Living in Christ

saint mary's press

The New Testament

The Good News of Jesus Christ

Margaret Nutting Ralph, PhD

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Introduction

On the wall in my office is a picture of Jesus and two disciples on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13–35). As I was writing this book, I frequently glanced at that picture. It epitomizes for me what I hope this book will accomplish—that you, your teachers, and I will meet on life's journey and, while discussing the New Testament, will encounter, in the Holy Spirit, the Living Word, Jesus Christ. We will discuss what God our Father has chosen to reveal to us about himself and about his only begotten Son. In listening to the Word of God and to one another, we will be strengthened and encouraged to live our lives in cooperation with the coming of his Kingdom. And as we read, discuss, absorb, and pray with the New Testament, the Risen Christ will be present with us.

The spirituality of many Catholics is rooted in the awareness that Christ is present with us in a unique way in the Eucharist. Too many of us seem less aware that Christ is also with us, although in a different way, in the proclamation of Scripture in the liturgy. How is this so? The Word of God is a saving Word that brings us salvation: "The word of God constantly proclaimed in the Liturgy is always, then, a living and effective word through the power of the Holy Spirit. It expresses the Father's love that never fails in its effectiveness toward us" (*Lectionary for Mass,* page 14).

In Luke's account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he tells us that the disciples did not recognize the presence of the Risen Christ when he "interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). My prayer for you and your teachers is that as you study Scripture together, you, like the disciples on the road, will find yourselves asking in wonder, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (24:32). In addition, I pray that you are able to recognize the presence of the Risen Christ in your midst, now and always.

Margaret Nutting Ralph

Section 1

The Word of God

Part 1

A Matter of Perspective

Have you ever looked for your own house or your own apartment in satellite photos on the Internet? By zooming in and out, you can adjust your perspective. You can change your point of view from the very widest possible angle to the very narrowest. You can see your city or town as it appears from space, and then you can zoom down to your own block and even to your own front door.

Imagine viewing the various forms of the New Testament writings through a wide-angle lens. What do you see—scrolls curling at their top and bottom edges; leather-bound books, carefully copied in Greek and Latin characters? Perhaps you see your family Bible, or the paperback New Testament you may have used in a class or two. What do these writings mean? What are their origins? What do they mean to us today?

In this student book, we consider these questions by beginning with a wide-angle view of the New Testament. In this first part, we begin by discussing the meaning of God's Revelation and key concepts related to Scripture, including biblical inspiration, biblical inerrancy, and the canon. We will also discuss the relationship between Scripture and Tradition and the role of the Magisterium in the interpretation of Scripture. Then we consider the New Testament as part of the larger whole of Sacred Scripture. Finally, we begin to narrow our focus to the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and review them in their various literary categories.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 1: "Revelation and Inspiration" (page 10)
- Article 2: "Covenants Old and New" (page 14)
- Article 3: "An Overview of the New Testament Books" (page 18)

Article 1

Revelation and Inspiration

We know about God because he reveals himself through love. We are made by God and for God, out of love, and in this is our meaning and purpose. As human beings we are oriented toward God by our very nature and by an interior call placed deep within us. Saint Augustine wrote, "We were made for thee, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." Only in God, and in union with him, will we find true happiness. Similarly, the psalmist wrote:

> My soul rests in God alone,
> from whom comes my salvation.
> God alone is my rock and salvation,
> my secure fortress; I shall never fall.
> (Psalm 62:1–3)

God gradually, in both words and actions, communicated himself to us, his beloved children, first through Creation itself, then through that inner voice we call "conscience." Through the wonders of Creation, from the smallest cells to the most majestic mountain ranges, we learn something of God. From the voice within, if we listen to it, we learn something of what God expects of us as human beings. From both the created world and our own understanding, we can come to realize that God exists, that he is the cause of everything and the goal of everything. We can learn about him from the evidence of his works and from our own God-given gift of human reason.

Catholic Wisdom

God's Revelation of Love

God has revealed himself to us out of love. In the Book of Genesis, we learn that he revealed himself to our first parents, promised them salvation, and offered them his promise of a Redeemer. God made a lasting covenant with Noah and with the entire human race (see Genesis, chapter 9). When God chose Abraham, he made a covenant with him and all his descendants. Through Moses, God revealed his Law, and through the prophets, prepared his people "to accept the salvation destined for all humanity" (*Cathechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 72).

But God wanted to communicate more than his existence. He wanted to communicate his very self and his love for us. He did this gradually, through the centuries of human history, in his words and actions. He also revealed himself through his covenants with his Chosen People. Finally, as the writer to the Letter to the Hebrews wrote: "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son" (1:1–2). That son, the Son of God, is Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ is God's final and full Revelation; he is God's Final Answer to every question of the human heart. (We discuss salvation history more fully in the next article, when we discuss the intimate relationship between the Old and New Testaments.)

In this student book, we study God's Revelation transmitted through the written word of the New Testament. But first, let us think about Scripture as a whole, both the Old and New Testaments. You may have wondered why Scripture has been so treasured by every generation and passed on so carefully through the centuries, or why it has been translated into almost every language on earth. Have you ever wondered why we proclaim Scripture in every celebration of the Mass, or why we quote Scripture when we want to make a special point on an issue? This is because Scripture transmits the **Divine Revelation** of God to us. It records his plan for us, his love for us, and the gift of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to us. As a record of God's Revelation, as truly God's Word, we revere Scripture as sacred and holy. We realize that Sacred Scripture comes from God and that he is the author.

Does this mean that God dictated Scripture, word for word? No. God is the author because he inspired the human authors of Scripture. Through **biblical inspiration**, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God used the natural gifts of specially chosen human beings to communicate the truths, without error, that we need to know for our salvation. The phrase "without error" is sometimes misunderstood to mean that every fact presented in the Bible is historically or scientifically accurate. However, when we speak of **biblical inerrancy**, we refer to only those truths that relate to our salvation, to our faith or to our morals, how we are to live as God would have us live. We discuss this concept further in later articles in this student book.

Divine 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. It is most fully realized in the Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ.

biblical inspiration
The gift of the Holy Spirit, which assisted human beings to write biblical books, so they have God as their author and teach faithfully and without error the saving truth that God willed to give us.

biblical inerrancy
The doctrine that the books of Scripture are free from error regarding the truth God wishes to reveal through Scripture for the sake of our salvation.

Bible
The collection of Christian sacred writings, or Scripture, accepted by the Church as inspired by God and composed of the Old and New Testaments.

Tradition
From the Latin *tradere,* meaning "to hand on." Refers to the process of passing on the Gospel message. It began with the oral communication of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written down in Scripture, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Church
The term *Church* has three inseparable meanings: (1) the entire People of God throughout the world; (2) the diocese, which is also known as the local Church; (3) the assembly of believers gathered for the celebration of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. In the Nicene Creed, the Church is recognized as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic—traits that together are referred to as "marks of the Church."

Yet the human authors of Scripture were not robots. The inspired biblical authors did not go into a trance and wake up to find that they had written Scripture while in some altered state. Rather, God revealed himself through events, events that the authors, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, understood as significant communications from God. The authors, understanding the spiritual ramifications of these events, and seeing God present and powerful in them, preserved their spiritual meaning for future generations. These written accounts were treasured, preserved, organized, and passed down to us. In that way, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Revelation of God was made accessible to human beings through the written word.

The Bible As We Know It

The process of forming what we know as the **Bible** (from the Latin word *biblia,* meaning "books" or "library of books") took many hundreds of years. The Bible began as many separate pieces of oral tradition and writing, announced and written by separate evangelists and authors at various times in various places. Gradually, through what we call Sacred **Tradition**, the Church authenticated the writings as the truth revealed by God. The writings of the Old Testament were first organized by God's Chosen People, the people of Israel, and then gradually the New Testament writings were collected and organized. Through reliance on Tradition, the **Church** discerned which books are sacred. The New Testament was authorized with twenty-seven books, and the Old Testament with forty-six. Together this list of books authenticated by Tradition and accepted as God's Revelation by the Church is called the canon of Scripture. The word *canon* comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning "measure" or "standard," which evolved into the word *canon*, meaning "rule."

Sacred Scripture together with Sacred Tradition "make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God" (*Dei Verbum,* 10) (*CCC,* 97). This deposit of the Word of God enables the Church to contemplate God who is "the source of all her riches" (97). Both Scripture and Tradition together make up the **Deposit of Faith** from which the Church transmits to every age all that she is and believes. Depending on Scripture alone for the truths of salvation (as many of our Protestant brothers and sisters do) deprives us of the living transmission of

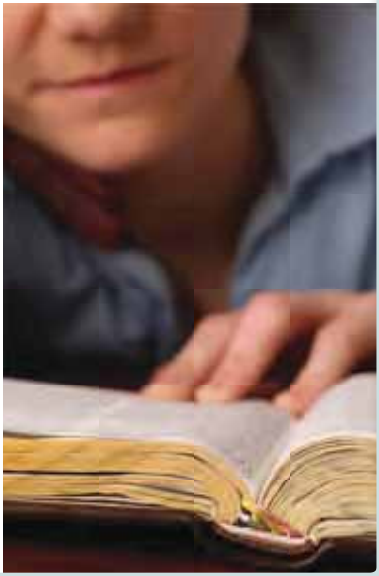
authentic Church practice and teaching through the ages; and looking to Sacred Tradition without Sacred Scripture, without the Word of God at its core, would be an exercise in futility, empty of meaning. We need both Scripture and Tradition to live the full and meaningful life God intends for

Who Interprets Scripture?

"The Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes" (*Dei Verbum*, 8, § 1) (*CCC*, 98). Through her mandate from Christ, the Church alone, through her teaching authority (the Magisterium, from the Latin word *magister*, meaning "teacher"), has the right and task to interpret the authentic meaning of Scripture and Tradition. This right was given to the Church by Christ, who entrusted all his teachings to the Apostles. What Christ entrusted to the Apostles, they, in turn, through their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, handed on to the entire Church, through the Pope and bishops, from one generation to the next, until Christ returns in glory.

The Church's teaching authority is not limited to Scripture but extends to the doctrine, life, and worship of the entire Church. Although the Church is entrusted with the task of interpreting Scripture, this does not mean we cannot study or discuss Scripture among ourselves, or read and pray with Scripture on our own. Because we are baptized Christians, the Holy Spirit is with us, and the Church encourages our prayerful reading of Scripture (see *CCC*, 2653).

But we must always be mindful that Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium form the three-footed foundation of scriptural interpretation and all the teachings of the Church. All three work together to help us to understand the meaning of God's Revelation in the past and in the present. Even those who interpret Scripture as serious scholars (called exegetes) are subject to the teaching authority of the Church in their writing and teaching about Sacred Scripture.



Deposit of Faith
The heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. It has been passed on from the time of the Apostles. The Magisterium takes from it all that it teaches as revealed truth.

Magisterium
The Church's living teaching office, which consists of all bishops, in communion with the Pope, the bishop of Rome.

covenant
A solemn agreement between human beings or between God and a human being in which mutual commitments are made.

us. Indeed we need a third element, which is the teaching authority (the Magisterium) of the Church. The **Magisterium** draws all that it teaches as revealed truth from the Deposit of Faith, contained in Scripture and Tradition.

Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium

The relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching authority of the Church is illuminated by these statements from *Divine Revelation*:

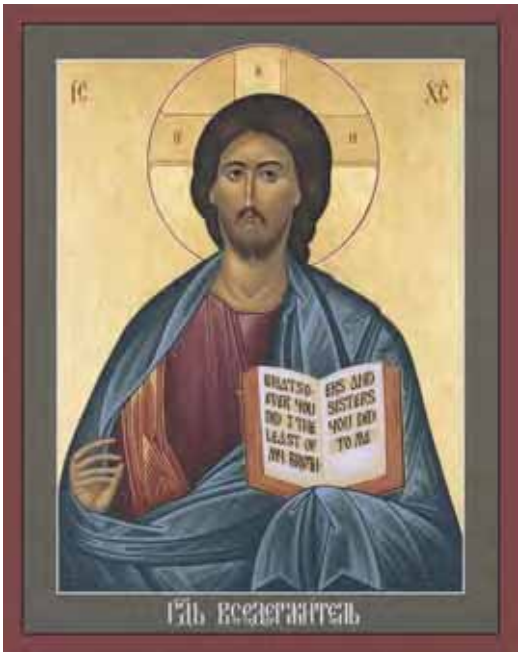
> Tradition and scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church. . . .
>
> The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. (10)
>
> This magisterium is not superior to the word of God, but rather its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devoutly, guards it reverently and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed it draws from this sole deposit of faith. (10)

Article 2

Covenants Old and New

We are accustomed to seeing the Bible divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. As you read in the previous article, it has taken many hundreds of years for the Bible to be organized and collected in this way. To understand the meaning of Sacred Scripture, we must see the Old Testament and the New Testament as one book, one Word of God. The Old Testament prepares for the coming of Christ in the New Testament; the New Testament fulfills the promises of God made in the Old Testament. Thus we can say that, in reality, "All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, 'because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ'" (Hugh of Saint Victor, quoted in *CCC,* 134).

When Jesus, the Word of God, walked among us, he clarified the relationship between the Scripture of the Old **Covenant** and himself as the inauguration of the New Covenant, the new Revelation of God in his only Son: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). In Jesus Christ the Old Covenant and the New Covenant were brought together. The writings of the Old Covenant were fulfilled in him, and Jesus revealed their ultimate meaning. Through him the sins of all, including sins against the Old Covenant, were redeemed. While Jesus walked among us, the writings of the New Covenant, the New Testament, remained to be written.



Jesus Christ: Pantocrator, © 1987 Br. Robert Lentz, OFM / Courtesy of Trinity Stores (www.trinitystores.com), (800.699.4482)

In this icon, Jesus is majestically portrayed as the Pantocrator (Greek for "Ruler of All"). He holds the Gospel of Matthew, and the quotation is based on Matthew 25:40 in the Parable of the Last Judgment.

Pray It!

Hear, O Israel!

In the *Shema* (pronounced sh-MA and meaning "hear" in Hebrew), Jews have, since the time of Moses, professed their faith in the one true God: "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The passage continues: "Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I [God] command you today" (6:5–6).

Sound familiar? Jesus himself quoted the Shema, adding, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31), also from the Law (see Leviticus 19:18).

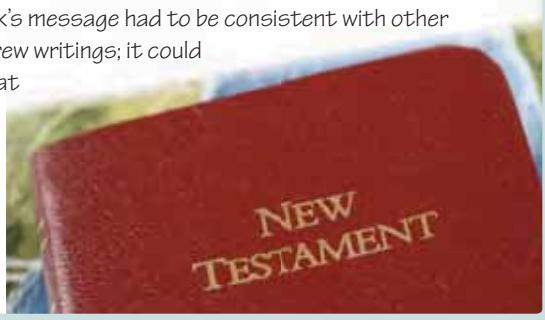
Our faith in the same God, the one and only true God, leads us to him as "our first origin and our ultimate goal" (*CCC*, 229), preferring nothing to him, and accepting no substitute for him.

Many Jews say the Shema every morning and evening. Try it yourself, adding Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors. It may very well strengthen your faith.

Acceptance into the New Testament Canon

Who decided whether a certain piece of writing or letter could be accepted as authentic Christian teaching and included in the canon of the New Testament? These matters were finally decided by the leaders of the early Church, called *episcopi* (Greek for "overseers") or, as we say now, bishops. The bishops confirmed what the Holy Spirit had inspired in the worshipping community through the use and acceptance of these books. They relied on apostolic Tradition, as we mentioned earlier, to decide whether a book should be included in the canon (see *CCC*, 120). Within this Tradition these four criteria were used, and a particular book had to meet all four to be included in the New Testament:

1. **apostolic** A book had to be based on the preaching and teaching of the Apostles and their closest companions and disciples.
2. **community acceptance** If the Christians of an important Christian community accepted a book as valid and consistent with their beliefs and practices, it would be accepted into the canon.
3. **liturgical** If Christians were using this book in their liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist, then the early bishops concluded that it was valid for growth in prayer and in faith.
4. **consistent** A book's message had to be consistent with other Christian and Hebrew writings; it could not contradict what was already accepted as the Word of God.



Two Covenants, One Bible

Through Apostolic Tradition, the Old Testament and the New Testament were eventually joined together as we have them now. But this in itself was a long process that began with the Greek translation of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, called the Septuagint. These writings, the major part of what we now know as the Old Testament, had been written on scrolls. In the second century AD, the Church put the Septuagint into **codices**, or books. (The singular

is *codex*.) With the Septuagint the Church also included apostolic writings about Jesus Christ, also written in Greek, which had been accepted as part of the canon. In this way the Old Law and the New Law were literally bound together in one book.

codices
Book-like manuscripts that replaced scrolls.

By including the treasured apostolic writings in the codices, along with Jewish Scripture, the Church affirmed the validity of God's Revelation in the Old Covenant. In doing so it declared that the one God who created the world and established the Old Covenant with the Jews was the same God who sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save us and to establish with us the New Covenant in his Blood. This covenant will last forever. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to the Chosen People over the centuries.

The early Church recognized that in order to understand the marvels that God has accomplished through Jesus Christ, one must understand them in the light of God's self-communication to the Israelites, his Chosen People. The coming of Christ did not negate the previous covenants that God has made with his people. Christ's coming did not negate the covenant with Abraham and his descendants, through which God made a people for himself and revealed his law through Moses. The Church also recognized that, in Jesus Christ, God had joined both the Old and the New Covenants together, that they were truly one, and that they belonged together in one collection of books. ✝

Live It!

The Book of Our Lives

When the bishops of the early Church assembled the New Testament, they used four criteria to decide if a book was valid. In the same way, we can apply similar criteria to the "book" of our own Christian lives. Are we living an apostolic life? Are we being true to our beliefs and practices as members of our local parish community? Do we celebrate the liturgy faithfully? Are our lives consistent with the Word of God? Are our lives a book of truth that anyone can read? As Saint Paul wrote to the early Christians, "You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all, shown to be a letter of Christ . . . written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God" (2 Corinthians 3:2–3).

Article 3

An Overview of the New Testament Books

Gospels
Translated from a Greek word meaning "good news," referring to the four books attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, "the principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word" (*CCC,* 125) Jesus Christ.

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament are divided into five categories, as follows: the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline letters (including the letters attributed to Paul), the catholic epistles, and the Book of Revelation. The categories and the books they contain are listed for you in the chart on page 19.

The Gospels

The **Gospels** of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are central to the Sacred Scriptures because Jesus Christ is at their center. They are our primary source for all that is revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus. Because they reveal and proclaim Jesus as our incarnate God and Savior, they are called *evangelion* (meaning "good news" in Greek). The writers of the Gospels are known as the Evangelists. (We also use this word in a contemporary sense when we call a preacher of the Gospel an evangelist.) Our English word *gospel* comes from the Old English word *godspel*, which means "good tidings." In Luke's Gospel, when the angels appear to the shepherds, they say: "I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord" (Luke 2:10–11). Fundamentally, the Good News—the *evangelion*, the *godspel*, the Gospel—is Jesus himself.

The four Gospels are similar but not identical, and we will discuss their similarities and differences in detail later in this student book. Each of the Gospels was written by a separate Evangelist in a different historical situation and was originally written for a particular audience. Yet all four agree on the essential truths concerning the mystery of Christ, including his Incarnation, life, Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

This scene of the Birth of Christ is from a Latin manuscript from the Abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés, France. Decorated manuscripts are known as illuminated manuscripts. The paintings within them "light up" the text.

The New Testament		
Category	**Books**	
Gospels	Matthew Mark	Luke John
The Early Church (Luke)	The Acts of the Apostles	
The Letters of Paul	Romans First Corinthians Second Corinthians Galatians	Philippians First Thessalonians Philemon
Letters Attributed to Paul	Ephesians Colossians	Second Thessalonians
The Pastoral Letters (Attributed to Paul)	First Timothy Second Timothy	Titus
A Sermon (anonymous author)	Hebrews	
The Catholic Epistles	James First Peter Second Peter First John	Second John Third John Jude
The World to Come	The Book of Revelation	

The Acts of the Apostles

The Acts of the Apostles is considered a "sequel" to the Gospel of Luke because in it Luke continues his account of the saving work of Jesus, now extended through the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the **Gentiles**. The Acts of the Apostles recounts the spread of the early Church from its origins in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, to the limits of the known world, to the center of the known universe: the city of Rome. Again we discuss this book in greater detail in articles to come.

Gentile
A non-Jewish person. In Scripture the Gentiles were those outside the covenant, those who did not know how to fulfill God's will. Without this knowledge, they could not be in right relationship with God, as so were considered "unholy" or "unclean." In the New Testament, Saint Paul and other evangelists reached out to the Gentiles, baptizing them into the family of God.

The Pauline Letters

The compilation of letters in the New Testament is extensive and varied. There are twenty-one in all. They are all called letters, but some are more like short treatises on Christian life and faith. Thirteen of these are attributed to the Apostle Paul, although Paul is thought to have written only seven: First and Second Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, First Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Letters Attributed to Paul

The letters attributed to Paul but thought not to have been written by Paul are Ephesians, Colossians, First and Second Timothy, Titus, and Second Thessalonians. Among these, the three pastoral letters are so named because they were addressed to Timothy and Titus, young pastors, or shepherds, whom Paul had mentored and had put in charge of the churches at Ephesus and Crete. These letters are concerned with pastoral issues and situations that warrant Paul's advice and counsel.

The Letter to the Hebrews was once thought to be written by Paul, and, after it was accepted into the canon of the New Testament, it was placed at the end of the letters attributed to Paul. However, the consensus among modern scholars is that is it a non-Pauline letter. It has been assumed to have been written for Jewish Christians, but its author and audience are not known.

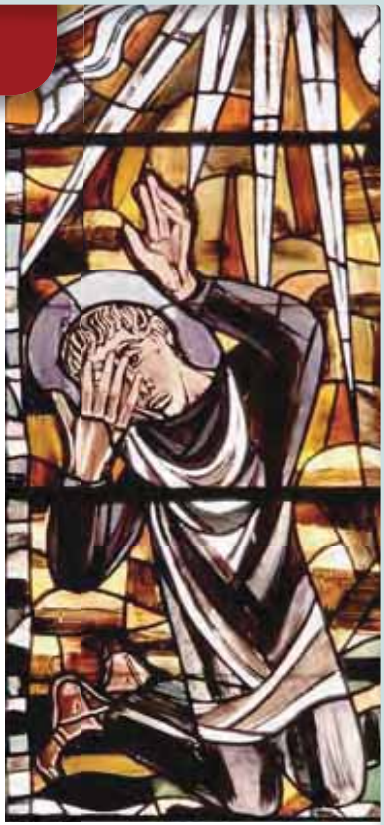
The Catholic Epistles

The other seven letters were written by other writers and are called the catholic epistles. The word *catholic* here means "universal." These letters were not addressed to one particular local church but to a wider Christian audience—to all the faithful of the universal Church.

The Book of Revelation

The New Testament collection ends with a much read, much quoted, and much misunderstood book called the Book of Revelation. When we discuss this book, we will consider its author, its intended audience, and its literary style. For now we can note that the Bible begins with a picture of the vast

The Conversion of Saint Paul



Saul (or to use his Roman name, Paul) was a fervent and observant Jew, and was totally against this new version of Judaism (as he saw it at the time) that had sprung up around a belief in Jesus as Savior, Messiah, and Risen Lord. He had held the coats of those who stoned the martyr and first deacon Stephen to death, and he joined with those who were going from town to town, capturing these believers in Jesus and putting them in prison.

Saul was on his way to Damascus to do just that when he was confronted by Jesus himself, who asked him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" This question was the beginning of Saul's conversion. (You may want to read accounts of this incident in the Acts of the Apostles 9:1–19, 22:3–21, and in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 15:8–11.) After a period of prayer and study, Paul (who used his Roman name when dealing with the Gentile world) began to preach, teach, and write the letters that bear his name. He became the man and the saint we know as the Apostle to the Gentiles—those non-Jews who had never known the one true God. Through Paul they found God in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

and empty universe, on the verge of Creation, and ends with an affirmation of hope for a New Creation, in the lives of the original audience, in our lives, and in the future: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). All of God's Revelation, from the creation of the world to the hope for the world to come, points to Jesus Christ.

The Stages of New Testament Formation

Let us step back a moment. As we ponder these twenty-seven books bound together in the New Testament, we might well wonder about the process by which they were formed. How did they come to be?

In general, we can say that the New Testament was formed in three broad stages:

1. **The life and teaching of Jesus** Jesus lived and taught among us until his Ascension.
2. **The oral tradition** The Apostles handed on what Jesus had said and done, in that fuller understanding brought about by the Resurrection of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. **The written books** The inspired authors selected certain elements from what had been handed on, either in oral or written form, often with synthesis and explanation (that is, in a process of editing), to bring us the truth about Jesus (see *CCC,* 126). These written accounts eventually became what we know today as the New Testament. We consider the formation of the New Testament in greater detail in future articles. ✝

Part Review

1. How does God communicate himself to us throughout history?
2. How did God communicate himself to us most fully and finally?
3. Why do we revere and venerate Sacred Scripture?
4. What is biblical inspiration?
5. What are the two other elements needed (besides Scripture itself) for the foundation of scriptural interpretation?
6. What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?
7. What is the significance of binding together the Old Testament and the New Testament into one volume?
8. What are the four criteria for the acceptance of a book into the New Testament canon?
9. What are the two stages of New Testament formation that precede the written accounts?

Part 2

Understanding the New Testament

Even when speaking the same language with someone who grew up in the same country, the same culture, and perhaps even the same family, communication can be difficult. Interpretation of words often depends on not only their literal meaning but also the inflection or tone of the human voice that utters them. Even a simple affirmation can have many different meanings. A short comment like "Yeah, right!" can be enthusiastic. It also can be edged with sarcasm: "Yeah, *right!*" In this example, the difference can be suggested by printing the sarcastic remark in italic type. But to be certain of the meaning of this phrase, we would really need to know more about the *context* of the conversation. We would need to know the speakers and their particular cultural or historical situation. We might need to know the subject matter or the concerns of the speakers in this instance. Are they speaking in figurative language? Are they engaged in a serious conversation or merely joking with one another?

As you can imagine, interpreting a language that is not our own, that is written rather than spoken, and, moreover, written in an ancient language that has its own conventions and literary forms, is even more difficult. For this reason the Church encourages Scripture scholars to study life in Israel at the time of Jesus and the Greco-Roman culture in which the New Testament was written, in order to establish the context for these ancient writings. In the articles in this part, we benefit from this contextualist approach as we continue to study the New Testament.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 4: "Context: Literary Form" (page 25)
- Article 5: "Context: Historical and Cultural Situation" (page 29)
- Article 6: "Context: Scriptural Development" (page 32)
- Article 7: "Sacred Scripture: A Living Word for Today" (page 36)

Article 4

Context: Literary Form

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You may remember that when we discussed the role of inspiration in the writing of Scripture, we said that the human authors of Scripture were not robots and that the Holy Spirit did not dictate Scripture word for word. Rather, the scriptural writers chose both their wording and the form in which their writing was expressed, all the while remaining true to the message of God, which was their reason for writing in the first place. In interpreting their writings, we must be attentive first of all to what God wishes to reveal for our salvation. But, because of the wide variety of **literary forms** found in the Bible, it is important that we understand what they are and how they are used. Such an understanding is important to understanding the core truth that God wishes to convey through the writings of the inspired authors. As *Divine Revelation* declared:

> The interpreters of sacred scripture, if they are to ascertain what God has wished to communicate to us, should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words.
>
> In determining the intention of the sacred writers, attention must be paid, among other things, to *literary genres*.
>
> . . . Hence the exegete must look for that meaning which the sacred writers, in given situations and granted the circumstances of their time and culture, intended to express and did in fact express, through the medium of a contemporary literary form. (12)

literary forms (genres)
Different kinds of writing determined by their literary technique, content, tone, and purpose (how the author wants the reader to be affected).

Literary Forms Today

You are probably already familiar with literary forms through your own study of literature. These forms include history, poetry, sermon, parable, biography, fable, science fiction, and so on. And it should be no surprise to you that literary form affects the meaning of a piece of writing.

You discern this meaning every time you read a newspaper or surf the Web for news and articles. For example, a news story is supposed to be objective and inform you of facts: who, what, where, and when. An editorial (usually at the back of the first section of a newspaper) is commentary. It is based on the news but is supposed to take a stand; the author tries to persuade you to his or her point of view. A sports story emphasizes a person's talent in a particular sport and usually fails to mention that person's character flaws. A comic strip can report a conversation between characters with no claim at all that such a conversation ever took place.

We might wonder if future generations will correctly interpret our varied literary forms in media today. Is a comedy show that is based on news events the "real news," or is it commentary? Is a radio talk show that discusses current events "real news," or is it an editorial, an effort at persuasion? As contemporary watchers, listeners, and readers, we can usually tell the difference. But we may wonder what these media will look like to researchers many years from now.

Literary Forms in Scripture

Understanding the literary forms found in Scripture can help to prevent misunderstanding and help us to discover what the inspired author intended to teach. It is for this

Live It!

Find the Literary Form

As you learned in this part, because the Bible contains many different literary forms, it is important to recognize the literary form of each book. Get acquainted with the New Testament. Of the literary forms listed below, how many can you find in the New Testament?

- an historical account
- a personal letter
- a teaching lecture
- a book of advice
- a set of prayers
- an exhortation
- an apocalyptic writing

Which of these is the easiest to recognize? Which is the easiest to understand?

reason that it is essential for us to learn to consider the context of literary form when reading any book in the Bible. As we discuss each New Testament book, we will include a discussion of the literary forms within that particular book.

It is important to note, however, that Sacred Scripture is not just another form of literature. It must be read and interpreted in light of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who through the Holy Spirit opens our minds and hearts to "the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words" (*Divine Revelation*, 12). Even with our use of literary and historical contexts, only the Holy Spirit can help us to fully understand Scripture, for it is his work and he is its author.

literary convention
A defining feature of a particular literary form. An example would be beginning a letter with the greeting "Dear."

apocalyptic literature
A literary form that uses events and dramatic symbolic language to offer hope to a people in crisis.

Literary Conventions

Different literary forms often make use of particular literary conventions. A **literary convention** is a defining feature of a particular literary form. For instance, if a story begins, "Once upon a time . . ." you immediately conclude that the story you will hear will not be based in history but will be a fairy tale. If you receive a letter that begins "Dear . . ." you know that this is just the way people begin a letter; it is not an expression of special affection for you. Just so, when the author of a book says that he has had a vision in which he saw a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, you need to understand the conventions of **apocalyptic literature** in order to understand just what that author is teaching. This kind of writing, using highly dramatic and symbolic language, is found in the Book of Revelation, and we will discuss it further when we consider that particular book.

Understanding Literary Forms and Conventions

A common presumption that is often made when reading the New Testament is that the inspired writers report events just as we would have witnessed them had we been present when the events occurred. However, biblical authors are not historians or reporters intending simply to recount what exactly happened. Rather, they are ministers of the Word, intending to teach the significance of Christ in the lives of

those to whom they are writing, including us. In order to understand the richness of their teachings, we will always have to consider their words in the context of the literary forms and conventions they have chosen to use. ✝

The War of the Worlds

Widespread panic followed the broadcast of a radio program called "The War of the Worlds" on October 30, 1938. The program was a radio play adapted from a novel of the same name by H. G. Wells. The writer and narrator of this play, Orson Welles, was a dramatic actor and later, filmmaker. The plot revolved around an invasion from Mars, reported in a realistic manner from Grovers Mill, New Jersey, and included realistic interviews with "astronomers" and "the Secretary of the Interior." Listeners who tuned in from the beginning understood that this was a radio play. Others, who found the show as they surfed through stations with the radio dial, thought that the narrator was a real broadcaster and that the reporting and interviews were real.

Although the play was set in New England, panic ensued in many places throughout the nation as listeners discovered the program on their radios. When the radio play reported the evacuation of New York City, people in other cities began to evacuate as well. Others called their local police, radio stations, and newspapers. Some went to their churches to pray, thinking that this was the end of civilization as they knew it.

Gradually, as the truth became known, the panic died down. It was certainly a tribute to the compellingly realistic writing of Orson Welles. But it also points to the importance of knowing the literary form of the work you are reading (or listening to)—in this case, not news, not history, but a fictional radio play.

Article 5

Context: Historical and Cultural Situation

As you may remember, in the first article in this student book, we discussed the Revelation of God and biblical inspiration. We noted that in Scripture, God used the natural gifts of specially chosen human beings to communicate the truths, without error, that we need to know for our salvation. The Bible is "the book" we turn to when we want to understand the truth about ourselves, our lives, our world, and our future. We do not turn to the Bible for answers to all questions we may have—questions about science, for example. The inspired authors of the Bible were not scientists or historians or reporters. Their aim was to teach the truth that God wanted to convey through Scripture.

However, the inspired writers do use the events and culture of their times in their writing. They may write something by way of explanation or application that reflects a presumption (something *presumed* to be true) of the time or circumstances in which they are writing. We do this ourselves. We say, "The sun will rise tomorrow at 7 AM." Scientifically speaking, the sun does not rise. Earth revolves around its axis in relationship to the sun, and when our part of Earth reaches a certain point in revolution, the light of the sun shines on us. But when we describe the sunrise, we say nothing about revolving. Even when we know the scientific truth, we still hold to our conventional way of speaking.

In a similar way, the facts of an event or incident that the inspired writers relate may even, in our time, be seen as scientifically false. For example, scientifically speaking, the world cannot have been created in six days, as the account in Genesis relates. But the author of Genesis was not writing about science. The author's sole aim was to explain the world and human origins as created by God out of love. Thus the literary form, or genre, of the Book of Genesis is not a scientific report but rather an account created to express a truth of faith. If we insist on looking for "scientific truth" in the Bible, we will not

moral truth
A truth dealing with the goodness or evil of human acts, attitudes, and values.

be respecting literary form and will be missing the truths of faith that God would have us know—about him and about ourselves. When reading the Bible, we must always ask, "What is the inspired writer trying to teach?" It will be something about God and our relationship with him.

Does the Bible Support Slavery?

When we read the Bible, we must learn to separate what is being taught from what the writer is presuming is true, due to his own historical or cultural situation. One good example is the issue of slavery.

During the Civil War, people both in favor of and opposed to slavery used Scripture to add authority to their arguments. A person who believed slavery was moral might have said: "Scripture teaches that slavery is fine. In Ephesians we read: 'Slaves, be obedient to your human masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not only when being watched, as currying favor, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart' (6:5–6). This passage illustrates that it is the will of God that we have slaves and that our slaves should obey us." Is this a legitimate use of Scripture? Is the inspired author of Ephesians teaching that slavery is moral? Let us look more deeply into this letter to find the answer.

Finding the Moral Truth

The author of Ephesians is teaching an important **moral truth**, a truth about good and evil, but that truth is not that slavery is moral. Rather, the truth that the author is teaching appears earlier in the letter, when it is stated that the Ephesians should "be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God" (Ephesians 5:1–2). The author then applies that truth to the social structure existing at the time. He does not ask if the social structure is just. He simply applies his spiritual insight to that structure.

Remember, Ephesians is a letter. A letter is written to a specific audience in a specific setting. What is said in a letter depends on the people to whom the letter is being sent and what they need to hear. The Ephesians had slaves. That was a fact of life and not one that the author of Ephesians

questions. Rather, the author recognizes the existence of the Ephesians' social structure and applies his spiritual insight within that social context.

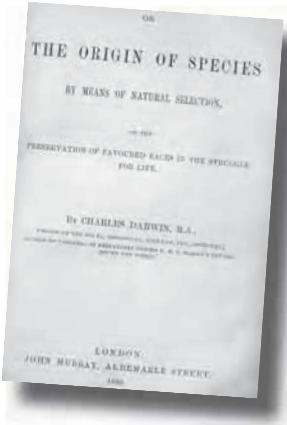
In teaching his spiritual insight, the author of Ephesians does not address only the behavior of slaves. He applies his core teaching about the necessity of love to husbands and wives, to children and parents, and finally to slaves and masters. Masters are told to "act in the same way toward them [i.e. their slaves], and stop bullying, knowing that both they and you have a Master in heaven and that with him there is no partiality" (6:9).

Science and the Bible

Because God is the source of all truth, there can be no contradiction between the truths of religion necessary for our salvation and the truths of science. However, this does not mean these truths are identical. It is sometimes difficult for us to clearly define these differing truths in our minds when reading the Bible. What is a presumption about a scientific or social matter in the Bible, and what is its core spiritual teaching? An example from history might help.

When a teacher in Tennessee taught Darwin's theory of evolution in a public school in the 1920s, he was brought to trial for teaching something contrary to Scripture. (The teacher, John Scopes, was found guilty and fined one hundred dollars—about one thousand dollars today—but the verdict was overturned on a technicality.) Unfortunately, this trial popularized the "science versus religion" debate, implying that if you pursued scientific learning, you could not also embrace the truths of Scripture. In this case, a scientific theory—the relationship of material forms to one another—is not an area of biblical study. It is a scientific question, not a spiritual one.

When a biblical author touches on such topics, he is expressing a presumption of his time, not a teaching. We do not turn to Scripture for answers to scientific questions. Rather, we turn to Scripture for answers related to matters of faith and morals: for example, answers about God, his purpose for us, his plans for us, and how we are to live our lives in his love.


ON
THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES
BY MEANS OF NATURAL SELECTION,
OR THE
PRESERVATION OF FAVOURED RACES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.
By CHARLES DARWIN, M.A.,
LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

Now, with this information in hand, we are prepared to respond to whether it is a legitimate use of Scripture to use this passage from Ephesians to support the morality of slavery. The correct response is no. The author of Ephesians makes this statement as part of an *application* of a core teaching, not the core teaching itself. He is *applying* the core teaching (love) to the current historical and cultural setting as it is. In his cultural and historical setting, slavery was the norm.

The author of Ephesians remains silent on whether a social order that includes slavery is moral or immoral. We may wonder why this is so. Part of the reason is that the author wanted to spread the message of Christ to his society as it was, and not as it should be or could be. Remember, the author of the Letter to the Ephesians was writing in the early years of Christianity. The letter's message of universal love would take many more years to infiltrate human society. We can look to our own country as an example. Slavery was not abolished in the United States until 1865. Segregation, the legal separation of people by race, was permitted by law in schools until 1954 and was only gradually overcome in other areas of life through the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and many others, beginning in the 1960s. Still today racial prejudice can be a factor in our societal relationships. Moreover, slavery itself is not unheard of in many parts of the world, especially the enslavement of young women and children. The message of Christ's love has still not yet reached the hearts of all.

As we look at the individual books in the New Testament, we will explore other instances where it is important to understand the beliefs of the time and historical circumstances in which Scripture was written. ✝

Article 6 Context: Scriptural Development

In the article "An Overview of the New Testament Books," we gave a brief overview of the development of the New Testament. It notes three stages: (1) the life and teachings of Jesus, (2) the oral tradition, and (3) the written books.

The Scripture of the Jewish people, later adopted into the canon of the Old Testament, underwent a similar process

in their development. This process began with Abraham around 1850 BC. The words and actions of the salvific events of the Old Testament were passed on through oral tradition and then finally written down in the various books that were accepted into the canon of the Old Testament.

Teachings in the Old Testament lay the foundation for what is revealed in the New Testament. The New Testament completes or fulfills the teachings of the Old Testament: "The Old Testament prepares for the New and the New Testament fulfills the Old; the two shed light on each other; both are true Word of God" (*CCC,* 140). Thus to truly understand Scripture, we cannot look at one small piece on its own. All must be viewed in the context of the truth God reveals to us over time throughout all of Scripture, including the New Testament, especially in the final Revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ. When we read Scripture, we read it, Old and New Testament alike, through the lens that is Christ.

We owe the Jewish people a debt of gratitude for preserving the Word of God, the Sacred Scripture. Here a rabbi uses a yad (Hebrew for "pointer") to mark his place so that he will not soil or damage the scroll with his fingers.

A Fuller Understanding

Let's look at one example of a truth in Scripture that is fully revealed through the Old and New Testaments. Imagine that you are having a conversation with a friend who is a Christian, one who believes that Scripture is the Word of God and who wants to obey that Word. The two of you are discussing the way God would have us treat someone who has done us harm. The friend says: "Scripture allows us to give as good as we get. It says right here in Exodus, 'But if injury ensues, you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe' (21:23–25)." Has your friend proved that God would have us harm our enemy as our enemy has harmed us?

Someone who considers the process of the development of Scripture and God's full and final Revelation in Christ would say no. Why? Because, although this passage in

Exodus represents an important insight on the road to becoming loving people, the passage does not represent the fullness of truth on this subject. The meaning of the passage must be discerned in light of the whole of Scripture, especially the teaching and saving works of Jesus Christ.

The "eye for an eye" passage is certainly a positive step in the process of Revelation. This passage teaches *against* revenge. It teaches that "payback" has its limits, and that we cannot do *worse* to someone than was done to us. However, a fuller understanding of what God would have us do appears in Matthew's Gospel, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

"But I Say to You"

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains that he has not come to abolish the Law and the prophets but to fulfill them (see Matthew 5:17). As an example, Jesus quotes the very passage from Exodus that we have been discussing. He says: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well" (Matthew 5:38–39). This later teaching does not contradict the first; it stands on the shoulders of the first. It takes us another step in understanding just what is required of us in loving our neighbor.

We see, then, that it is very important that we consider the context of particular passages. If we do not consider this context, we are in danger of taking a partial truth and thinking of it as the whole truth. To receive the fullness of Revelation that is offered us through Jesus Christ, we must consider every teaching in the context of the whole Bible as well as the whole of Tradition. As we continue our study of the books of the New Testament, we will further explore the context of the truths God reveals to us over time throughout all of Scripture. ✞

Symbol of the Mountain

The Gospel writers included elements of the natural world in their presentations of the life and message of Jesus. In the Gospels, particularly in Matthew, the mountain has a symbolic meaning. Many scholars see parallels between Moses and Jesus: As Moses encounters God and receives the Law on a mountain, Mount Sinai, so Jesus teaches the New Law from the mountain; Moses teaches the Ten Commandments, and Jesus adds to them the Beatitudes of the New Law (see Matthew, chapter 5). In the Gospel of Matthew, the commissioning of the Apostles, at the end of the Gospel, takes place on a mountain.

It is symbolically significant that the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elias appear with Jesus, takes place on a mountain in all three synoptic Gospels (see Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:1–3, Luke 9:28), because in the Semitic culture, mountains symbolize closeness to God. The Mount of Olives is thought to be the mountain where Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. The garden at Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed before he was taken captive, is at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Mount Zion, the eastern hill of Jerusalem, was the site of David's palace and the Temple. Its elevation made it a natural fortress and a focus for the worship of God.

Article 7

Sacred Scripture: A Living Word for Today

analogy of faith
The coherence of individual doctrines with the whole of Revelation. In other words, as each doctrine is connected with Revelation, each doctrine is also connected with all other doctrines.

senses of Scripture
The senses of Scripture are the literal and spiritual senses; the spiritual senses are the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical.

So far in this part, we have discussed three ways of understanding Scripture: its literary form, its historical and cultural situation, and its development. If we ignore these three elements, we have a very good chance of misunderstanding Scripture.

Yet these three elements do not suffice for our understanding of Scripture. For a complete understanding of the meaning of Scripture, we must look to the Holy Spirit. The overarching principle of understanding and interpreting Scripture is that "sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind" (*Divine Revelation*, 12). Yet how can we be sure that we are interpreting Scripture as its Divine Author, the Holy Spirit, would want us to understand it? Three principles guide us in interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Holy Spirit:

1. We must recognize the unity of the whole of Scripture. Because Scripture reveals God's plan for us, and because Jesus Christ is the center of that plan, we must discern the meaning of Scripture based on the complete picture of God's plan to save us through Jesus Christ.
2. We must understand Scripture in light of the Tradition of the Church through the centuries. As the Fathers of the Church said, "Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church's heart" (*CCC,* 113). The Church carries Scripture within her Tradition and relies on the guidance of the Holy Spirit for spiritual understanding of the Word of God.
3. We must respect the **analogy of faith**, the unity of individual doctrines, or teachings, within the whole of Revelation, and the interconnectedness between doctrines, which are congruent among themselves and also support one another. To guide us in interpreting Scripture according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we depend on the Magisterium of the Church—that is, the Pope and bishops in union with him who form the teaching office of the Church. The Pope and bishops continually guide our contemporary understanding of Scripture through their teachings. Only the teaching office

Don't get stuck on difficult passages when reading Scripture. Keep reading until you find a passage that speaks to you. You can always go back and ask a priest or teacher about passages that you found hard to understand.

of the Church can make a definitive judgment on what Scripture means for our faith and moral development.

The Senses of Scripture

As we encounter Scripture at Mass or in our private reading, particular tools of interpretation can be helpful in our understanding. These tools have come down to us from the Tradition of the Church. They are called the **senses of Scripture**.

The first sense is the literal sense. The literal sense is what the words of Scripture actually mean, in the contexts we have already discussed: literary form, historical or cultural context, and the development of Scripture. The Pontifical Biblical Commission describes the literal sense as "that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors" and explains that "[s]ince it is the fruit of inspiration, this sense is also intended by God, as principal author" ("The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church"). All the other senses of Scripture are based on the literal meaning (see *CCC,* 116).

Because Scripture is the living Word, in addition to the literal sense, there is a spiritual sense. This spiritual sense has been developed by the Tradition of the Church and is often the reason certain Scripture passages are chosen for various celebrations or seasons of the year. The Pontifical Biblical Commission describes the spiritual sense as "the meaning

Pray It!

Pray the Psalms

One entire book of the Bible, the Book of Psalms, is essentially a book of prayers. The Psalms range from cries of lamentation to songs of praise and wonder, prayers for forgiveness, and poems of thanksgiving.

Jesus himself regularly used the Psalms for prayer. When tempted in the desert, Jesus uses Psalm 91:11–12 to rebuke the Tempter. During his Crucifixion he prays Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (verse 1).

When you can't find the words to pray, do as Jesus did: pray the Psalms.

- for comfort—Psalm 23
- for forgiveness—Psalm 130
- for hope—Psalm 123
- in sadness—Psalms 42–43
- for help—Psalm 121
- for guidance—Psalm 139

typology
The discernment of God's work in the Old Testament as a prefiguration of what he accomplished through Jesus Christ in the fullness of time. Typology illuminates the unity of God's plan in the two Testaments, but does not devalue the Old Covenant.

expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and of the new life that flows from it" ("The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church").

Three kinds of spiritual senses can be applied to Scripture: the *allegorical* sense, the *moral* sense, and the *anagogical* sense. Using the allegorical sense of Scripture in the account of the Israelites' crossing the Red Sea, for example, the Church sees not only the literal meaning but also the added allegorical meaning of the Red Sea as an image of Baptism. We "cross over" the Red Sea into the "Promised Land" of the Church when we are baptized. The discernment of God's work in the Old Testament as a prefiguration of what he accomplished through Jesus Christ is called **typology**. As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in his apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010), "the entire Old Testament is a path to Jesus Christ" (38).

Using the moral sense of Scripture, the Church encourages us to act on the instructions and encouragement we find in Scripture to do good and to act justly. Using the anagogical sense of Scripture (in Greek, *anagoge* means "leading"), we are led from considering scriptural events to considering events in our lives that are significant for our eternal salvation. For example, when we read about the New Jerusalem in the Scriptures, we are led to think about the Church on earth as that New Jerusalem, leading us to the heavenly Jerusalem (see *CCC,* 117).

The meaning of Scripture always begins with the literal. However, as you read spiritual books, commentaries, and the writings of Fathers of the Church, you may meet some of these other important ways that the Church interprets Scripture.

The approach to biblical interpretation that pays attention to context in an effort to understand the literal, and therefore also the spiritual senses of Scripture, is sometimes referred to as the contextualist approach. It can be summarized as the approach through which our understanding of the literal sense of Scripture is informed by scientific and historical knowledge. This understanding informs the spiritual senses of Scripture—the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical—with their deepest symbolic meaning. A contextualist approach simply teaches us how to relate the truths of faith to science. If Scripture is studied in a

What Did Scripture Mean to Jesus?

The Gospels present Jesus as knowing and loving Scripture. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus, at the age of twelve, stays behind in the Temple to sit "in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers" (2:46–47). Surely the topic of their conversations must have been the Word of God and its meaning in our lives.

In the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus had fasted and prayed for forty days and nights in the desert and was hungry, he was tempted by the devil. Satan suggests that Jesus turn the stones into bread. Jesus replies, "One does not live by bread alone, / but by every word that comes forth from / the mouth of God" (4:4). This is almost an exact quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3.

In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, when Jesus is on the cross, he calls out to his Father, in the words of Psalm 22, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" (Mark 15:34), which is Aramaic for, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The New Testament was written in Greek, and it is rare that Jesus is pictured speaking Aramaic, Jesus' native language. But these words attributed to Jesus in both Mark and Matthew's Gospels have been treasured through the ages.

We might note that Psalm 22 ends in triumph and victory:

> And I will live for the LORD:
> my descendants will serve you.
> The generation to come will be told of the Lord,
> that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn
> the deliverance you have brought.
> (Verses 31–32)

We are that people. Through Jesus Christ we know that deliverance.

exegete
A biblical scholar attempting to interpret the meaning of biblical texts.

biblical exegesis
The critical interpretation and explanation of a biblical text.

contextualist manner, following the rules of sound exegesis, "there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason"[1] (*CCC*, 159). In other words, the truths revealed in the Bible will not conflict with the truths gleaned from science and history.

The Role of Exegetes

Biblical **exegetes** and scholars are necessary to the process of interpretation. They are scholars and teachers who study Scripture in all its aspects, seeking to discover and attend "to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words"[2] (*CCC*, 109). Their field of study is called **biblical exegesis**. This is the critical interpretation and explanation of a biblical text. In this sense, *critical* does not mean "fault-finding" but means a close and thorough investigation of a particular biblical text. Besides studying the contexts of literary form, historical and cultural situation, and development, biblical exegetes must also ground their interpretations in the Tradition of the Church and the teaching of the Magisterium in order to interpret Scripture as the living Word of God for us today.

Scripture in My Life

The following are some important questions we can ask about Scripture: Why read Scripture? How does Scripture help me in my life? in my relationship with Christ? in my faith? How does Scripture help me to live the way God wants me to live? What should be my attitude toward Scripture as I hear the Word of God read at Mass and in the Sacraments, or as I read Scripture privately?

Catholic Wisdom

Dialogue with the Word

St. Jerome said: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." It is therefore important that every Christian live in contact and in personal dialogue with the Word of God given to us in Sacred Scripture. . . . We must not read Sacred Scripture as a word of the past but as the Word of God that is also addressed to us, and we must try to understand what it is that the Lord wants to tell us. (Pope Benedict XVI, "General Audience")

First, accept Scripture in faith for what it is: the living Word of God. The author of Psalm 119 declares, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, / a light for my path" (verse 105). We can hear the words of Scripture as living words that are addressed specifically to us. Through faith and prayer and by putting what they teach us into practice, we can learn to respond more faithfully to God's call.

Second, meditate on Scripture. Meditation, from the Latin *meditatio,* literally means "to chew over." Whether reading or listening, a few words or sentences may strike you. Try to remember them, repeat them, learn from them. As you ponder them in faith and prayer, applying them to your own life, you will grow in understanding of God's will for you and your moral obligations to him and to others. When you are looking for guidance or support, these words, the Word of God to you, will spring to your heart and mind just when you need them.

Your Spiritual Journey

You may recall the time that Jesus was reading Scripture aloud in his home synagogue. He read from the Prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, / because he has anointed me / to bring glad tidings to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Then he declared what these words meant to him personally: "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). In other words, Jesus was saying that he is the Anointed One. Isaiah's words are living words of light that helped Jesus to name his understanding of his own mission.

You too can discern the steps in your spiritual journey by meditating on Scripture in faith and prayer and applying in your own life the truth about God and yourself that you discover along the way. God knows you through and through, and he loves you. He wants to communicate with you through the Word of Life, Christ, in Scripture. When you ponder Scripture in your heart and mind, asking "What is God calling me to do?" you will discover the Word that will give you life, purpose, and joy.

Remember, however, to consider Scripture in the light of the Church's Magisterium and in the various contexts of interpretation we have discussed. Even in private prayer and reading, no Scripture passage can be read in isolation but

only in the context of the fullness of Revelation opened to us in Jesus Christ through the Church. ✝

Part Review

1. Why is it important to understand the literary forms used in Scripture?
2. What are literary conventions?
3. Why is it important to know and understand the historical and cultural contexts in which the various books of Scripture were written?
4. For what kind of answers do we look to the Scriptures?
5. Give an example of a truth in Scripture that originates in the Old Testament and is fully revealed by Jesus Christ in the New Testament.
6. What are the three criteria by which we interpret Scripture according to the Holy Spirit?
7. Who makes the definitive judgment on what Scripture means?
8. What are the three spiritual senses of Scripture?
9. What role do exegetes play in the interpretation of the Scriptures?

Part 3

The New Testament and the Church

You may remember that old conundrum, What came first, the chicken or the egg? We might revise it a little to ask, What came first, the Church or the New Testament? The answer is not as complicated as the answer to the chicken-and-egg question. The simple truth is this: The Church came first. The Church, God's People, followers of Jesus Christ, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave birth to the New Testament.

Think back for a moment about some of the things you have learned about the Church, from a broad viewpoint: founded by Jesus Christ, sent to evangelize the nations, sent to spread the Good News of God's love and his salvation, headed by Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead, and guided by the Holy Spirit until the end of time.

This is the Church that, after the death and Resurrection of Christ, recalled all that Jesus had done and taught, and told and retold the events of his life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension until they were saved in writing. This is the Church that, under the leadership of the bishops, gathered the accounts together, verified them as authentic, read them in the liturgy, organized them into chapters and verses, saw that they were copied and saved by countless anonymous monks and nuns, and guarded them carefully through the centuries. This is the Church that when the printing press was invented, printed the Word of God, translated it, distributed it, carried it to far-off lands, and continues to teach it and preach it to this day. Yes, the Church, led by the Holy Spirit, gave birth to the New Testament and has placed it in your hands. As you read the articles in this part, tracing the relationship between the Church and the New Testament, you may ask yourself: How will I respond to this New Testament? How will I pass along its teachings in my life?

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 8: "Jesus Christ, the Word of God" (page 44)
- Article 9: "The Bible and the *Lectionary*" (page 46)
- Article 10: "Scripture and the Eucharist" (page 51)

Article 8

Jesus Christ, the Word of God

Word of God
The entire deposit of truth revealed by God throughout history and transmitted through Scripture and Tradition, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks of the Word, Jesus Christ, the fullness of Revelation and the Eternal Son of God. Jesus Christ became man (the Word incarnate) for the sake of our salvation.

incarnate
From the Latin, meaning "to become flesh," referring to the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Divine Son of God, becoming man. In the Incarnation, Jesus Christ became truly man while remaining truly God.

In the previous articles, we briefly introduced all of Scripture as the inspired **Word of God**. We then focused on the New Testament and briefly explained its development. We also discussed the role of Apostolic Tradition and its relationship to Scripture and to the New Testament in particular.

Now let us take a step back, and consider what (or, we might better ask, who) is the source of both Scripture and Tradition, the source of both the Old and the New Testaments, and of the Apostolic Tradition, which the Church has preserved through the centuries? The answer is this: Jesus Christ, the Word of God. A more detailed answer would be: Jesus Christ, the *preexistent* and *incarnate* Word of God.

What does it mean to say that Jesus Christ is *preexistent*? If you recall what you already know about the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, you will remember that God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) existed from all eternity. The Son of God existed as the Word of God but without a human nature. It was only at the Annunciation, when Mary consented to be the Mother of God, that the Word of God, sent from the Father, took on a human nature through the power of the Holy Spirit, became **incarnate** (from the Latin *caro*, meaning "flesh"), and was named Jesus, meaning "God saves." Both Scripture and Tradition bear witness to this preexistent Word of God who became incarnate for our sake.

We declare our belief in the preexistent Word of God every time we proclaim the Nicene Creed. We assert in faith:

> I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
> the Only Begotten Son of God,
> born of the Father before all ages.
> God from God, Light from Light,
> true God from true God,
> begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
> through him all things were made.
> For us men and for our salvation
> he came down from heaven,
> and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate
> of the Virgin Mary,
> and became man.
>
> *(Roman Missal)*

Celebrating the Incarnation

During what season of the year do we celebrate the Incarnation? We focus on celebrating the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God at Christmas and during the Christmas season. The prayers of the Christmas Masses constantly remind us of the wonder of the Word Made Flesh and what it means to us. In this preface for Christmas, we pray to the Father:

> 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.
>
> (*Roman Missal*, "Preface I of the Nativity of the Lord")

The love of God does not end at the end of the Christmas season, for Jesus, the Word of God, is with us always.

Compare this proclamation of faith with the beginning (prologue) of the Gospel of John:

> In the beginning was the Word,
> and the Word was with God,
> and the Word was God.
> He was in the beginning with God.
> All things came to be through him,

and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

(1:1–5)

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In these first five verses, the Gospel of John introduces us to the preexistent Word of God, describes his life on earth as "the light of the human race" (1:3), and declares his Resurrection as the light that shines in the darkness, "and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5). The scholarship of biblical exegetes indicates that this prologue to John's Gospel (see 1:1–14) is, for the most part, an early Church hymn that was sung when Christians gathered for the breaking of the bread. You may want to read these fourteen verses for yourself, and recall them when you receive Communion, as you too are receiving the very Word of God in the Eucharist. ✝

Article 9 The Bible and the *Lectionary*

When we listen to the Word of God proclaimed at the Eucharist each Sunday, are we listening to readings from the Bible or from the *Lectionary*? Actually, we are listening to readings from both, because the readings from the ***Lectionary***, the official liturgical book from which the readings during the Liturgy of the Word at Mass are taken, are also readings from the Bible. The *Lectionary* is a collection of readings that have been selected from the Bible for proclamation during the Church's liturgies throughout the year. These scriptural readings proclaimed at Mass, and also in the other Sacraments, are short excerpts from the various books of the Bible, chosen to commemorate the various seasons of the liturgical year and the mysteries of Christ they celebrate. To understand the relationship between the Bible and the *Lectionary,* we need to understand the structure of the liturgical year.

The Liturgical Year

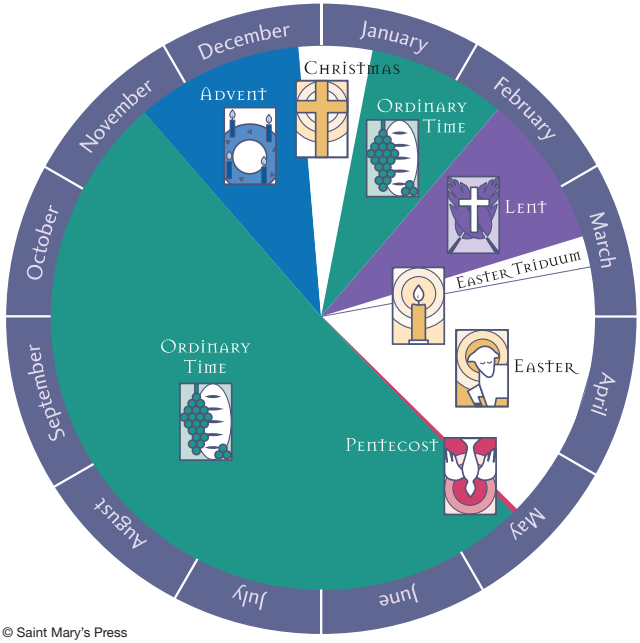
The **liturgical year** is the annual cycle of religious feasts and seasons that forms the context for the Church's worship. It can be compared to a great wheel, a wheel that carries us through the Church's seasons and into the mysteries of Christ of which we become a part. Each season of the liturgical year focuses on and celebrates a different aspect of the mystery of Christ. The liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent. During the seasons of Advent and Christmas, we celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ. The Christmas season continues to the Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord and is followed by Ordinary Time. During Ordinary Time, named because the weeks of this season are named with ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and so on), we celebrate the mystery of Christ in all its aspects. Lent follows this period of Ordinary Time. Lent is the season of preparation for the Solemnity of Easter, the pinnacle of the Church year. The Easter season continues until Pentecost, which ushers in a longer period of Ordinary Time. The liturgical year ends with the Solemnity of Christ the King. The following Sunday, the beginning of Advent, the liturgical year begins again.

Lectionary

The official liturgical book containing the readings of the Mass, the Gospels, the Responsorial Psalms, and the Gospel Acclamations.

liturgical year

The Church's annual cycle of religious feasts and seasons that celebrates the events and mysteries of Christ's birth, life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, and forms the context for the Church's worship.



What season of the year is the Church celebrating now? In what season of the liturgical year does your birthday fall? the birthdays of friends and family? How do you celebrate each season in your home?

How deeply we enter into the mysteries of Christ, how closely we assimilate them into our hearts and minds, is our own choice. The wheel of the liturgical year, year after year, brings us into contact with Christ through the liturgy. We can choose to participate on the surface, or we can plunge into the life-giving cycle set before us.

The Readings of the Liturgical Year

We might expect that year after year we would have the same readings for the same Sundays as we celebrate the same mysteries of Christ. But this is not the case. The *Lectionary* has been constructed to provide us with a rich and full selection of readings, year after year, in a three-year cycle. In each year of the cycle, we proclaim semicontinuous readings from the Gospels. (Semicontinuous means that we read from the same Gospel, in the order written, but some parts are skipped.) On the Sundays of cycle A, the Gospel readings come mainly from the Gospel of Matthew; in cycle B, from Mark; and in cycle C, from Luke. The Gospel of John is proclaimed during Lent, Holy Week, and in the Easter season in all three cycles and on five Sundays in cycle B.

On weekdays the *Lectionary* is organized in a two-year cycle, year I (odd-numbered years) and year II (even-numbered years). There are usually only two readings (an Old or New Testament reading and the Gospel) proclaimed at Mass on weekdays.

Live It!

Understanding Scripture

Sometimes passages in Scripture can be confusing. The author of the Second Letter of Peter admitted that some of Saint Paul's writings could be challenging: "In them there are some things hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). If you are having troubling "getting" the meaning of a verse, try reading another translation. Sometimes all it takes is a slightly different word to make the entire passage suddenly come alive for you.

The translation we use in the Mass is the New American Bible, but other translations include the Jerusalem Bible, the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, and the Good News Translation: Catholic Edition. You can also use a parallel Bible that has several Catholic translations printed side-by-side for easy comparison.

The proclamation of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. On Sundays two other readings lead up to the Gospel. The first is from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season, when this reading is from the Acts of the Apostles). This reading is selected to prepare us for the theme of the Gospel. The second reading is from a New Testament book other than the Gospels. This reading witnesses to the faith of the early Christians, and how they appropriated and lived out the Gospel in their own lives and in their own settings. We, of course, are called to do the same.

The *Sunday and Feast Day Lectionary*

The *Sunday and Feast Day Lectionary* was compiled by the Catholic Church. However, in recent years, thirteen churches and faith communities in North America (including Episcopalian, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Disciples of Christ churches) have developed their own cycle of Sunday and feast day readings, called the Revised Common Lectionary, based on this lectionary. The *Revised Common Lectionary* is not a separate bound book. It is simply a list of the biblical references to the readings for Sundays and feast days, many of them identical or similar to those given in the *Sunday and Feast Day Lectionary*. During the service the readings themselves are read directly from the Bible.

Because of these similarities, we now share the same calendar, liturgical seasons, and three-year-cycle of readings with these thirteen churches and faith communities. We read almost exactly the same Gospel readings on each Sunday. In addition, we all hear three readings proclaimed each Sunday. Because of the similarities in our liturgical readings, we enjoy much more unity at the table of God's Word than we have in the past.

A Gift from the Church

The *Lectionary* is a great gift from the Church to all her faithful. Listening to Scripture at Mass, in the thoughtful arrangement the *Lectionary* provides, is a great privilege. However, familiarity with the *Lectionary* is not the same as familiarity with the Bible. Why? Because the *Lectionary* is selective. Bible passages are chosen to help us to reflect on certain themes and events in the life of Christ. They are necessarily presented in small excerpts suitable for public reading.

Reading a book of the Bible, on the other hand, helps us to put these familiar passages into the wider context of the entire book from which they come. Understanding the larger context of the selected reading deepens our understanding of why the readings were selected and the truths they reveal for our lives. Because the *Lectionary* is not the entire Bible, knowledge of the Bible becomes an essential component to our fuller understanding of the Word of God. ✝

Pray It!

The Bible and Personal Prayer

You may have a family Bible that has been carefully preserved through many years or generations. Such an heirloom is precious, because it is the Word of God and because it may contain treasured family records and mementos.

But the Word of God is above all meant to be heard and read; it is a living Word, and it can give us guidance, direction, encouragement, and hope in our everyday lives. One way to make the Bible a part of your daily life is to read passages as a personal prayer by using *I* and *me* in place of *we* and *us*. Making the words deeply personal gives them an urgency and a relevance that sometimes gets lost when they become too familiar.

Try this with the prayer Jesus taught us, the Lord's Prayer (see Matthew 6:9–13). We pray this as "we" and "us" because Jesus taught us that we are all brothers and sisters in him, but at times you might want to pray some of the lines of the prayer in this way:

> My Father . . . your kingdom come to me . . . your will be done by me. . . . Give me today my daily bread, and forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who have trespassed against me. And lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. Amen.

This *Road to Emmaus* is an altarpiece by Duccio di Buoninsegna (c. 1255–1319). Jesus is being invited into the inn. What makes Jesus look like a traveler? Why would the front of an altar be an appropriate place for this art?

Article 10 Scripture and the Eucharist

You may remember this incident from the Gospel of Luke: Two friends were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Their leader, Jesus, had just been crucified, and they were leaving the city with heavy hearts. Suddenly, a stranger joined them, explained God's plan to them, and "interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). At the end of the day, they invited the stranger to stay with them. At table the stranger broke the bread, and suddenly "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (24:31). He was Jesus, crucified and now risen. Suddenly, he vanished from their sight. The two friends exclaimed, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (24:32). The friends returned to Jerusalem to tell the Apostles and disciples about their encounter with the Risen Christ and "how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (24:35).

This encounter on the road to Emmaus illustrates the intimate connection between Scripture and the Eucharist. Along the road it is Jesus himself who explains Scripture to the friends. Later, at table, Jesus once more breaks the

Eucharist, the
The celebration of the entire Mass. The term sometimes refers specifically to the consecrated bread and wine that have become the Body and Blood of Christ.

bread and offers it to them as his own Body and Blood. The friends identify Jesus in both actions: opening up Scripture and breaking the bread. This intimate connection between Scripture and the Eucharist has been fostered by the Church ever since. From the earliest liturgies of the Church, the celebration included both the reading of Scripture—writings from the Old Testament as well as the apostolic writings (the letters of Paul and the other Apostles)— and the Eucharist. It is the same today. In every Eucharist, in both the Word and in the Sacrament, we encounter the Risen Christ.

The Eucharist: Heart and Summit

The Eucharistic celebration is the memorial of Christ's Passover, his work of salvation won for us mainly through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. This work does not merely remain in the past. It is a *living* remembrance continuing into the present in the liturgy because, for God, all time is eternal and all time is now.

The Eucharist is offered by Christ himself, as the eternal high priest of the New Covenant, acting through the ministry of the priest. In **the Eucharist**, we proclaim the Word of God and give thanks to the Father for all his blessings, especially for the gift of his Son. The offerings of bread and wine are consecrated, and we are invited to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Every Eucharistic celebration includes all these elements, forming one single act of worship.

For all these reasons, the Eucharist is "the heart and summit of the Church's life" (*CCC,* 1407). Moreover, in the Eucharist, Christ invites each and all of the members of his Church, his family, to join with him in the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving that he offered to his Father once and for all on the cross. In the Eucharist, the living memorial of this sacrifice, Christ continues to pour out his saving love and grace upon his Body, the Church.

Scripture in the Mass

The Mass is made up of four parts: the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rite. As we explore each of these parts, we will discover how Scripture both shaped the Eucharistic celebration from its beginnings and is essential to it.

The Introductory Rites

The Introductory Rites begin with an entrance antiphon that is always taken from either the Old Testament or the New Testament. (On Sundays this antiphon is usually replaced with a gathering song.) Except during Advent and Lent, the Glory to God *(Gloria)* is also part of the Introductory Rites. The words of this song of praise originated in the Gospel of Luke, at the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds:

> And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:
>
> "Glory to God in the highest
> and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
>
> (Luke 2:13–14)

At the Eucharist we join in this song of heavenly praise.

The Liturgy of the Word

Following the Introductory Rites and the Opening Prayer, we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy of the Word is integral to the Eucharist and indeed to every Sacrament. Through Scripture we are led to respond in faith to the meaning of the sacramental action, proclaimed and expressed by the Word of God. As stated in *Divine Revelation,* promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, "The church has always venerated the divine scriptures as it has venerated the Body of the Lord, in that it never ceases, above all in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the word of God and the Body of Christ" (21).

Catholic Wisdom

Scriptural Art

Scripture has inspired great art. During the Middle Ages, the great stories and messages of Scripture were "translated" into stained-glass windows so that everyone could "read the Bible" by looking at the pictures in the windows. Abbot Suger of the Abbey of Saint Denis, near Paris, who lived in the twelfth century, called stained-glass windows "sermons that reached the heart through the eyes instead of entering through the ears." The same can be said for beautiful scriptural and religious art today.

The words "the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ" remind us that Christ is present not only in the Eucharist but also in the Word of God proclaimed. This truth is explicitly stated in the Vatican II document *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 1963): "He [Christ] is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church" (7).

In addition to the three readings on Sundays (the last and most prominent one from the Gospel), a psalm is read or sung. This is called the Responsorial Psalm. Then, before the Gospel, a Gospel acclamation is read or sung, with an Alleluia (suppressed during Lent). Both the Responsorial Psalm and the Alleluia verse (or the acclamation verse in Lent) are taken from Scripture.

In the liturgy, reverence toward the Gospel is expressed by the acclamation verse that precedes it, by standing for the Gospel reading, and often by a Gospel procession to the lectern or ambo, accompanied by candles and incense.

Following the Gospel, a homily is given by the priest or deacon. A homily is not the same as a sermon. A sermon can be given on any religious topic; a homily is centered on Christ and based on the readings from Scripture or another scriptural text from the Mass. The function of a homily is to insert the Scripture readings of the day into the life of the gathered community, to teach the Word of God here and now. It must also lead the listening community to an active participation in the Eucharist. The homily invites us, like the disciples at Emmaus, to recognize Jesus in the opening up of Scripture and in the breaking of the bread.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The most solemn part of the Mass is the Liturgy of the Eucharist. At the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, we are invited by the celebrant to join the angels and saints as they sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts" *(Roman Missal).* This acclamation is based on the Prophet Isaiah's description of the heavenly throne room (see Isaiah 6:3) and on the crowd's welcoming Jesus as he entered Jerusalem (see Mark 11:9–10).

This acclamation is a good example of the spiritual sense of the verse "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mark 11:9). In its literal meaning, the crowds are greeting Jesus as a prophet who speaks for God. But when

we proclaim this verse at Mass, we have the benefit of knowing that this same Jesus died and rose for us and is with us now, and will shortly come to us in the Eucharist. And so we say, "Blessed is he who comes" to me personally, very soon now, in the Body and Blood of Christ!

In the Eucharistic Prayer, the blessing of the Holy Spirit, invoked by the priest upon the essential signs of wheat bread and grape wine, is accompanied by the words of **Consecration** that the priest pronounces. These words ("This is my Body . . ." and "This is the chalice of my Blood . . ." *[Roman Missal]*) are based on words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper and found in passages in the **synoptic Gospels**, the Gospels of Mark (see 14:22–26), Matthew (see 26:26–30), and Luke (see 22:19–20). (The word *synoptic* comes from the Greek, meaning "seeing the whole together" and refers to the basic unity of vision shared by these three Evangelists. All three follow the same synopsis or general view of Jesus' life, Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. We will study the synoptic Gospels more closely in upcoming articles in this student book.)

Then, before receiving the Eucharist, we unite in prayer as sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus, as we pray the Lord's Prayer, based on Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4. The Communion Rite includes within it the short litany, the Lamb of God *(Agnus Dei),* which has its sources in John 1:29 and Revelation 5:6–13. During this part of the Mass, we also pray a prayer based on the words of the centurion to Jesus, found in the Gospel of Matthew:

> Lord, I am not worthy
> that you should enter under my roof,
> but only say the word
> and my soul shall be healed.
>
> *(Roman Missal)*

You might like to read the entire incident on which this prayer is based in Matthew 8:5–13. This will give you a wider context in which to appreciate this short prayer we say before receiving the Body of Christ.

The Concluding Rite

As we are dismissed, we accept the gift of peace that the Risen Christ offered to his disciples as he commissioned them to go forth and to share that peace with the world:

consecrate, Consecration
To declare or set apart as sacred or to solemnly dedicate to God's service; to make holy. At Mass the Consecration occurs during the Eucharistic Prayer when the priest recites Jesus' words of institution, changing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

synoptic Gospels
From the Greek for "seeing the whole together," the name given to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, because they are similar in style and content.

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21; see also John 20:19).

Our place of the Eucharist—our parish church, our school chapel, even an auditorium or a stadium—has been our "Upper Room," where we shared Christ's Word and his Body and Blood. In our own time and place, we have

The Institution of the Eucharist

When we think of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, the first passages that might come to mind are the accounts in Mark (14:22–25), Matthew (26:26–29), and Luke (22:15–20). These describe the words and actions of Jesus as he shared the Last Supper with his disciples. However, the earliest written account is found in the First Letter to the Corinthians. In that letter the Apostle Paul writes:

> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

Paul is upset that the Corinthians were not welcoming the poor in their midst when they celebrated the Eucharist. Paul is insisting that the Corinthians recognize the Body of Christ in the Eucharist and also in the Church, especially in the poor. In other words, he is reminding the Corinthians that they cannot accept Christ in his Body and Blood and then reject him in those who are poor.

encountered his saving love. We are strengthened by his Word—not only in the readings but also woven throughout the celebration of the Eucharist. We are also strengthened by his Sacrament, going forth to bring him, in his life and love, to others, through our own. ✝

Part Review

1. What does it mean to say the Word of God, Jesus Christ, is preexistent?
2. What is the relationship between Scripture and Tradition?
3. What role does the Magisterium play in the interpretation and teaching of Scripture and Tradition?
4. Why are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke called the synoptic Gospels?
5. How is the *Lectionary* similar to the Bible? How is it different from the Bible?
6. Describe the role of Scripture in the Mass. Give three examples.

Section 2

The Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles

Part 1

What Is a Gospel?

"Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord" (Luke 2:10–11). With these words, the angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds the birth of Christ. And with these words, this anonymous angel encapsulated for the shepherds and for us the very meaning of *Good News:* You have a Savior. Your Messiah and Lord has come.

Gospel means "good news." In these verses we are told that Jesus Christ is the Good News. Jesus Christ is the Gospel. But of course, our study in this book is of the four written Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The purpose of these written Gospels, the inspired Word of God, is to lead us directly to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In this next part, we look closely at the relationship between Jesus himself and the Gospels that witness to him and to his message. The Gospels we study today are an end result of a long process. Of course they began with the life and teaching of Jesus, but how did they come to be written in the first place? Why are the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) so similar and yet different from one another? (Remember that *synoptic* means "seeing the whole together.") And for whom were they written? What were their target audiences in the first centuries of the Church?

There are only two articles in this part, but they lay the groundwork for a detailed study of each of the synoptic Gospels to be studied in the rest of this section.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 11: "The Formation of the Gospels" (page 60)
- Article 12: "An Overview of the Synoptic Gospels" (page 65)

Article 11

The Formation of the Gospels

What exactly is a Gospel? How did it come to be? Is a Gospel one person's eyewitness account? Has the author written a kind of diary, jotting down his own observations as he witnesses events? Or has he written a research paper, gathering information together from various sources?

The answers to these questions are very important because understanding the purpose and the process of the formation of the Gospels helps us to understand why the Gospels are both similar to and different from one another, and what the inspired authors are teaching.

The inspired author of a Gospel is not claiming to be an eyewitness. Rather, he is relying on a variety of trustworthy accounts from other people. As he does so, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he thinks about the significance of these events. He tries to find the best way to communicate that significance to his audience.

For example, the author of the Gospel of Luke addresses the question of Gospel formation directly. As he begins his Gospel, he tells us how he went about writing it:

> Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received. (Luke 1:1–4)

By beginning in this way, the author of Luke's Gospel explains that his finished product is the result of a three-stage process, a process that began with events in the life of Jesus Christ.

First Stage: The Life and Teachings of Jesus

At the core of each of our Gospels are the events in the life and teachings of Jesus. You are undoubtedly familiar with many of them: Jesus' public ministry, preaching, powerful actions, Passion, death, Resurrection, post-Resurrection appearances, and Ascension. The events of the life of Jesus, his preaching and his miracles, are themselves the message