

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

# ASPIRE

A MAGAZINE FOR HIGH SCHOOL RELIGION TEACHERS

POPE FRANCIS'S

*vision*

OF THE CHURCH

Science vs. Religion:

THE WAR THAT  
NEVER WAS

IDEAS FOR YOUR  
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TODAY

How is  
your  
heart  
today?

—Francisco de Osuna

## OPENING THOUGHT



The spiritual mentors in my life have been skilled at asking the kinds of questions that have caused me to pause, then ponder something I hadn't considered before—taking me to a depth of contemplation I had not expected.

Perhaps the first act of the spiritual mentor is to ask an open-hearted question.

The second act, then, is to create the trusted space of silence for that question to be answered.

I think of Francisco de Osuna, the spiritual mentor of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. When they would come to him for spiritual direction he would ask just one question:

*How is your heart today?*

What are the open-hearted questions we might ask of young people today?

**Can we create safe, silent space for them to linger in the question, allowing the Spirit to lead where it will?**

—JOHN VITEK, PRESIDENT OF SAINT MARY'S PRESS



# FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to the first issue of *Aspire*. Our intent with this new magazine is to provide support and inspiration for the rich ministry of educating youth in today's world.

We at Saint Mary's Press have a long history of walking alongside our friends in Catholic education. We hope to further that mission with the pages of this magazine.

The magazine title *Aspire!* speaks to the goals in every educator's heart: to improve the classroom experience, to touch young lives in a profound way, to offer the most accurate theological insights, and to simply be the best possible teacher for the youth who are in our classes.

This first issue focuses on the aspiration of truly being present to the diversity of young people in our schools. Inside are articles and reflections that touch on key topics being discussed in the classroom today. Our hope is that this content will spark deep and meaningful conversations and provide thoughtful ways forward.

We hope that you find this magazine both helpful and hopeful as you continue the great work of bringing faith to life!

*Live Jesus in our hearts...forever!*

*Steven Ellair*

Steven Ellair



## ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Saint Mary's Press is a nonprofit, Lasallian Catholic publisher administered by the Christian Brothers of the Midwest District. Our focus is a contemporary expression of the Catholic Church's mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and the Lasallian mission to provide a human and Christian education for young people, including those who are economically deprived. With our partners in schools, parishes, and families, we share the Good News of Jesus Christ with Catholic Christian children and young people through publications and services.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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*Read it*

Articles that are theologically rich and usable with your students

*Apply it*

An application section follows each article, so you can immediately use the ideas presented with your class



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# DIDN'T GOD WRITE THE BIBLE?

By Corrine L. Carvalho

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**S**OME PEOPLE WILL CLAIM THAT TO BE A “CHRISTIAN” MEANS THAT ONE MUST BELIEVE THAT EVERYTHING THE BIBLE SAYS IS TRUE.

Many Christian churches, however, including the Catholic Church, would say there are many problems with this view, beginning with how we define the notion of “truth.”



Let me give you an obvious example. In Psalm 23, we read: “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.” Well, that can’t be literally true. First, God is not a physical shepherd; that statement is a metaphor (God is like a shepherd). And, I don’t know about you, but I’ve never been made to “lie down in green pastures,” although I do believe God leads and protects me. This is a silly example, because this is obviously a poem, full of metaphors and images, meant to be read poetically. The “truth” of Psalm 23 is not in its literal meaning, but in the truth of those metaphors. Therefore, the Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations first object to a literalist

interpretation because it does not recognize all the different kinds of texts the Bible may contain.

**BUT JEWS AND  
CHRISTIANS  
WOULD SAY  
THAT GOD IS AN  
“AUTHOR” OF  
THE BIBLE. HOW  
CAN THIS BE?**

**One of the arguments that divide Christian denominations is the way that they answer the question, who wrote the Bible?** While most Christians would say that texts in the Bible were written by both a human and a divine author, the model for how this interaction played out can differ significantly. Some Christians hold to a model of divine dictation: God told the human author what to write. Others think of God’s role more as an object for reflection than as an active agent in writing.

Each religious tradition deserves careful study to understand how its view of human-divine authorship, or inspiration, fits in with its views on creation, natural reason, and so on. Obviously, there is neither time nor space to do that here. What I can provide, however, is the model that informs my reading as a Catholic biblical scholar. In many ways, it will be compatible with many Protestant and Jewish understandings of inspiration.

**The question of how to read the Bible stems in part from the question of the authorship of the Bible.** When we use the word *author* today, we usually mean the person who actually took up pen and paper (or computer and printer) and physically, purposefully, wrote the words we read. If we restrict the word *author* in this way, then God did not write the Bible, because



God did not physically come to earth and write. But Jews and Christians would say that God is an “author” of the Bible. How can this be?

The Christian discussion of biblical authorship started early in church history when people wrote in Latin. The Latin word for *author* can mean the actual physical writer, but it can also mean something like “the authorizing agent”; in fact, it is at the root of the word *authority*. In this broader sense, the author is the person who guarantees the “authenticity” of the material.

**The Bible, then, has levels of authorship: the physical, human author and the divine author who authorizes the material.** Most churches

throughout the world believe that the Bible is the product of the interaction of divine and human authors. *Inspiration* is a term used to express that the writing of biblical texts entailed

an interaction of divine and human authors. In summary, the canon (the fixed list of sacred Scripture) is the list of those texts that were divinely inspired (had a human and divine author).

**So why do churches disagree so much about the Bible?** For instance, why do some Christian

denominations insist that the Bible’s account of creation contradicts views of evolution, while other churches find the accounts compatible? **The discord happens because churches disagree on how human and divine authors interact.**

## HUMAN AUTHORS WHO HAVE WRITTEN THE BIBLICAL TEXTS DO SO AS PRODUCTS OF GOD’S CREATION.



More to the point, not all churches agree that human authors act as independent, autonomous writers in the process of producing texts.

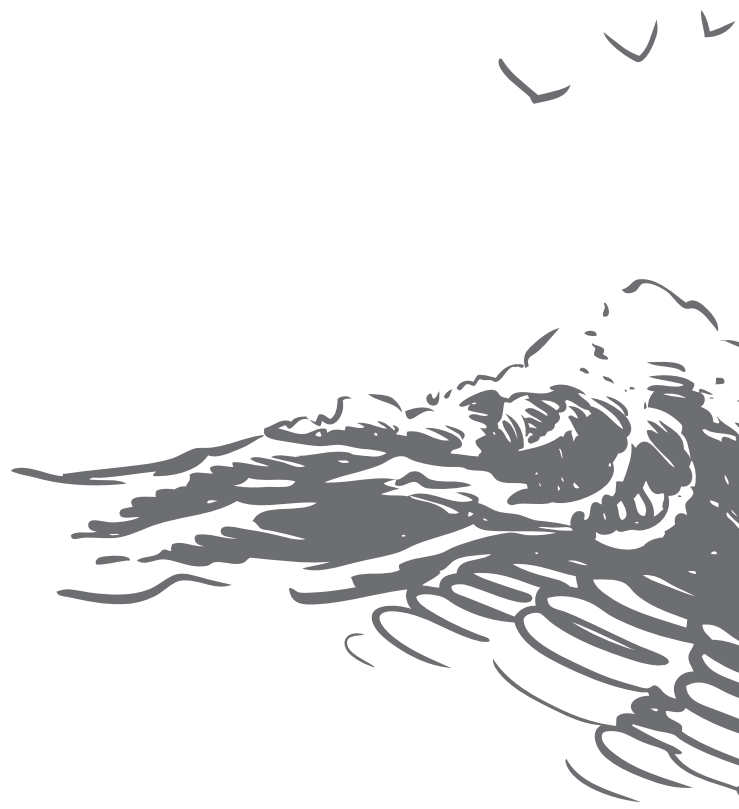
Let me give you a specific example. The Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations believe that the human authors of the biblical texts act as any human author would in producing the texts. The theological reasons for this teaching are complex but profound. To oversimplify, these Christians believe that God, who has created the world, can use that creation as a vehicle for divine revelation. Put simply, they define revelation as God's self-disclosure to humanity. Scripture is one primary way we come to know about God; that is, it is a primary source of revelation. People also come to know something about God by observing God's created world. Humans are part of that creation and, therefore, can reveal something about God through their own nature.

### **Human authors who have written the biblical texts do so as products of God's creation.**

As such, God does not have to somehow "fix up" or obliterate human nature, which was created by God, in order for Scripture to contain revelation.

Some people say that the Bible is inerrant, that is, "free from error." Fundamentalist Christians would say that everything in the Bible is inerrant; so if the Bible says that the world was created in seven days, they would interpret that to mean that it was created in seven calendar days. Catholic and much Protestant teaching is purposefully worded differently. **Catholic teaching states that the Bible is inerrant in matters of "salvation."** This means that when the Bible communicates things that people need to know to live a life that leads to salvation, they can trust that the Bible contains no error.

## **ONE WAY WE KNOW GOD'S REVELATION IS HAVE BEEN DIVINELY INSPIRED SO THAT**



For example, Catholics would contend that salvation does not depend on how long it took the world to be created, but that it does depend on knowing that God is the sole creator, that the process of creation has a purpose and design, and that what God created is good.

Let me summarize using the terms you have learned here: the word *revelation* describes God's act of imparting true knowledge about the divine nature.



## THROUGH TEXTS WRITTEN BY HUMANS WHO WHAT THEY SAY CAN LEAD US TO SALVATION.



**One way we know God’s revelation is through texts written by humans who have been divinely inspired so that what they say really can lead us to salvation.** The divinely inspired texts form the canon. Christians call this canon the Bible or Scriptures.

### HOW SHOULD WE INTERPRET SCRIPTURE?

If human authors acted as human authors when creating the text, then we must use every means

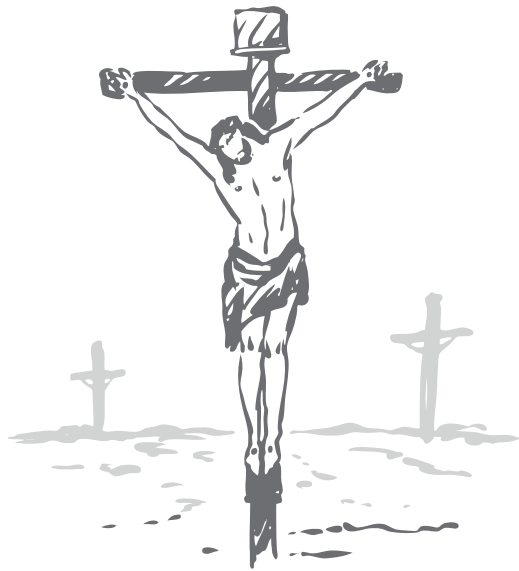
available to us to understand that text within its historical-cultural context. Many things complicate our ability to understand these texts. Modern readers have to learn many things in order to make sense of that story. But even when we think we know what is going on in a story, we may be missing things that would have been obvious to the first readers of the text.

Some of the Bible can be quite puzzling to modern ears. We may not understand the circumstances in which the texts were written or the meaning originally intended by the authors. Some of the material may seem contradictory. The actions of biblical characters may appear immoral if we do not learn about their laws. We may not recognize a metaphor if we don’t understand biblical literature. These are just some of the potential problems.

**These texts were written long ago, in a culture quite unlike ours and in a foreign language. To understand the text, we must “translate” it, not just the words but also the images and ideas.** In a literal sense, the Bible has been translated from the Hebrew and Greek into a number of English versions. But we are speaking here of a different kind of translation—translation aimed at discovering the original intent of an author in writing a given scriptural text.

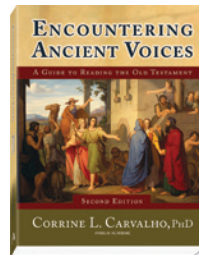
**Scripture scholars do much of that “translation” for us—not just the obvious kind, from the ancient Hebrew and Greek to modern languages, but the more challenging kind that deals with what the authors really meant.** Scholars delve into the history, archaeology, literary forms, and culture surrounding the development of the texts to help us understand their intended meanings.





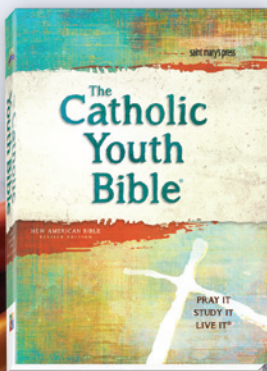
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Of course, even the best Scripture scholars disagree on certain findings and theories, and many questions are still open to debate (such as when a given scriptural text was written or who wrote it). However, by and large, biblical scholarship has shed great light on a modern understanding of the Bible. ■



*This article is an excerpt from Encountering Ancient Voices: A Guide to Reading the Old Testament, Second Edition, by Corrine L. Carvalho, PhD (2010). Winona, MN: Anselm Academic.*

Corrine Carvalho is professor of theology and director of the University of Saint Thomas Luann Dummer Center for Women. Dr. Carvalho serves as president of the Society of Biblical Literature's Upper Midwest Region, is active in the Catholic Biblical Association, and is a member of the National Association of Women in Catholic Higher Education.



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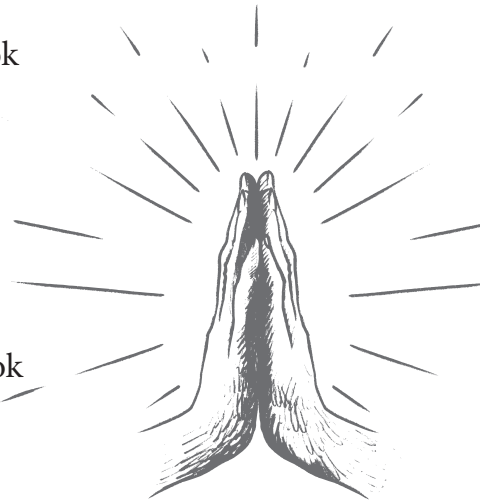




# SEVEN IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Here are seven summary questions you can ask  
when studying any book or story in the Bible:

- 1 • What was the historical situation at the time this book was written?  
How did the human author(s) address this situation?
- 2 • What is this book or passage's literary genre?  
What are the rules for understanding it?
- 3 • Is there a cultural practice or attitude reflected in this book  
or passage that we need to understand in order to  
appreciate the human author's intention?
- 4 • How does this book or story fit into the overall story  
of salvation history?
- 5 • How does Sacred Tradition help us to understand this book  
or story? How does this book or story help us to better  
understand God's revealed truths in Sacred Tradition?
- 6 • Is the truth I understand from this book or story consistent  
with the rest of Scripture and Tradition?
- 7 • When I look at everything I learned from these six  
questions, what spiritual truth is God revealing?



*This activity is taken from The Catholic Youth Bible® online resources.*

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# BEING PRESENT TO BELIEF & UNBELIEF

**M**y first year at a Catholic college was a wonderful experience. I soaked in all of the theology courses I could and applied my inquisitive mind to the new information and insights being offered. It wasn't too long, however, before my questions led me to a place of real doubt. I felt many long-held beliefs and understandings beginning to crack. Some even crumbled completely. It was a strange time—both scary and exciting.

Fortunately, I was surrounded by professors who recognized the growth that was occurring

because of my education. They made it extremely easy for me to explore my questions, surface my concerns, and give voice to my doubts. In fact, one professor—a religious sister—recognized the struggle and suggested we go for a walk around campus. **What an incredible opportunity it was to walk beside her, pouring out my soul and holding nothing back.**

At one point I exclaimed, "I think I need to become Jewish." She didn't laugh or argue that I must hold fast to the Catholic faith. Instead, I looked over and saw tears in her eyes. She explained that she was





## BY STEVEN ELLAIR

moved by my honesty, my willingness to dive into the search, and my deep desire to be authentic. Then she said, “Well, I have the perfect rabbi for you to talk to.”

**It’s important to continually remind ourselves that our students all come with very different levels of belief and unbelief.** We know that not every student in our school is Catholic and we also know that not every student believes in God.

**Can we be present to all of the students no matter where they are on their journey?** Can we create an environment where exploring questions and doubts is welcomed and even encouraged? If

we can, I dare say we are addressing an essential component of truly excellent Catholic education.

*(By the way, I never did become Jewish. The simple act of having someone present to my belief and unbelief propelled me more deeply into my own Catholic faith. Shortly thereafter, I changed my major to theology.)* ■

Steven Ellair is the Director of Content Development at Saint Mary’s Press and has worked in Catholic publishing for nearly 17 years. His previous work includes being a teacher, youth minister, and archdiocesan educational consultant.





## Weathering the Storms

### ***Background***

Several recent studies show that doubt is a constant companion for many young people. The digital generation's level of trust in all institutions—including religion—is at an all-time low. And in many ways, who can blame them? Considering this, how do we help these young people move from distrust to trust, from doubt to faith?

**Doubt can be easier to navigate when it is seen as a natural part of growing in faith rather than an impediment. Unfortunately, the experience of many youth is that the Church is not a place where they can express doubt.**

We must overcome this. It is important that we give our youth, and even ourselves, the space to name and wrestle with doubt as part of everyday faith. The Church has a long history of saints who have wrestled with doubt on their faith journeys. Let's help our young people discover that experiences of doubt can be vital moments of discovery that can lead to a deeper faith.

## Activity

### 1. Begin with these or similar words:

“We all have times of doubt—it is part of our human nature to doubt. Jesus’ closest friends and his own family doubted him throughout his life and ministry—and Jesus himself prayed to his heavenly Father for the strength to do what his Father called for him to do.

Many who experience doubt as part of their faith often feel alone or think they are the only ones questioning. That is just not true. Some of the most faithful people in our tradition faced doubts on their own faith journey.”

### 2. Divide the large group into twelve small groups.

Give each group a quote or a name from the handout “Meet Some Big Doubters” (on pages 16-17), and direct them to work together to figure out which group has their match.

### 3. Give the groups 60 seconds to find their match.

At the end of 60 seconds, ask a volunteer from each quote group to read their quote. Have a volunteer from the corresponding name group read the name of the person they think said it. For each suggested match, indicate if the pairing is correct or incorrect.

### 4. Allow any groups who were incorrect to try again.

Repeat the process until all groups have found their correct matches.

### 5. Conclude by once again asking each group to read its quote

and the correct source of the quote aloud. Say these or similar words: “As we have seen, many people you might not expect have experienced doubts in their journey of faith.”

### Digital Option

This activity can be done digitally using a game-based app or a polling app.

This activity is from Unit 1 of *Live It! Change the World with Everyday Faith*

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## Meet Some Big Doubters

***Invite the youth to match the quote to its source.***

The quotes and their correct sources are listed in the same order on these 2 pages. Keep a copy of the correct answers for yourself.



“I utter words of community prayers, and try my utmost to get out of every word the sweetness it has to give—but my prayer of union is not there any longer—I no longer pray.”

“Who among us has not experienced insecurity, loss and even doubts on their journey of faith? Everyone. We’ve all experienced this, me too. Everyone. It is part of the journey of faith.”

“If one has the answers to all the questions—that is proof that God is not with him.... The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties.”

“[My God,] what a joyous mystery is your presence within me... even when I do not feel your presence.”

“Sometimes... I’m in such a state of spiritual dryness that I can’t find a single thought in my mind which will bring me close to God.”

“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

This activity is from Unit 1 of *Live It!*  
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**Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta**

**Pope Francis**

**Pope Francis**

**Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity**

**Saint Thérèse of Lisieux**

**Thomas the Apostle**





# Hope



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# Francis's Vision of the Church

BY DENNIS DOYLE

Not long ago, I read a newspaper article reporting that officials in a government agency had been making decisions aimed at increasing their own power and wealth rather than serving the people the agency had been founded to serve. The story was sad but not unusual. What struck me about the article, though, was the tone. The journalist sounded shocked and outraged. Such feelings are ordinarily reserved for the editorial page. I wondered if maybe this reporter had been reading *Evangelii gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), in which Pope Francis laments that the majority of people accept, as usual, economic and social conditions that ought to evoke shock and outrage.

*Evangelii gaudium* is an apostolic exhortation, a document written by a pope in response to a synod of bishops.<sup>1</sup> This particular synod of bishops was held in Rome in 2012 on the topic of “the new evangelization.” Evangelization is the sharing of the good news of the gospel. The new evangelization emphasizes the need for Catholics to be evangelized themselves before they go about spreading the news. In his book-length response, **Pope Francis uses the theme of evangelization as a framework for expressing his vision of the Catholic Church and its mission in the world today.**





## COMBINING EVANGELIZATION AND LIBERATION

Although some of the early liberation theologians in the 1960s may have placed political revolution above the gospel message, the most respected and internationally well-known liberation theologians, such as the Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez, the Salvadoran Jon Sobrino, the Brazilian Leonardo Boff, and many others, had balance at their core. Even in their cases, though, their sense of urgency and even outrage could, at times, obscure that balance in the eyes of other theologians and church leaders in more comfortable parts of the world.

Like Gutiérrez and Sobrino, Pope Francis hails from Latin America. In *Evangelii gaudium*, this Argentinian Pope Francis, without losing his balance, shares the urgency and outrage of the liberation theologians. **He calls for Christians to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality.** He asks, “How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock

market loses two points?” (EG 53). He denounces what he calls “the globalization of indifference . . . The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us” (EG 54). **He declares that we are experiencing a profound human crisis in which the primacy of human dignity is being denied through the idolatry of money** (EG 55). He dismisses trickle-down theories as expressing “a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system” (EG 54). He declares that “the socio-economic system is unjust at its root” (EG 59) and that Christians should say no to the dictatorship of an impersonal economy (EG 55). He says these things without losing his simultaneous focus on the need for the personal interior transformation of each Christian.

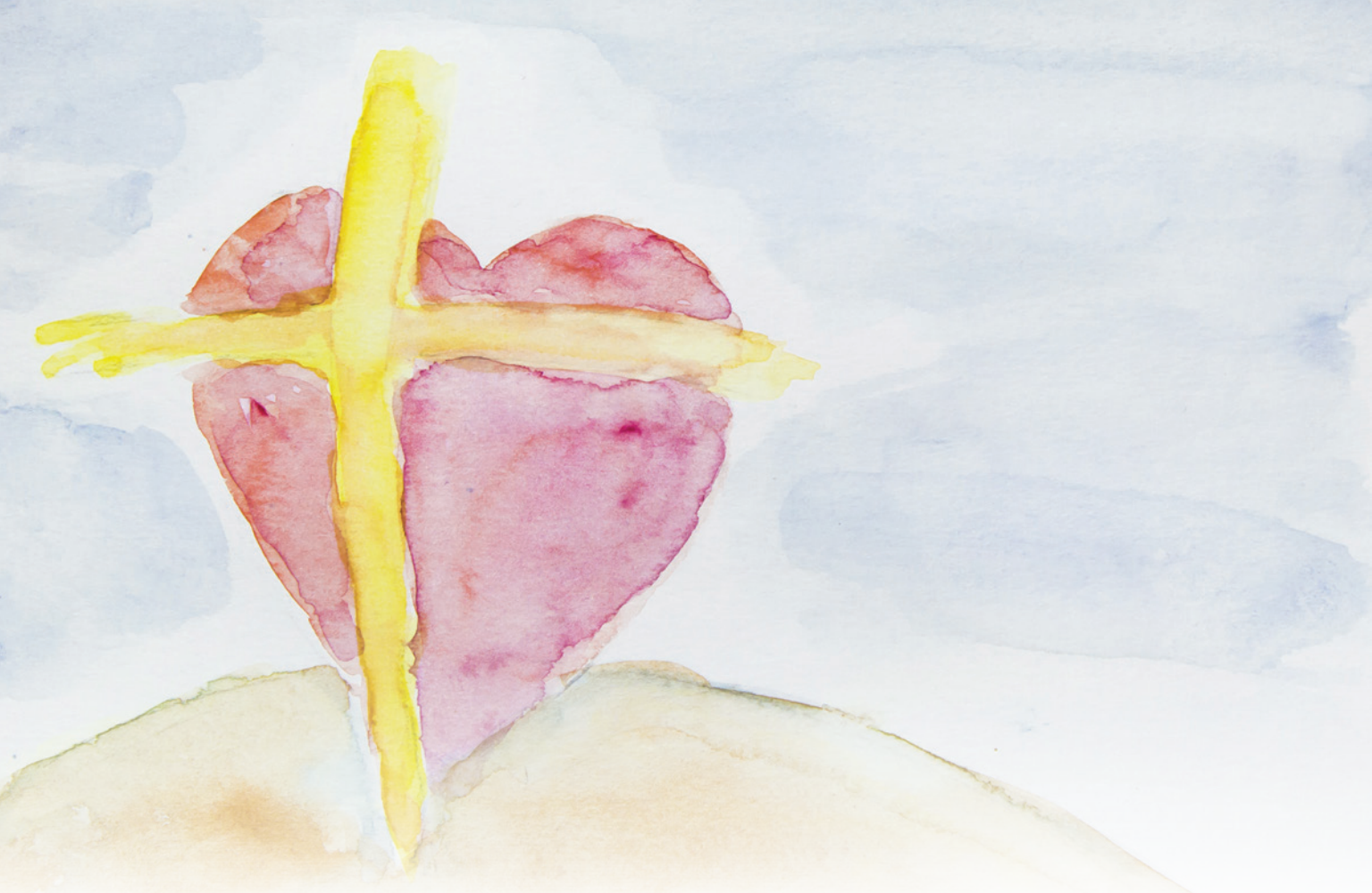
## POPE FRANCIS'S SYNTHESIS

Pope Francis ties together themes of evangelization and liberation with the word *synthesis*. His use of *synthesis* carries with it three distinct yet overlapping layers of meaning connected with the heart, authentic expression, and the integration of traditional modes of thought with modern science and technology.

All three layers of meaning in Pope Francis's use of *synthesis* are connected with the task of evangelization in the modern world. **Christians need to hold the treasure of the gospel in their hearts. They must be able to share it with others. They need to be able to understand and express their synthesis in ways that connect with modern cultures and forms of thought.**







## THE FIRST LAYER: PERSONAL INCORPORATION

**The first layer of meaning of synthesis describes a personal incorporation of one's Christian faith within one's heart** (EG 129, 143). The very title *Evangelii gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), names this personal synthesis, for it is what Christians should be prepared to share with others: gospel joy. Nor is this merely a textbook faith; rather, it is the faith of a converted heart. The kingdom of heaven lives and breathes within one. It is one's treasure, because "where your synthesis lies, there lies your heart" (EG 143).

Identifying one's *synthesis* with where one's heart lies, Pope Francis alludes to a passage from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus offers important and timeless advice:

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where*

*thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Mt 6:19–21)

**Jesus is concerned about our hearts. Where do our hearts lie?** Our hearts lie where we store up our treasure. In what do we place our deepest values? On what type of gains do we focus our energies and actions? What is it that we esteem as our treasure? Later in Matthew, Jesus compares our treasure with the kingdom of heaven itself: "*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field*" (Mt 13:44).

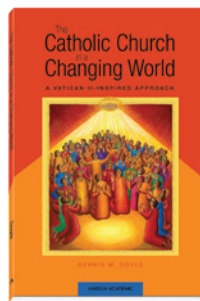


## THE SECOND LAYER: AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION

The second layer of meaning of synthesis describes the authentic expression of faith that is in one's heart as it is shared with others. This meaning connects with a well-known point made by Pope John XXIII in his opening speech at Vatican II. Pope John wanted the council not to issue new doctrines, but instead, to be pastoral. He said, "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another."<sup>2</sup> This distinction between the substance of doctrine and how doctrine and faith are presented echoes loudly in *Evangelii gaudium*.

Pope Francis writes, "We should not think, however, that the Gospel message must always be communicated by fixed formulations learned by heart or by specific words which express an absolutely invariable content" (EG 129). He advises preachers, "The difference between enlightening people with a synthesis and doing so with detached ideas is like the difference between boredom and heartfelt fervor" (EG 143). Christians are called to communicate their synthesis not with cold formulas but genuinely and earnestly.

*This article is an excerpt from  
The Catholic Church in a Changing  
World, by Dennis Doyle (2019).  
Winona, MN: Anselm Academic.*



Dennis Doyle is a professor in the religious studies department at the University of Dayton. He received his doctorate from the Catholic University of America.

## THE THIRD LAYER: CONNECTING FAITH TO THE WORLD

The third level of meaning of Pope Francis's use of synthesis is drawn from the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*. *Gaudium et spes* calls for "reading the signs of the times" and engaging in dialogue with people of different viewpoints. The word *synthesis* is used several times in *Gaudium et spes* to describe what is needed to address imbalances between (1) modern forms of science, technology, and culture and (2) more traditional forms of thought.

The document calls for "artisans of a new humanity" who can interweave the fruits of the various academic disciplines with an integral view of the meaning of the human person and the needs of the human family. Rather than rejecting the modern world, Christians are called to achieve a synthesis of modern and traditional paths to knowledge in the light of Christian faith. Christians need to be able to connect their faith to the concrete realities of the world in which they live. ■

### THIS ARTICLE WILL CONTINUE IN A FUTURE ISSUE OF *ASPIRE*.

1. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 2013, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).7089\_CathChurchChangWorld\_Pgs.indd.
2. "Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council," *Vatican II—Voice of the Church*, [http://vatican2voice.org/91docs/opening\\_speech.htm](http://vatican2voice.org/91docs/opening_speech.htm).7089\_CathChurchChangWorld\_Pgs.indd.

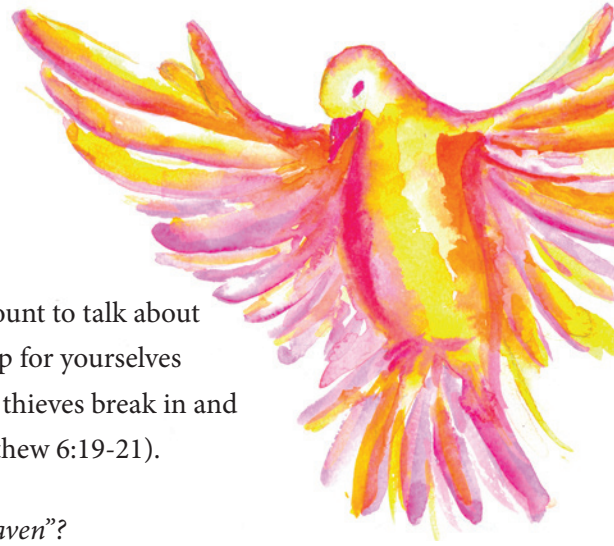
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## *Pope Francis's Vision of the Church* **Discussion Prompts**

- 1.** In *Evangelii gaudium* Pope Francis “laments that the majority of people accept, as usual, economic and social conditions that ought to evoke shock and outrage.”
  - a. *What local and global situations can you think of that should evoke shock and outrage in us?*
  
  - b. *Why do you think people have begun to accept these situations as usual?*
  
  - c. *What can we do to transform peoples' awareness of these situations? How can we transform our own awareness?*
  
- 2.** The author of the article, Dennis Doyle, mentions liberation theology and names some specific liberation theologians.
  - a. *Select one of the three theologians he mentions and find a quote from that person that inspires you. Be ready to share your selected quote with the class.*
  
  - b. *Pope Francis shares some of the urgency and outrage of the liberation theologians. How do you see this in his words and actions?*



- 3.** Pope Francis alludes to a passage from the Sermon on the Mount to talk about synthesis in terms of personal incorporation: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...” (Matthew 6:19-21).

  - a. What do you think Jesus is referring to as “treasures in heaven”?*
  - b. Where do you place your deepest values? What gains do you focus your energies and actions upon?*
  
- 4.** The second layer of meaning of synthesis talks about the authentic expression of faith. How might Christians best communicate their faith, “not with cold formulas but genuinely and earnestly”?
  
- 5.** In the third layer of meaning of *synthesis*, Doyle refers to the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et spes* and calls for us to become “artisans of a new humanity.” Imagine and brainstorm together what this new humanity might look like and act like. What kind of faith expression would be valuable? How would this new humanity combine traditional and modern paths?

**Personal reflection:** Considering your own beliefs and unique faith journey, what one idea from this article would you like to consider more?









# Science Versus Religion

## The War That Never Was

By Joshua Moritz

MANY THINK THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION—ESPECIALLY THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION—HAS BEEN ONE OF CONFLICT, DEBATE, OR EVEN ALL-OUT WARFARE. ASK THE AVERAGE PERSON ON THE STREET, AND THEY WILL LIKELY TELL YOU THE WAR BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION IS AS OLD AS HISTORY.

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# EVERYONE SEEMS TO KNOW FOR A “FACT” THAT RELIGION AND SCIENCE HAVE ALWAYS HAD A HARD TIME GETTING ALONG.

**This common notion, that science and religion have experienced a long history of conflict or warfare, is called the conflict thesis by historians of science and religion.**

This article is divided in several parts. The first examines the historical roots and social context of the origin of the conflict thesis.

Later parts will then evaluate three historical cases that are often cited in support of the conflict thesis: (1) that Christopher Columbus was persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church for holding that the Earth is a globe and not flat; (2) that the Church hounded, tortured, and imprisoned Galileo Galilei (and Nicolaus Copernicus before him) for suggesting that the sun is the center of the solar system; and (3) that John T. Scopes—the defendant in the famous 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial—was a “martyr for science” who heroically taught evolution and paid the price by being thrown behind bars. Investigation of these three cases will demonstrate that the language of warfare falls far short of historical reality. A more accurate understanding of these events reveals a complexity of interactions characterized by both creative tension and constructive dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

## SCIENCE AND RELIGION AT WAR: THE BIRTH OF A MODERN MYTH

In Dan Brown’s best-selling novel *Angels and Demons* (also a 2009 movie), the hero of the story, Harvard professor Robert Langdon, asserts that “early scientists were branded alive, on the chest, with the symbol of a cross,” and “outspoken scientists like Copernicus were murdered by the church for revealing scientific truths.” He also declares, “Since the beginning of history, a deep rift has existed between science and religion,” and “religion has always persecuted science.”<sup>2</sup>

While Hollywood films are not typically viewed as authoritative sources for historical truth, high school and college textbooks generally are.

And here one often finds the same theme—that the Christian church has resisted science and persecuted scientists from the beginning. Many textbooks include references to popes who banned the number zero or excommunicated Halley’s Comet, bishops who opposed vaccination

Where does  
the myth of  
the ages-long  
warfare between  
religion and  
science derive?





and human dissection, or how the Catholic Church burned at the stake the early scientist Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) for his scientific support of heliocentrism.<sup>3</sup>

**Students are often surprised to learn that these stories are false in a variety of ways. As a number of contemporary historians of science have pointed out, the truth is that the church never did any of these things.** In fact, the Catholic Church encouraged the early practices of vaccination and supported human dissection. Moreover, there is not one clearly documented instance of the church ever burning anyone at the stake for scientific opinions.<sup>4</sup>

**While professional historians of science try their best to set the record straight, a good story dies hard, and the notion of the perennial warfare between science and religion is a persistent myth.**

But from where does the myth of the ages-long warfare between religion and science derive? According to historian of science Thomas Dixon, the conflict thesis was invented by anti-church rationalists of the European Enlightenment in the late 1700s and then embellished and propagated by anti-Christian secular “free-thinkers” in the late 1800s.<sup>5</sup> **The Enlightenment rationalists contrasted their own “Age of Reason” with what they called the “Dark Ages” of Christian Europe, and they promoted the story of the warfare between science and religion to make a case for social revolution.** Among these Enlightenment rationalists were the French patriot Voltaire (1694–1778) and the American patriot Thomas Paine (1737–1809), both scientific thinkers who were opposed to Christianity and who viewed the institutional churches of France and England as the oppressive tentacles of the established

monarchies. In his enormously popular book *The Age of Reason* (1794), Paine railed against “the continual persecution carried on by the Church, for several hundred years, against the sciences and against the professors of science.”

Paine contended that Christianity placed shackles on the mind and that no scientifically progressive person could ever embrace the central doctrines of the Christian faith. What Paine sought through his literary efforts, however, was not to end religion but to replace the Christian religion with a secularized “rational” religion based on science.<sup>6</sup>

**In the 1800s, the rhetorical torch of the anti-religious Enlightenment thinkers was taken up by the “freethinkers” of the Victorian Age who sought to stage a social revolution in the scientific establishment, which at that time was dominated by religiously devout practitioners.<sup>7</sup> Foremost among the freethinkers were “Darwin’s Bulldog,” British naturalist Thomas Henry**

Huxley (1825–1895), along with the American promoters of science and secular education, John W. Draper (1811–1882) and Andrew Dickson White (1832–1918). Huxley, who resented the influence of the Anglican establishment within the scientific culture of his day, embellished a vision of Western history where “extinguished theologians lie about the cradle of every science as the strangled snakes beside the cradle of Hercules.”<sup>8</sup> Coining the term “agnostic” to describe his own position on religion, Huxley enlisted Darwin’s scientific theory to champion the cause of religious skepticism. He had no patience with scientific colleagues, such as Roman Catholic biologist St. George Mivart, who accepted evolution and insisted that Darwinism was perfectly compatible with historic Christian teaching. Huxley, infuriated by Mivart’s position, insisted that Mivart choose whether he wanted to be “a true son of the Church” or “a loyal soldier of science.”<sup>9</sup> If Huxley was to create a proper war between





science and religion, he could not afford to have soldiers fighting loyally for both sides.

To further the cause of secularizing the scientific establishment and help spread the message of the war between science and religion, Huxley also founded the X-Club—a group of like-minded, agnostically oriented, and scientifically influential friends, whose key aim was to reform the foremost British scientific organization, known as the Royal Society. (Draper and White were distinguished members.) The explicit mission of Huxley and his colleagues in the X-Club was to rid—with an evangelical fervor—the discipline of the natural sciences of women, amateurs, and Christian clergy, and to place secular science into the center of cultural

life in Victorian England.<sup>10</sup> Between the time of its inception in 1864 and the end of the nineteenth century, the X-Club and its members gained much prominence within the scientific community, exerting considerable influence over scientific thought. “The enduring legacy of this group,” explains historian of science Peter Harrison, “has been the perpetuation of the myth of a perennial warfare between science and religion.”<sup>11</sup>

**Draper (a prominent chemist, founder and first president of the American Chemical Society) and White (the first president of**

**Cornell University) prosecuted the war of rhetoric against religion in the United States.**

From these authors come two books that have been in print for more than a century and are still among the most widely read books in the history of science and Christianity.

Draper’s book, *The History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), tells of “ferocious theologians” hounding the pioneers of science with a Bible in one hand and a flaming torch in the other.

His book is primarily a tirade against the Roman Catholic Church, which he blames for almost everything he views as wrong in Western history (including encouraging the “evolutionarily unfit” to breed). Draper was reacting to the new wave of Catholic immigrants in America, to the first Vatican Council, and, in particular, to the doctrine of

papal infallibility. On top of this, he was angry that his own sister had become a nun.

White’s book, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), similarly speaks of the struggle between religion and science as “a war waged longer, with battles fiercer, with sieges more persistent, with strategy more shrewd than in any of the comparatively transient warfares of Caesar or Napoleon.” Indeed, he tells the reader, “The coming of Christianity arrested the normal development of the physical sciences for over fifteen hundred years...

“Recent scholarship has shown the warfare metaphor to be neither useful nor tenable in describing the relationship between science and religion.”<sup>13</sup>



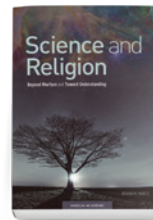
imposing a tyranny of ignorance and superstition that perverted and crushed true science.”<sup>12</sup>

White, too, was annoyed with the Christian church, but for different reasons. He was provoked to write because of criticism he received for establishing Cornell University without a religious affiliation. Beyond this, White’s Cornell was competing with religiously affiliated colleges to get money from Congress; thus he had to make a historical case to show why religion and the natural sciences shouldn’t mix.

What do historians of science make of the conflict thesis that science and religion have been in a perpetual state of warfare? **University of Wisconsin historians of science David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers explain that “recent scholarship has shown the warfare metaphor to be neither useful nor tenable in describing the relationship between science and religion.”**<sup>13</sup>

Johns Hopkins University historian of science Lawrence Principe likewise says that the historical formulation of Draper and White “rests on very shaky (and sometimes fabricated) foundations and was contrived largely for quite specific political, professional, and racist purposes... **Serious modern historians of science have unanimously dismissed the warfare model as an adequate historical description.**”<sup>14</sup> ■

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This article is an excerpt from *Science and Religion: Beyond Warfare and Toward Understanding*, by Joshua Moritz (2016). Winona, MN: Anselm Academic.

*This article will continue in a future issue of Aspire.*

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1. Oxford historian John Hedley Brooke makes a case for what he labels the “complexity thesis” to describe the historical relationship between science and religion. See *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Historian James Hannam describes the relationship as one of “creative tension.” See James Hannam, *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2011).
2. Dan Brown, *Angels and Demons* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 31.
3. For a reference to popes banning vaccination and dissection, see the college textbook by Emily Jackson, *Medical Law: Text, Cases, and Materials* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7. For a reference to Bruno being burnt at the stake for his science, see the popular college textbook by Louis P. Pojman, *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 147. For a discussion on why these are all myths, see Ronald L. Numbers, ed., *Galileo Goes to Jail, and Other Myths about Science and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
4. For an in-depth discussion of why such stories are unfounded see Hannam, *Genesis of Science*; and Numbers, ed., *Galileo Goes to Jail*.
5. Thomas Dixon, *Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.
6. See *ibid.*, 11–12.
7. See Peter Harrison, “Religion, the Royal Society, and the Rise of Science,” *Theology and Science* 6, no. 3 (2008): 255–71.
8. Quoted in Richard G. Olson, *Science and Religion, 1450–1900: From Copernicus to Darwin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 204.
9. Timothy Larsen, “War Is Over, If You Want It’: Beyond the Conflict between Faith and Science,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60, no. 3 (September 2008): 149–50. As Larsen says, “Huxley and others who aspired to turn scientific pursuits into a profession . . . ‘needed’ a war between science and religion.”
10. See Ruth Barton, “An Influential Set of Chaps’: The X-Club and Royal Society Politics 1864–85,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 23, no. 1 (March 1990): 53–81.
11. Peter Harrison, “‘Science’ and ‘Religion’: Constructing the Boundaries,” in *Science and Religion: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Thomas Dixon, Geoffrey Cantor, and Stephen Pumfrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27.
12. Quoted in David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers, eds., *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 3.
13. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, “Beyond War and Peace: A Reappraisal of the Encounter between Christianity and Science,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 39, no. 3 (September 1987): 140–49, at 141.
14. Lawrence Principe, “The Warfare Thesis,” *Science and Religion*, recorded lecture (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2006).

# Navigate Science & the Bible

**We seldom get a second chance to make a first impression. The accounts of creation in Genesis give us our “first impression” of the Bible.**

In these accounts, God creates the earth in six days. Science, however, has revealed that it took billions of years for the earth and planets to form.

Our “first impression” may be that biblical truth and scientific truth are incompatible, given all our scientific knowledge about the universe. We might be left asking: “Can the truth of the Bible be reconciled with scientific truth? Can this first impression be given a second look?”

It is our job to dispel key divisions between science and the Bible and help students find a healthy balance in their perspective.

By exploring Church teaching and introducing faith-filled scientists, young people will recognize that both science and the Bible can have a place in the Catholic worldview.

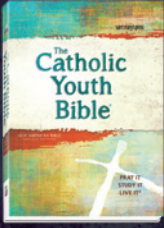


## Introduce the Experts

Countless past and contemporary scientists believe that the truth of the Bible can be reconciled with scientific truth. In fact, greater knowledge of the universe often results in a greater appreciation of the grandeur and creativity of God.

Among those scientists who believe this to be true is Br. Guy Consolmagno, SJ, of

the Vatican Observatory. In his frequent talks around the world, Brother Guy often challenges the notion of the incompatibility of the Bible and science, explaining that “we must believe in a God that is supernatural. We then recognize God as the one responsible for the existence of the universe, and our science tells how he did it.” In fact, Brother Guy



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many elements in the newest version of *The Catholic Youth Bible®*, including:

“Six Days? Really?” near Genesis 1:1–2:4

“Apocalyptic Literature,” near Daniel, chapters 7–10

“What Miracles Reveal,” near Matthew 8:1–9:34

“Core Catholic Understandings about Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation,” in the Being Catholic section (p. 1720 CYB NABRE or p. 1502 CYB NRSV)

often mentions that it was a Catholic priest, Fr. George Lemaître, who first proposed what we now call the big bang theory.

*Introduce the teens to scientists, both past and present, who have made a difference to scientific study and were also believers in God and in biblical teaching. As experts in their fields (and some who were vowed religious), they serve as great examples of the ability to be both a person of faith and a scientist.*

## **Explore It!**

Helping the young people encounter people who have reconciled science and biblical truth can go a long way toward showing them that the two can indeed exist together. Here are some ideas for encouraging this conversation:

**1. Ask students to learn about an accomplished Catholic scientist (especially a modern one). Some possibilities are listed below.**

**2. Encourage the teens to share what they have discovered and how that information impacts their questions about the Bible and science.**

**3. Invite a local scientist to speak about the Bible and faith, and engage the young people in a conversation.**

## *Catholic Scientists*

### **Roger Bacon**

(c. 1214–1294)  
Franciscan friar and early advocate of the scientific method

### **William of Ockham**

(c. 1288–1348)  
Franciscan friar known for Ockham's Razor

### **René Descartes**

(1596–1650)  
Father of modern philosophy and analytic geometry

### **Blaise Pascal** (1623–1662)

French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer, and philosopher

### **Laura Bassi** (1711–1778)

Physicist at University of Bologna and first woman to be offered a professorship at a European university

### **Amedeo Avogadro**

(1776–1856)  
Noted for his contributions to molecular theory and Avogadro's Law

### **Léon Foucault**

(1819–1868)  
Inventor of the Foucault Pendulum, measuring the effects of the Earth's rotation

### **Gregor Mendel**

(1822–1884)  
Augustinian priest and monk, father of genetics

### **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** (1881–1955)

Jesuit priest, theologian, and renowned paleontologist

### **Gerty Cori** (1896–1957)

Biochemist who was the first American woman to win a Nobel Prize in Science (1947)

### **Mary Celine Fasenmyer**

(1906–1996)  
Sister of Mercy and mathematician, founder of Sister Celine's polynomials

### **Mary Kenneth Keller**

(c. 1914–1985)  
Sister of Charity, BVM, first American woman to earn a PhD in computer science, helped develop BASIC



# Let the Church Speak

Pope Saint John Paul II, in his “Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences” (October 22, 1996) concerning the theory of evolution, gave a landmark affirmation to the complementarity of biblical truth and science when he said, “We know, in fact, that truth cannot contradict truth.”

In that same talk, Pope Saint John Paul II briefly reminded the scientists of the “Galileo question,” in which the Church condemned Galileo for his discovery that the Earth revolved around the sun, and not the other way around. (In 1992, Pope Saint John Paul II officially apologized for the Church’s condemnation of Galileo.)

This unnecessary clash between scientific truth and the Bible resulted from an incorrect interpretation of God’s word. As Pope Saint John Paul II reminded the scientists: “It is necessary to determine the proper sense of Scripture, while avoiding any unwarranted interpretations that make it say what it does

not intend to say. In order to delineate the field of their own study, the exegete and the theologian must keep informed about the results achieved by the natural sciences.”

In other words, the biblical expert and theologian must communicate with the scientist in order to come to a proper understanding of God’s work in the universe. In this kind of communication, the role of the Catholic scientist, or any scientist who believes in God, is particularly important. Because most people seem to assume (as the high school student quoted previously did) that all scientists are atheists, it is up to scientists who believe in God and who believe in biblical teaching to make their profession as scientists known to their church-going friends and neighbors. Scientists are not always isolated in labs; some of them are likely sitting next to us in church!

## Explore It!

Exploring the question of science and the Bible can be done within your own faith community and can connect the youth with local people who accept both science and faith.

- 1. Ask the teens to identify professions that they would identify as “scientific” in nature:** medical professions, math teachers, biologists, and so on. Facilitate a reflection on the ways faith can also shape these professions.
- 2. Challenge the young people to identify members of their parish who work in the above named scientific fields** and see how many people they can identify.
- 3. Organize a panel discussion on the topic of the Bible and science.** Invite your pastor, a local scientist, a Catholic school science teacher, a member of a local religious community, and a thoughtful parishioner to sit on the panel.
- 4. Invite the teens to choose one of the named professions and explore the daily activities of that field.** Facilitate a discussion to identify what activities would be difficult for a person of faith.

### *The Catholic Youth Bible™ Connections*

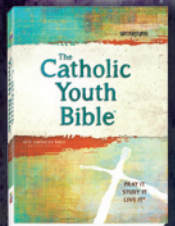
Use *The Catholic Youth Bible* in

your consideration of science and the Bible in the local community. The following elements from it are just some of many that are helpful:

“Heart and Head,” near Mark 16:20

“Core Catholic Understandings about Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation,” in the Being Catholic section (p. 1720 CYB NABRE or p. 1502 CYB NRSV)

“How Do Catholics View the World?” in the Being Catholic section (p. 1722 CYB NABRE or p. 1504 CYB NRSV)



# Consider the Purpose

So, what is the take-away? We cannot look at the Bible as a science textbook. It was never intended to be one. Our job is to facilitate the movement from understanding the Bible as a text that contradicts science to the recognition that the Bible serves a different purpose.

The Bible has much to teach us about our humanity, our origins in God, our relationships with God and with one another, and the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as God-with-us. The Bible unfolds God's plan for our lives and for our world, a world that science helps us explain. The biblical writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, conveyed God's message of salvation, answering the questions we all ask: "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "Where am I going?" "How am I to live?" These are the questions the Bible can answer. These are the questions to explore with youth when engaging Scripture.

The entire created universe is evidence of God's love. It is ours to care for and to explore. As in any other human endeavor, the study of science presents us with moral dilemmas that we must confront with honesty, love, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But we can look to the universe for evidence of God's marvelous work that informs and sustains our precious human lives:

*The heavens declare the glory of God  
the firmament proclaims the works of his hands.*  
(Psalm 19:2, NABRE)

## Additional Resources

### Consult the following resources for further exploration of science and the Bible:

*Genesis, Evolution, and the Search for a Reasoned Faith*, by Mary Katherine Birge, SSJ, et al. (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2011)

*God's Mechanics: How Scientists and Engineers Make Sense of Religion*, by Br. Guy Consolmagno, SJ (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008)

*The Heavens Proclaim: Astronomy and the Vatican*, edited by Guy Consolmagno, SJ (Huntington, IN: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2009)

"Pope Francis's Address to the Vatican Academy of Sciences," 27, October 2014, at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141027\\_plenaria-accademia-scienze.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141027_plenaria-accademia-scienze.html)

*A Window to the Divine*, by Zachary Hayes, OFM (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2009)





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How does the Bible help me know God?

How do I keep my focus on God?

Were the first Christians that different from us?

How do challenging times deepen our faith?

How is Jesus' mission kept alive?

Why do the kings and prophets matter?

What does it mean to have faith in Jesus?

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Was Jesus Christ really divine?



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# SPEAKING FROM THE DEEP WELL OF ONE'S BEING

ELLEN B. KONECK

**W**hen I first read *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation Among Young Catholics*, the detail that lingered with me more than any other was the gratitude expressed by some of the young people interviewed at simply *being asked* to tell their stories. This sentiment has echoed for me in contexts and conversations ever since—I can't seem to escape it. **Clearly, the experience of being heard is powerful, even transformational, and the act of listening is a virtue needed in our culture.**

Although good dialogue may depend in part on an inviting and safe space, a good set of questions, and a willing listener, the conversation doesn't really *start* until someone takes that initial vulnerable step and decides to speak. **There's certainly more to communication than just listening and being heard. There is also the sharing part.**

That activity—indeed, that *skill*—of speaking articulately and from the heart, is as urgently

needed as the skill of listening, but may be even harder to do well. Speaking truthfully, authentically, and without pretense, *especially* if the thing shared is a deeply felt concern, a raw wound, or a yet-untested idea, can be scary: What if someone misunderstands? Worse yet, what if someone understands perfectly and just doesn't agree or care?

**PROGRAMS AND SPACES  
IN WHICH PEOPLE  
LEARN TO ARTICULATE  
THEMSELVES ARE  
JUST AS IMPERATIVE  
IN OUR CULTURE OF  
CONSTANT-BUT-SHALLOW-  
COMMUNICATION.**

Programs and spaces in which people learn to articulate themselves are just as imperative in our culture of constant-but-shallow-communication.

Louisa Kamps, cited in a Saint Mary's Press Research blog post titled "*Can We Talk?*", suggests the classroom as one location for practice: **"More and more, students and faculty are seeking out and welcoming conversations where they can feel not only free, but encouraged to unfurl—working through difficult thoughts together**

**with others in an unhurried way, saying things they've never said (or thought) before."** In another blog post, youth and young adult faith formation



expert Theresa O’Keefe emphasizes the role that adults in the community can play. “The maturing adolescent needs some listening adult [other than parents] with whom they can ‘try out an idea and see how it sounds in the world.’”

**The notion of ‘trying out an idea’—or as I like to say, *trying it on for size, seeing how and if it fits*—is one of the most profound powers of speaking.**

Like a sacrament, it can be efficacious: it brings about what it signifies. The ability to hear *in one’s own voice* a reality, a deeply felt need or urge or wound or joy, suddenly makes that thing vivid and present. I remember as a middle-school girl finally stumbling upon some frustration or hurt while processing the day’s events with my twin sister from the top bunk of our bunkbeds. She may very

well have already been asleep by the time I had my “aha!” moment—but the act of speaking (even if not *totally* being heard...) was powerful for me.

It’s no surprise that speaking—accessing some deep part of ourselves, then translating those nearly ineffable feelings, memories, thoughts, or moods into words, and then *sharing* those words with the world—is so daunting and difficult.

**It’s also no surprise that opportunities for and invitations to speak from the deep well of one’s heart are so important for the health of both individuals and communities alike. ■**

Ellen B. Koneck is the acquisitions, sales and marketing manager at Anselm Academic in Minneapolis, Minn. She previously worked at *Commonweal* magazine and taught at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn.





# Disaffiliation is discouraging.

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## PRAYER SERVICE

# WE ARE ALL PRECIOUS IN GOD'S SIGHT

**Focus:** In this prayer service, the students explore cultural diversity, their own personal uniqueness, and how all people are precious to God.

**Isaiah 43:1–2, 4–5**

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- poster board with outline of a tree drawn
- small papers on which leaves will be drawn
- crayons or markers
- scissors for cutting paper into leaves
- instrumental music

### Leader:

In the name of our glorious Creator God, whose imagination dreamed up the beauty of our trees, bushes, and plants, I welcome you to this time of worship. We turn to God to hear words of comfort and love.

### Reader:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name: you are mine.  
When you pass through waters, I will be with you;  
through rivers, you shall not be swept away.  
When you walk through fire,  
you shall not be burned,  
nor will flames consume you...  
Because you are precious in my eyes,  
and honored, and I love you...  
Fear not, for I am with you.

*(Isaiah 43:1–2, 4–5)*

Adapted from Prayer Service 7, offered as part of the online resources for *The Catholic Youth Bible*™, 4th Edition. The original service can be found at <https://www.smp.org/resourcecenter/resource/12884/>. The Blessing in this prayer service is adapted from *Inspiration from Indian Legends, Proverbs, and Psalms*, compiled and edited by R. L. Gowan (Rapid City, SD: American Ministries International, n.d.), page 59. The Scripture quotes are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owners.

## Leader:

God knows each of us as a precious, unique, individual child who is loved, honored, and cherished.

There are billions of people in the world, and God knows each of us by name.

The world includes many different people. There are Africans, Asians, Europeans, South Americans, and Native Americans. There are married people, single people, and divorced people. There are stepsisters, half-brothers, godmothers, and grandfathers.

There are heterosexuals and homosexuals. There are infants, schoolchildren, teenagers, twenty-somethings, thirty-forty-fifty-sixty-seventy-eighty-ninety-somethings. How does God keep track?

Each of us is a precious, unique, individual child of God who is loved, honored, and cherished.

Imagine now, a leaf. Each leaf is a unique creation. The color, shape, pattern, and size are all one-of-a-kind. The veins, stem, and ragged edges all add to its beauty.

Each of you will receive a small piece of paper on which to draw a leaf. Make sure your leaf reflects the same diversity found in nature.

As you create your leaf, try to reflect your own uniqueness in the design. And remember that, while no leaf is perfect, every leaf is beautiful.

After you have finished your leaf, cut it out and wait for additional instructions.

*(Distribute the paper and supplies. Play reflective music while students create and then cut out their leaves.)*

I pray this semester, we become not just a class, but a community. Each of us brings a gift that will make our community strong, supportive, and unique. On your leaves, I would like you to write one gift you bring to this community.

*(Invite each student to share the gift they bring to this community. When they have finished sharing, ask them to tape their leaf to the outline of a tree drawn on poster board.)*

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## Reader:

A legend in the Sioux tradition explains why leaves turn color in the autumn.

Many, many moons ago, when the world was young, the grass and flower folk were enjoying the beautiful summer weather. But as the days went by, the weather became colder and colder.

The grass and flowers grew sad, for they had nothing to protect them from the sharp cold. Just when it seemed that there was no hope for living, the Holy One who created all things came to their aid. The leaves of the trees were told to fall to the ground and spread a soft, warm blanket over the tender roots that were about to freeze. To repay the leaves for their kindness, the Creator gave them one last bright array of beauty.

That is why the trees take on their pretty farewell colors of red, gold, and brown each year during Indian summer. Then the leaves turn to their task of covering the earth with a thick rug of warmth.

Most people want to be useful. Like the leaves in this old Sioux legend, they want to be of service.

May God bless our group as we follow the example of the leaves, looking for ways to be useful and to serve those created by the Holy One. Amen.







# Why am I here?

By Joanna Dailey

Can it be fall already? The days of summer are, as Simon and Garfunkel used to sing, “slip slidin’ away.” In my youth, August used to be longer. It was the last month before school opened, and there seemed to be plenty of time to meander in the neighborhood branch library, walk to the city pool and back (which meant you ended up just as hot as you were before you made the trip), spend the afternoon on a screened-in porch, or ride bikes to a friend’s house.

Then arrived that Sunday after the Feast of the Assumption when the Sisters were again seen at Sunday Mass. “They’re ba-a-a-ck...” And with them, the cusp of a new scholastic year had arrived. We are once again at the cusp. It may be a good time to look back at your own journey and ask yourself:

*How did I get here?  
Why am I here?  
Why do I keep at this?*

*How did I get here? Why am I here? Why do I keep at this?*

I have always been intrigued by vocation stories, because each one is so different. Did you plan for a life in religious education, or did you somehow fall into it and find that it suited you? Did you have a hunch that this would be your path, or did God surprise you along the way? If you have a faculty or catechist day of recollection before beginning the school year, sharing stories of how and why you each find yourself in your current ministry might be faith-strengthening for everyone. Why?

Because sometimes we can see the hand of Providence in others’ lives more easily than we can in our own. However you got here, you are not here by accident. You were led. You are sent.

But why? The reasons you began may not be the reasons you continue. We grow in self-understanding, and we grow in our appreciation for our own roles in furthering the Kingdom.

Shortly after his election, Pope Francis received a visit from students in Jesuit-run schools in Italy and Albania. He was prepared with a long speech, but, in meeting the students, he laid the speech aside and decided to open the visit to questions and dialogue. Much of his address centered around the meaning of a Catholic education, which the Pope identified as freedom and service. For their teachers, Pope Francis had these words\*:

*“Do not be disheartened in the face of the difficulties that the educational challenge presents! Educating is not a profession but an attitude, a way of being; in order to educate it is necessary to step out of ourselves and be among young people, to accompany them in the stages of their growth and to set ourselves beside them.”* ■

Joanna Dailey is part of the content development team at Saint Mary’s Press and has a wide-range of experience in the educational field. She has authored and developed texts for the elementary, middle-school, and high-school religious-education settings.

\*To read the complete address, see [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/speeches/2013/june/index\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2013/june/index_en.htm). Scroll down to To Students of Jesuit Schools of Italy and Albania.

## CLOSING THOUGHT



*Have a thought you  
would like to share?*

*We'd love to hear. Drop us  
a line at [aspire@smp.org](mailto:aspire@smp.org).*

Perhaps the first act of the spiritual mentor is to ask an open-hearted question.

The second act, then, is to create the trusted space of silence for that question to be answered.

**I** imagine this as a starting point contrasted to how we often approach young people now in religion class.

**For young people to tell their story, in a place without judgment, their story received as sacred, is one of the greatest gifts we can offer as religious education leaders.**

—JOHN VITEK, PRESIDENT OF SAINT MARY'S PRESS



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