which identified revelation with a body of supernatural truths.

It is against this background that we must read the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* from the Second Vatican Council. Without this point of comparison much of the richness and significance of *Dei verbum* would be lost. What is perhaps most instructive about the Second Vatican Council on revelation is that the first draft of the decree in 1962 incorporated the primary emphasis of Vatican I on revelation as a body of truth, whereas the final text of 1965, which came after four further drafts, presented revelation in a new and different perspective. This does not mean that Vatican II overthrew the teaching of Vatican I. To the contrary a conscious effort is made in Vatican II to maintain links with Vatican I. This is quite explicit in the opening article of *Dei verbum* which declares that Vatican II is following in the footsteps of Vatican I. It is also clear, for example, in the last section of Chapter I which is made up of a mosaic of quotations from Vatican I.

In broad terms we can say that the Second Vatican Council, in *Dei verbum*, sees revelation as the personal self-communication of God to people in the history of salvation which reaches its fullness in the person of Jesus Christ. Revelation no longer appears simply as a body of supernatural truths contained in Scripture and taught by the Church. There is a clear movement in *Dei verbum* away from revelation as simply truths disclosed (*revelata*) to personal disclosure (*revelatio*). The basic emphasis

is now placed on the personal self-communication of God to humanity in Christ. This does not neglect or diminish the new knowledge expressed in doctrine that results from this personal disclosure (n.6). It does imply, however, that this new knowledge is something consequent to the more important emphasis on the personal self-communication of God in Christ.

In more specific terms revelation, according to *Dei verbum*, is an act of God who out of the abundance of divine love communicates God's self to people through Christ for the express purpose of giving a share in the divine nature (n.2). As such revelation is Trinitarian: it is an act of God the Father, who discloses God's self through the Word Incarnate in Jesus, with a view to drawing humanity to the Divine self in the Holy Spirit. Revelation, therefore, is a personal invitation by God out of love addressed to the individual in faith to enter into a new life of fellowship with God's self (n.2).

Excerpt from *Dei Filius*

By the First Vatican Council

1. The same Holy mother Church holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason: ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

2. It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself and the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that a supernatural, way. This is how the Apostle puts it: In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.

3. It is indeed thanks to this divine revelation, that those matters concerning God which are not of themselves beyond the scope of human reason, can, even in the present state of the human race, be known by everyone without difficulty, with firm certitude and with no intermingling of error.

4. It is not because of this that one must hold revelation to be absolutely necessary; the reason is that God directed human beings to a supernatural end, that is a sharing in the good things of God that utterly surpasses the understanding of the human mind; indeed eye has not seen, neither has ear heard, nor has it come into our hearts to conceive what things God has prepared for those who love him.

5. Now this supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, as declared by the sacred Council of Trent, is contained in written books and unwritten traditions, which were received by the apostles from the lips of Christ himself, or came to the apostles by the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and were passed on as it were from hand to hand until they reached us.

Excerpt from *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*

By the Second Vatican Council

2. In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14–15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having in inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.

“ *The invisible God . . . speaks to [us] as friends and lives among [us].* ”

3. God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (see Rom. 1:19–20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents. Then after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (see Gen. 3:15) and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (see

Rom. 2:6–7). Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation (see Gen. 12:2). Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.

4. Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, “now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2). For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (see John 1:1–18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as “a man to men.” He “speaks the words of God” (John 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (see John 5:36; John 17:4). To see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment refers to a movement in European thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Enlightenment thinkers cast doubt on claims not rooted in reason, especially conclusions not verifiable by empirical sciences or supported by philosophical reason. This way of thinking called into question the possibility of Revelation, that the truths of which were difficult or impossible to verify through reason.

truth. Moreover He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.

The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 6:14 and Tit. 2:13).

For Reflection

1. How does the Second Vatican Council's *Divine Revelation* build on the understanding of Revelation as a body of truths articulated in Vatican Council I's *Dei Filius*?
2. How might someone who views Revelation primarily as a body of truths live out faith differently from someone who views Revelation primarily as the self-communication of God?
3. What is the role of Christ in Revelation according to *Divine Revelation* and *Dei Filius*?

2 The History of Salvation

Introduction

The history of God's relationship with humankind is sometimes referred to as salvation history or the history of salvation. It spans time from the origins of the universe to today's modern world and will encompass all future time. Describing this history as salvation history emphasizes that there has never been a time when God has been absent or a time when God didn't desire friendship with people. All of history, since humankind's first sin, is marked by God's working to bring us into communion with him and with one another. This communion will be accomplished at the end of time when God's Reign is fully realized.

One of the best ways to explore salvation history is by reading the Scriptures. You can start with accounts in Genesis of God's Creation and his covenants with the Israelites. Then you can continue with the Exodus and other central Old Testament events. Finally, you can move on to the New Testament and explore the message and mission of Jesus Christ, the Revelation of the Holy Spirit, and the early days of the Church. This chapter presents another, secondary, way to reflect on salvation history, which you can work into your weekly routine. It is to pay attention to the prayers we hear at Mass that recall God's saving work in human history.

To help you explore salvation history, this chapter provides a collection of excerpts from Eucharistic Prayers. The excerpts summarize key aspects of this history from the perspective of Christian faith. They are from the part of the prayer that comes after this three-part dialogue, which begins every Eucharistic Prayer:

Priest: The Lord be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Priest: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right and just.

After this dialogue comes a prayer of thanks and praise “in which the priest, in the name of the entire holy people, glorifies God the Father and gives thanks for the whole work of salvation or for some special aspect of it that corresponds to the day, festivity, or season” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 79a). This prayer, called the Preface, has three parts: an introduction, a middle part that expresses what we give thanks for, and a transition that introduces the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy . . .). Notice the three parts in this Preface, which we might hear on a Sunday in Ordinary Time:

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For you laid the foundations of the world
and have arranged the changing of times and seasons;
you formed man in your own image
and set humanity over the whole world in all its wonder,
to rule in your name over all you have made
and for ever praise you in your mighty works,
through Christ our Lord.

And so, with all the Angels, we praise you,
as in joyful celebration we acclaim:
Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts . . .

(*Roman Missal*, Preface V of the Sundays of Ordinary Time)

The excerpts collected in this chapter are taken from the middle sections of the Prefaces. This is because our focus is salvation history, and the middle section of each Preface is the part in which we express thanks and praise for all God has done for us. Liturgical theologian Adolf Adam notes that “if one were to gather together the middle sections of all the prefaces and arrange them

in order, one would have a complete, although brief, overview of God's saving work" (*The Eucharistic Celebration*, p. 74).

This chapter provides excerpts from twenty-three prefaces, with two aims. The first is to help you reflect on some of the key aspects of God's saving work. The second is to prepare you to notice the Preface each time you attend Mass and reflect on the aspect of salvation history for which the community praises and thanks God. When reading the selections, note that each is preceded by a heading identifying the season when it is said.

Excerpts from *The Roman Missal*

By the Congregation for Divine Worship

Advent I

For he assumed at his first coming
the lowliness of human flesh,
and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago,
and opened for us the way to eternal salvation,
that, when he comes again in glory and majesty
and all is at last made manifest,
we who watch for that day
may inherit the great promise
in which now we dare to hope.

Advent II

For all the oracles of the prophets foretold him,
the Virgin Mother longed for him
with love beyond all telling,
John the Baptist sang of his coming
and proclaimed his presence when he came.

It is by his gift that already we rejoice
at the mystery of his Nativity,
so that he may find us watchful in prayer
and exultant in his praise.

The Nativity of the Lord I

For in the mystery of the Word made flesh
a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind,
so that, as we recognize in him God made visible,
we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible.

The Nativity of the Lord II

For on the feast of this awe-filled mystery,
though invisible in his own divine nature,
he has appeared visibly in ours;
and begotten before all ages,
he has begun to exist in time;
so that, raising up in himself all that was cast down,
he might restore unity to all creation
and call straying humanity back to the heavenly Kingdom.

The Nativity of the Lord III

For through him the holy exchange that restores our life
has shone forth today in splendor:
when our frailty is assumed by your Word
not only does human mortality receive unending honor
but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal.

Epiphany

For today you have revealed the mystery
of our salvation in Christ
as a light for the nations,
and, when he appeared in our mortal nature,
you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature.

Lent I

For by your gracious gift each year
your faithful await the sacred paschal feasts

with the joy of minds made pure,
so that, more eagerly intent on prayer
and on the works of charity,
and participating in the mysteries
by which they have been reborn,
they may be led to the fullness of grace
that you bestow on your sons and daughters.

“ *For today you
have revealed the
mystery of our
salvation in Christ
as a light for
the nations.* ”

Lent II

For you have given your children a sacred time
for the renewing and purifying of their hearts,
that, freed from disordered affections,
they may so deal with the things of this passing world
as to hold rather to the things that eternally endure.

Lent III

For you will that our self-denial should give you thanks,
humble our sinful pride,
contribute to the feeding of the poor,
and so help us imitate you in your kindness.

Lent IV

For through bodily fasting you restrain our faults,
raise up our minds,
and bestow both virtue and its rewards,
through Christ our Lord.

Passion of the Lord I

For through the saving Passion of your Son
the whole world has received a heart
to confess the infinite power of your majesty,
since by the wondrous power of the Cross
your judgment on the world is now revealed
and the authority of Christ crucified.

Passion of the Lord II

For the days of his saving Passion
and glorious Resurrection are approaching,
by which the pride of the ancient foe is vanquished
and the mystery of our redemption in Christ is celebrated.

Easter I

For he is the true Lamb
who has taken away the sins of the world;
by dying he has destroyed our death,
and by rising, restored our life.

Easter II

Through him the children of light rise to eternal life
and the halls of the heavenly Kingdom
are thrown open to the faithful;
for his Death is our ransom from death,
and in his rising the life of all has risen.

Easter III

He never ceases to offer himself for us
but defends us and ever pleads our cause before you:
he is the sacrificial Victim who dies no more,
the Lamb, once slain, who lives for ever.

Easter IV

For, with the old order destroyed,
a universe cast down is renewed,
and integrity of life is restored to us in Christ.

Easter V

By the oblation of his Body
he brought the sacrifices of old to fulfillment
in the reality of the Cross
and, by commending himself to you for our salvation,
showed himself the Priest, the Altar and the Lamb of sacrifice.

Ascension I

For the Lord Jesus, the King of glory,
conqueror of sin and death,
ascended (today) to the highest heavens,
as the Angels gazed in wonder.

Mediator between God and man,
judge of the world and Lord of hosts,
he ascended, not to distance himself from our lowly state
but that we, his members, might be confident of following
where he, our Head and
Founder, has gone before.

Ascension II

For after his Resurrection
he plainly appeared to all his
disciples
and was taken up to heaven in
their sight,
that he might make us sharers
in his divinity.

Sundays in Ordinary Time I

For through his **Paschal**

Mystery,

he accomplished the marvelous deed,
by which he has freed us from the yoke of sin and death,
summoning us to the glory of being now called
a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, a people
for your own possession,
to proclaim everywhere
your mighty works,
for you have called us out
of darkness
into your own wonderful light.

The Roman Missal

The Roman Missal, also referred to as the *Sacramentary*, is the liturgical book the priest uses at the altar and at his chair during the celebration of Mass. It includes the Order of Mass and all the prayers said by the priest and by the people. These include the Eucharistic Prayers and the options for the portion of the Eucharistic Prayer called the Preface.

Paschal Mystery The work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ mainly through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

Sundays in Ordinary Time II

For out of compassion for the waywardness that is ours,
he humbled himself and was born of the Virgin;
by the passion of the Cross he freed us from unending death,
and by rising from the dead he gave us life eternal.

Sundays in Ordinary Time III

For we know it belongs to your boundless glory,
that you came to the aid of mortal beings with your divinity
and even fashioned for us a remedy out of mortality itself,
that the cause of our downfall
might become the means of our salvation,
through Christ our Lord.

Saints I

For you are praised in the company of your Saints
and, in crowning their merits, you crown your own gifts.
By their way of life you offer us an example,
by communion with them you give us companionship,
by their intercession, sure support,
so that, encouraged by so great a cloud of witnesses,
we may run as victors in the race before us
and win with them the imperishable crown of glory,
through Christ our Lord.

For Reflection

1. Describe the portion of the Eucharistic Prayer referred to as the Preface and explain its relationship to the history of salvation.
2. What does the collection of Eucharistic Prayer excerpts presented in this chapter say about who Jesus Christ is?
3. Notice the number of references to light in the selection of prayer excerpts. Why is light a meaningful image for Christians?
4. Identify and describe at least five events of salvation history recounted in the selected excerpts in this chapter.

3 What Is Faith?

Introduction

When you read or hear the term *faith*, what comes to mind? Perhaps you think primarily of the relationship Christians have with God. Perhaps you think of religious beliefs that summarize the content of the Christian message, such as that God created the world or that Jesus Christ is God. In English the word *faith* encompasses both these understandings. In Latin the first understanding is called *fides qua* and the second is called *fides quae*. The “General Catechetical Directory,” a document intended to guide the Church’s religious education, explains:

Faith . . . can be considered in two ways, either as the total adherence given by [humans] under the influence of grace to God revealing himself (the faith *by which* one believes), or as the content of revelation and of the Christian message (the faith *which* one believes). (36)

We can distinguish these two aspects of faith when we talk about them, but in reality they are inseparable. On the one hand, our beliefs about God and how God interacts with us affects the way our relationship with him unfolds. On the other hand, our manner of relating to God embodies a set of beliefs, even if we don’t articulate them. For example, if we pray to God only in times of crisis, then our actions express an idea of God as uninvolved in our day-to-day lives.

In 2002 a team of researchers set out to study the faith of teenagers in the United States. The authors, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, published the results in a book titled *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. The research indicates that though most American teenagers say faith is important in their lives, the beliefs embodied in the way

many teens live out their faith and the beliefs expressed in the way they talk about God is unlike the belief system of any established religion. The researchers coined a name for this “faith”: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. The first of two readings in this chapter is an excerpt from *Soul Searching* that describes Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Notice that a portion of the excerpt presents five creedlike statements. These statements were composed by the researchers, who heard these creedlike themes in teenagers’ articulation of their beliefs and in the way they live out their relationship with God.

The second reading, a collection of short excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, describes aspects of faith from the viewpoint of the Catholic Church. These excerpts help you begin to compare and contrast the Catholic perspective on faith with Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

Excerpt from *Soul Searching*

By Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton

We advance our thesis somewhat tentatively as less than a conclusive fact but more than mere conjecture: we suggest that the de facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers is what we might well call “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” The creed of this religion . . . sounds something like this:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die. . . .

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about inculcating a moralistic approach to life. It teaches that central to living a good and happy life is being a good, moral person. That means being nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, responsible, at work on self-improvement, taking care of one's health, and doing one's best to be successful. . . .

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is . . . about providing therapeutic benefits to its adherents. This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, or spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, et cetera. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people. . . .

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is about belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs.

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Excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

By his Revelation, “the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends, and moves among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company.”¹ The adequate response to this invitation is faith.

By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God.² With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, “the obedience of faith.”³ . . . (142–143)

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*. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian

faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says. It would be futile and false to place such faith in a creature.⁴ . . . (150)

“ *Faith is . . . the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself.* ”

Faith is a personal act—the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself. But faith is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbor impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith. . . . (166)

We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch. “The believer’s act [of faith] does not terminate in the propositions, but in the realities [which they express].”⁵ All the same, we do approach these realities with the help of formulations of the faith which permit us to express the faith and to hand it on, to celebrate it in community, to assimilate and live on it more and more. (170)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), published in English in 1994, provides a comprehensive summary of Catholic beliefs. It is a universal document, which means it is intended for Catholics throughout the world. Its aim is to deepen our understanding of faith in a way that leads to love of God and others. The CCC quotes the *Roman Catechism*, published in the seventeenth century, to explain this.

The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love.⁶ (25)

You can access the full text of the *Catechism* at the Web site of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Endnotes

1. *Dei Verbum* 2; cf. *Colossians* 1:15; *1 Timothy* 1:17; *Exodus* 33:11; *John* 15:14–15; *Baruch* 3:38 (Vulg.).
2. Cf. *Dei Verbum* 5.
3. Cf. *Romans* 1:5; 16:26.
4. Cf. *Jeremiah* 17:5–6; *Psalms* 40:5; 146:3–4.
5. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II–II, 1, 2, *ad* 2.
6. *Roman Catechism*, Preface, 10; cf. *1 Corinthians* 13:8

For Reflection

1. Summarize the religious perspective that the authors of *Soul Searching* describe as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.
2. Do the creedlike statements summarizing Moralistic Therapeutic Deism reflect your faith and relationship with God? Why or why not?
3. Notice the theme of love present in the excerpts from the *Catechism* and absent from the description of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Is there a more significant difference between the two perspectives? Why or why not?
4. Identify some of central Catholic beliefs that are in conflict with Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

4 How Do We Put Love for God into Action?

Introduction

Christians are called to help people in need, but figuring out how best to respond to this call can be a challenge. For some people, the magnitude of human need in the world today can lead to inaction. It just isn't always clear how one's efforts can make a difference in the face of great need and complex social injustices. The way Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910–1997) approached serving others provides helpful guidance.

In this chapter's selection, Mother Teresa explains that the important thing is not how much people do but rather how much love people put into their actions. She says she doesn't look at the masses of people in need as her responsibility. She focuses on loving one person at a time. This is how her ministry to the destitute began. She explains that she picked up one person, and says that if she hadn't done that, she wouldn't have picked up 42,000.

The picking up of the one person that she describes happened in 1952, when she encountered a dying person lying in a street in Calcutta, India. The 42,000 refers to the number of people, as of 1983, who had been helped by Mother Teresa and the members of the community of religious women she founded, the Missionaries of Charity. The community's aim is to provide free services to the poorest of the poor and to those who are near death. In 1979 Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her work.

Perhaps Mother Teresa's life of service appears too extraordinary to serve as a model for us today. The point, however, is to grasp her approach: to love one person at a time. This is her understanding of what Jesus asks of us. A seemingly ordinary action becomes extraordinary if just one person in need learns that he or she is loved.

Excerpt from *Words to Love by . . .*

By Mother Teresa

The Little Flower

The “Little Flower” whom Mother Teresa mentions is Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897), a saint known for doing many small, seemingly ordinary actions out of love for God. In her spiritual autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, which she wrote in obedience to her superior’s request, Thérèse describes her “little way” to sainthood: doing small things with great love rather than doing great deeds. She was named a **Doctor of the Church** by Pope John Paul II in 1997. Her feast day is October 1.

We are supposed to preach without preaching
not by words, but by our example,
by our actions.

All the works of love are works of peace.

This is the true reason for our existence
to be the sunshine of God’s love
to be the hope of eternal happiness.
That’s all.

We all want to love God, but how?
The Little Flower is a most wonderful example. She did small things with great love. Ordinary things with extraordinary love. That is why she became a great saint.

I think we can bring this beautiful thing into our lives.

Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning.

Love has to be put into action
and that action is service.

How do we put the love for God into action?

Doctor of the Church A title officially bestowed by the Church on those saints who are highly esteemed for their theological writings, as well as their personal holiness.

By being faithful to our family
to the duties that God has entrusted to us.
Whatever form we are
able or disabled
rich or poor

it is not how much we do
but how much love we put in the doing
—a lifelong sharing of love with others.

Jesus made himself the Bread of Life
to make sure we understand what
he is saying
to satisfy our hunger for him
to satisfy our love for him.

“ *You get closer to Christ by
coming closer to each other.* ”

Even that is not enough for him
so he makes himself the hungry one
so we can satisfy his hunger for our love.
And by doing to the poor what we are doing
we are satisfying his hunger for our love. . . .

I never look at the masses as my responsibility.
I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed
only one person at a time.

Just one, one, one.

You get closer to Christ by coming closer to each other. As Jesus said,
“Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me.”

So you begin. . . . I begin.

I picked up one person—
maybe if I didn't pick up that one person I wouldn't have picked up
42,000.

The whole work is only a drop in the ocean. But if I didn't put the drop
in, the ocean would be one drop less.

Same thing for you
same thing for your family
same thing in the church where you go
just begin . . . one, one, one.

For Reflection

1. Describe Mother Teresa's approach to serving those in need.
2. Read the quotation in this chapter's selection and explain what Mother Teresa means by this statement.
3. Why does Mother Teresa mention the Little Flower?
4. Identify at least one implication for your life of Mother Teresa's call to serve. Think of one person in need whom you could respond to.

5 The Cost of Being a Disciple of Christ

Introduction

In many respects there was nothing extraordinary about Franz Jägerstätter. He was born on May 20, 1907, in Saint Radegund, a small village in northwest Austria. He attended school until age 14, left home to work in an iron mine in a neighboring town, and later returned to marry a young woman named Franziska Schwaninger. He then settled into a simple life of farming and working at Saint Radegund's parish church as a sacristan, one who cares for the upkeep of the church and assists the presider at liturgy. Franz and Franziska had three children, all girls. Nothing was extraordinary about Franz, but the times he lived in certainly were.

In 1934 Adolf Hitler, already the German chancellor, became president of Germany. Four years later, he ordered German troops into neighboring Austria to annex it in what was known as the **Anschluss**. Hitler's **Third Reich** needed fresh troops to fight his expanding war, so Franz was drafted into the German army, the Wehrmacht. Franz received basic training in the army's motor corps, but when the time came for him to swear allegiance to Hitler and go into combat on the Russian front, he refused. He had become a conscientious objector on the grounds that Germany was waging an unjust war and that the Gospels were quite clear about killing another human being. "Is there anything more evil

Anschluss German for *connection* or *joining*. Refers to the German annexation of Austria on March 11, 1938.

Third Reich Refers to Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler, who ruled from 1933 to 1945. The two previous "reichs," or kingdoms, were the Holy Roman Empire (962–1806) and the modern German Empire (1871–1918). The period preceding the Third Reich is known as the Weimar Republic (1919–1933).

than when I am required to murder and rob people who are defending their homeland only so that I might help an anti-religious power attain victory and then be able to establish a world empire with belief in God or, to be more accurate, with no belief in God?" (*Franz Jägerstätter*, p. xxvi).

For Franz, being a disciple of Christ meant not only knowing Christ's teachings as expressed in the Church, the Scriptures, and the lives of the saints, but also living them. Thus, he could not swear an oath to Hitler and at the same time be true to his baptismal commitment to Christ. He believed that doing so would have been hypocritical and a betrayal of everything he held dear, and in this way he proved to be extraordinary. As a result of his refusal, he was arrested and charged with undermining military morale. He spent time in the same prison where a famous Lutheran theologian and opponent of Nazism, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was held. Eventually, Franz was found guilty, sentenced to death, and beheaded by guillotine. He left behind Franziska and their three daughters, but he knew that his example showed them what it meant to be a faithful and loving disciple of Christ.

On October 26, 2007—100 years after his birth—at the cathedral in Linz, Austria, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, archbishop of Vienna, Austria, declared Franz Jägerstätter "blessed." He called Franz "the most concrete and illustrative commentary on the Beatitudes that I have ever heard" (*Franz Jägerstätter*, p. 197). The two texts you are about to read are Franz's last letters from prison to his wife and family.

Excerpt from *Franz Jägerstätter: Letters and Writings from Prison* (Text No. 85)

By Franz Jägerstätter

My dear loved ones, the hour draws ever nearer when I shall give my soul back to God, the Lord. I could say many words of farewell to you, and it is hard to imagine saying no more good-byes to you.

I would have gladly spared you the pain and the suffering that you must have borne on account of me. But you surely know that we must love God more than we love our family, and that we must be ready to let go of everything that we love on this earth and that is dear to us rather than to offend God in the least. And I would not dare to offend God on account of you. We know what suffering God could have sent you on account of me!

It was surely hard for our dear Savior to give his dear mother pain because of his death. And what are our sufferings in relation to those which those two innocent hearts suffered for us sinners? Moreover, what must a farewell at death be for those people who do not fully believe in eternal life and who, therefore, do not have much hope for a reunion? If I could not have trusted in God's mercy and forgiveness for all of my sins, then I would have hardly had peaceful days during my solitary time in prison.

Although people have accused me of criminal behavior and condemned me to death, be consoled knowing that in God's eyes not everything is criminal that the world perceives to be criminal. I hope that I do not have to be afraid of the eternal Judge because of this so-called criminal behavior.

My death sentence should be a warning for you. God, the Lord, will not treat us much differently if we perhaps think that we do not need to obey everything which he commands us to believe and follow through his church. However, if we do not follow God's commandments, the eternal Judge will condemn us not merely to an earthly death but to an eternal one.

Therefore, I have nothing more urgent to set before you than that you resolve to keep all of the Commandments and to avoid every sin. You should love God, our Lord, and also your neighbors as yourself (Mk 12:28–34). On these two Commandments rest the entire law. Keep these, and then we have reason to hope for an imminent reunion in heaven.

One must not think poorly of others who act differently than I have. It is much better for everyone to pray than to pass judgment on others. God intends that everyone should become holy.

Many people simply believe that things must be as they are, that they should do what is unjust, and that others have responsibility for this [war].