

Living in Christ

The Living Word

The Revelation of God's Love

Second Edition

Robert Rabe

Saint Mary's Press®

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Introduction

“In the beginning . . .” (Genesis 1:1).

These are the first words in the Bible, and it is fitting that they should be the first words in this book. The beginning point for any exploration of our faith is discovering that God has revealed himself to us. This course starts by exploring God’s Revelation, which is communicated to us through Tradition and Scripture. The course will focus on Sacred Scripture, the Bible. As the editor for this book, I am excited to welcome you to what can be an amazing encounter with the living Word of God.

I imagine that you have at least one Bible in your home. I have three in my home. Two of them belonged to my grandparents. Those Bibles sit in a prominent space on a shelf in my home office. When my grandparents passed away, I asked for their Bibles because, for me, they are a special connection to a part of my past. They remind me of my family and my history. They remind me of the love my grandparents had for each other and passed on to my parents and to me. When I first acquired these Bibles, I sat down and leafed through their pages. I found passages that had been marked important by my grandparents. I discovered old family pictures of my parents and relatives I did not know. I came across documents that were tucked into the Bibles for safe keeping. I do not open these Bibles much anymore because I want them to stay intact. However, I am very aware of these treasured possessions, and I am deeply grateful for them.

The third Bible in my office is the one I use for personal study and for my work. I consult this Bible often. I have important passages marked. I have notes tucked into it. The pages are getting tattered from use. This Bible plays a part in my spiritual and professional life almost every day, always bringing me closer to God.

These three Bibles—the ones I have reverently placed on a shelf and rarely touch anymore and the one I take off the shelf and consult daily—are a good example of what Scripture is in my life. It is a connection to my personal history and the history of the faith I hold so dear. It helps me to know where I come from, what I was created for, and God’s enduring goodness in reaching out to me and to all his people to lead us to salvation. My hope is that Scripture can do the same for you—that it will connect your life today to the history of our salvation and to the promise of eternal life, that it will help you to grow in your relationship with God, and that it will guide you in how to live your life and bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to others.

You are going to learn a great deal about God and Scripture during this course, with this book as the starting point. But this book, studied in a

single semester, cannot teach you everything there is to know about God's Revelation. Seeking this understanding is a lifelong journey. I constantly discover new insights in my well-worn Bible. My hope is that through this course and lifelong study of Scripture, you too will continue to encounter the living Word of God.

Peace and blessings,
Steven McGlaun
Editor, First Edition

Revelation

When we study the Bible, what are we really studying? Is it a collection of exciting stories? A book of advice about moral life? A historical artifact?

The Bible is all these things, of course—but it is so much more. When we study the Bible, we study God’s Revelation and the history of our salvation. Therefore, before we turn our attention to the Bible in this course, we must look at the many ways God has revealed himself to us.

We start by recognizing that God created us with the deep longing to know him. This is where it all begins: our desire for some eternal truth beyond the everyday details of our own lives. The only source of happiness we need is our love for God, made possible by his love for us. Through the natural world and our own reason—both of which come from God—we can begin to know God. We can find him in all his creation. This is called natural revelation, and it has been affirmed by Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church.

If we can find God through his creation, why do we need to study the Bible? Sadly, Original Sin hinders our ability to know God fully through natural revelation. This is why God provided us with Divine Revelation: his communication about himself and his saving plan for us. We can begin our study of Divine Revelation through Sacred Scripture. However, Divine Revelation was fulfilled when God sent his own Divine Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin and death.

The enduring understandings and essential questions represent core concepts and questions that are explored throughout this unit. By studying the content of each chapter, you will gain a more complete understanding of the following:

Enduring Understandings

1. When we respond to the invitation to live in communion with God, we become more fully the people he created us to be.
2. We can come to know God through the natural world and through human reason.
3. God's Revelation is communicated through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

Essential Questions

1. How does one find true happiness?
2. How can I know and search out God?
3. How has God communicated with humanity?

The Desire to Know God

Introduction

We are created with a longing, a yearning, for God. Each of us yearns for a life of meaning and truth, which can be fulfilled only by our supreme, good, and loving God. God wants us to know him. It's so easy to become distracted by worldly promises and definitions of happiness, goodness, and beauty. But God continually invites and challenges us to renounce the distortions of this world and fix our eyes on the infinite truth found in him alone. There is only one answer, one choice, if we want to be truly happy in this life and the next. That answer is God—our God who knew us before we were born, knows our thoughts before we speak them, and leads us on the path to salvation.

We begin our study of the Bible by exploring God's continual invitation to us to be in relationship with him. We see in this chapter that just as we have been created with a longing for God, so God also longs to be close to us. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, shows us God's great love for humanity and invites us to communion and salvation through God. When we respond to God's invitation to live in communion with him, we find the lasting happiness he created us to experience.

Article 1: We Are Created to Long for God

Hunger . . . thirst . . . yearn . . . crave . . . long . . . need! When we use these words, we describe a desire to fill an emptiness, a void, in our lives. We all have the need to satisfy this inner longing. Because God has written this inner longing into our hearts, we experience a restlessness that only God can satisfy. To be human is to embark on a journey of wandering, as the Israelites did during the Exodus, knowing that our one true direction and destination is God alone.

We Are Religious Beings

Each of us is a religious being. Whether we realize it or not, our **vocation** (from the Latin word meaning “to call”) as religious beings is to live fully human lives—lives in which we know, love, and freely choose God. When we say that humans are religious beings, we are saying that we are made by and for God, to live in communion with him. Within the human heart is a place that desires to be filled with God’s infinite love. From the moment of conception, we were knitted in our mother’s womb with



vocation

A call from God to all members of the Church to embrace a life of holiness. Specifically, it refers to a call to live the holy life as an ordained minister, as a vowed religious (sister or brother), or in a Christian marriage. Single life that involves a personal consecration or commitment to a permanent, celibate gift of self to God and one’s neighbor is also a vocational state.

Primary Sources

Saint Teresa of Ávila on the Holy Desire for God

Do you ever feel an unexplainable desire for silence and prayer? God’s love draws us to him and calls us to respond to him with love. Sometimes we experience his love as a yearning in our heart. In *The Interior Castle*, Saint Teresa of Ávila, the first female Doctor of the Church, wrote about how God reaches out to us every day. The next time you are in prayer, reflect on the following words of [Saint Teresa of Ávila](#):

This Lord of ours is so anxious that we should desire him and strive after his companionship that he calls us ceaselessly, time after time, to approach him; and this voice of his is so sweet. . . . His appeals come through the conversations of good people, or from sermons, or through the reading of good books . . . through sicknesses and trials, or by the means of truths which God teaches us at times when we are engaged in prayer; however feeble such prayers may be, God values them highly.

a desire for truth and happiness that only God can satisfy. We find expressions of this desire both in Sacred Scripture and in the lives of the saints.

The Book of Psalms, in the Old Testament, sheds light on our longings that can find meaning and rest only in the knowledge and wisdom of God. [Psalm 42](#) speaks of the quest for God in this way: “As the deer longs for streams of water, / so my soul longs for you, O God. / My soul thirsts for God, the living God” (verses 2–3). The psalmist compares thirst for God to being parched, longing for refreshing and plentiful water. In [Psalm 23](#) we find the longing for a shepherd who gives strength, provides protection, and sets a banquet of love.

The writings of the saints also illustrate humanity’s search for God. At all times we move toward God to find completion. [Saint John of the Cross](#) wrote about “one dark night, fired with love’s urgent longings. . . . O night that has united the Lover with his beloved” (*The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, pages 358–359). John was speaking of his soul’s burning desire to be united with God, the Lover. [Saint Teresa of Ávila](#) stated, “In the measure you desire Him, you will find Him.”

Pray It!

Hear, Receive, Follow

God wants us to know him. He even created us to long to know him. But like most people, you probably have many distractions that interfere with your ability to focus on God. At such times, how can you turn your attention back to God and make time for him? Prayer is always a good place to start. This prayer is short and simple—but if you pray it regularly, you might find that it has a powerful effect:

O God:
 Open my ears to hear you
 and my heart to receive you,
 and strengthen my will
 that I may follow you.
 Amen.

(*The Catholic Youth Prayer Book*, page 13)

According to both saints, persistent longing and authentic desire are the direct paths to God.

We Are Always Moving toward God

[Saint Augustine of Hippo](#) said, “The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire to see God as He is.” We came from God and are constantly journeying back to him. Our ultimate desire is union with him. Because we are religious beings, our whole spiritual journey is characterized by an unceasing craving to know the saving hand of God. When we respond to his invitation to live in communion with him, we become more fully the people he created us to be.

What can you do in your everyday life to respond to God’s invitation to live in communion with him?

Article 2: God’s Invitation

How often do you interact with friends, family, classmates, and even strangers? We spend much of our time on earth building relationships. Science and our own experiences tell us that healthy relationships are necessary for us to survive and thrive. The heart of any healthy relationship is a strong, intimate closeness or bond. This goal challenges us to become people of compassion and faith. The most important relationship we have is with God. Sacred Scripture reminds us of the critical need to know God and his power to save us (see [Philippians 3:8–11](#)).

Just as we constantly yearn to know God, he constantly calls us to relationship with himself. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965) states, “From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God” (19). In other words, we are invited into communion with God to experience the grace





Incarnation

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.

of his saving love. God wants to know, love, and hold us. Therefore he continually calls us to himself.

Jesus Christ: God’s Greatest Invitation

Because God so longs for a relationship with us, he has reached out in a radical way. In the **Incarnation** the Word of God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, God revealed himself to human beings in a new way so we might hear and understand the message of **salvation**. In fact, the name Jesus means “God saves.” In and through Jesus Christ, God has “provided the definitive, superabundant answer to the questions that man asks himself about the meaning and purpose of his life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 68*). The Incarnation of the Son of God is about God’s love for humanity. Because of his love for us,

Did You Know?

The Church in the Modern World



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In 1962, [Blessed Saint Pope John XXIII](#) opened the twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Church, also known as **Vatican Council II**. Like all Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council II was a gathering of the Church’s bishops from around the world, convened by the Pope. Pope John XXIII wanted the Church to respond to the cares and concerns of people in a rapidly changing world. *The Church in the Modern World*, one of the Council’s many documents, emphasizes a pastoral concern for the people of the modern era, declaring that their joys, hopes, grief, and anguish must be the Church’s as well. With the goal of “scrutinizing the signs of the times” and “interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (4), the document

addresses the dignity of the human person, the need for community in an individualistic world, and our relationship to the universe. It also addresses the Church’s role in the formation of people, the sanctity of marriage and family life, and economic and social justice.

God the Father sent his only Son, who is God himself, to invite us into a life-giving relationship with him. By dwelling among us, God further extends his invitation to communion and eternal salvation. Although we build many relationships throughout life, no relationship is greater than the one we have with our God.

In what ways is your relationship with God the greatest relationship in your life? How can it become even greater?

Article 3: Happiness in God Alone

What do I need to be truly happy in this lifetime? All of us ask ourselves this question at some point. Most of us struggle with it throughout our entire lives. In our society the media offers various answers to this question, ranging from expensive homes, cars, and clothing to lives of promiscuous sex and experimentation with drugs and alcohol. Those who seek happiness through these sources discover that they do not get the happiness they thought they would. Why?

The promises of this world are empty, lacking depth and meaning. Some things might provide momentary satisfaction or relief, but they eventually leave us looking for a new fix for our unhappy and aching spirits. We may try to fill the void of unhappiness with the latest smartphone, computer, fashion trend, and so on. Through advertising and popular entertainment, the media has been able to convince people that material goods relieve our dissatisfactions with life. In reality, material goods leave us still looking for true happiness.

According to Saint Augustine, we need not look for happiness anywhere but with God, because our hearts are restless until they find rest in him. In the words of the *Catechism*, God is “our first origin and our ultimate goal” (CCC, 229). He is our beginning and our destiny. We can find happiness and truth only when we live in right relationship with God and commit fully to him. He always



salvation

From the Latin *salvare*, meaning “to save,” referring to the forgiveness of sins and assurance of permanent union with God, attained for us through the Paschal Mystery—Christ’s work of redemption accomplished through his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. Only at the time of judgment can a person be certain of salvation, which is a gift of God.

Vatican Council II

The Ecumenical or general Council of the Roman Catholic Church that Saint John XXIII convened as pope in 1962 and that continued under Venerable Pope Paul VI until 1965.

takes the first step in calling us to this communion with himself. Responding to God's call means we remove the promises and distractions of this world and focus on him to have a clearer sense of his vision and path.

Being fully committed to God means putting our faith in him. The Holy Spirit works in us and helps us to believe by preparing us to receive the gift of faith. God's supernatural gift of faith leads us to choose him with our whole heart and mind, not preferring anything else and not replacing him with anything. When we make this choice, we will naturally want to live a life based on the Beatitudes—recognizing that true happiness is found in God alone. Jesus Christ, God's infinite Word and Wisdom, gave us these Beatitudes as a key for living in true happiness:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

[\(Matthew 5:3–12\)](#)

Have you ever been unhappy even when you got something you really wanted? Why do you think you were still unhappy?

Article 4: Saint Augustine and the Four Objects of Love

Have you noticed that some people get along with everyone? The more friends they have, the more friends they seem to make. This is possible because within our heart and soul is a tremendous capacity to love. The more we love in a genuine way, the more love we have to offer.

Love—sometimes referred to as *caritas*, a Latin term meaning “charity”—is equated with the emotions of affection, reverence, and blessing. Love describes the manifestation of God’s presence in creation. Our primary call as Christians is to give and accept love. Underlying



continency, continence

Abstinence from all sexual activity.



Faith in Action

Saint Augustine’s Change of Heart



© Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy / Bridgeman Images

Does it sometimes seem like saints must be holy and virtuous from birth? If so, then you may be surprised to learn about the sinful early life of Saint Augustine, the fourth-century Church Father. Augustine’s pagan father was proud of his son’s physical ability and cleverness, but his Christian mother grieved because the young Augustine had fallen into sin. For example, he and his friends once stole pears from a neighbor’s garden. Augustine later recalled that he was not hungry, and the pears were not even tasty. Rather, he enjoyed the sin itself. He was unrepentantly sinful into adulthood, even having a son with one of his mistresses. He increasingly searched for deeper meaning, but he was not ready to give up his sinful ways, praying, “Grant me chastity and **continency**, but not yet” (*Confessions*, 8.17).

What changed? One day Augustine’s conscience would not let him go on like he’d been living, and he wept in his garden as children played nearby. Then he heard a child chant, “Take up and read; take up and read” (*Confessions*, 8.29). He opened his Bible to read: “Let us conduct ourselves properly . . . , not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh” ([Romans 13:13–14](#)). These words made clear to Augustine what he must do, and he finally turned to Christ with all his heart.

much of the Christian understanding of love is the wisdom of Saint Augustine of Hippo, who proclaimed that there are four objects we should love: God, our neighbors, ourselves, and our bodies.

1. God

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” ([Matthew 22:37](#)). Jesus Christ identified this as the first Great Commandment. Before we can love anything or anyone, we must first love God, who breathed life into our bodies. But love does not start with us. We are only able to love because God loved us first. Once we respond by giving our full selves to him, the love that flowed from the wounds of Jesus Christ on the cross will inflame our hearts with a fire that cannot be extinguished.

2. Our Neighbors

According to Saint Augustine, if we do not love our neighbors, we do not love God. Loving our neighbors does not mean we always agree with their attitudes and actions. It means we revere and respect our neighbors



Live It!

Loving by Listening

One way you can love is by listening well. Listening requires more than just physically hearing something. Good listening is a gift that takes time and energy. It demands full presence and attentiveness. It is sometimes difficult to listen, especially when the person speaking is in pain.

Listening also fits in with Saint Augustine’s four objects of love. Listening to God in prayer and in his Word is essential in the life of a Christian. Listening to your neighbor is love too. If anyone has ever attentively listened to you when you’ve had a problem, you know what a wonderful gift it is to share your worries with someone who cares. Listening to yourself—your own fears, needs, hopes, and dreams—is also important, especially in discerning your vocation in life.

Take time each day to show love—for God, others, and yourself—by being an attentive listener.

because God has created every person “in his image” ([Genesis 1:27](#)). Recall the second Great Commandment that Jesus proclaimed: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” ([Matthew 22:39](#)).

3. Ourselves

To love ourselves is to love God. Self-love is the realization that God is imprinted on our heart, waiting, wanting us to display his love to the world in a beautiful and magnificent way. Knowing that Jesus Christ gave himself for our salvation points to our infinite worth and value—God himself died for us. But we must be sure that love of self does not become selfish or contrary to God’s will. Rather, loving ourselves should empower us to move beyond ourselves and build the Reign of God, where all people can see their own value.

4. Our Bodies

Our body is one of God’s great masterpieces. It will be resurrected at the end of time, manifest in God’s greatness, goodness, and glory. We must hold our body in high esteem, because it bears God’s creative hand. “It is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit¹” ([CCC, 364](#)).

Which of these—God, neighbor, yourself, or your body—do you have the most difficulty loving? How can you overcome that difficulty?

Chapter Review

1. What is the vocation of every human being?
2. How did Saint Augustine summarize the goal of a good Christian?
3. What is the Incarnation? How is it an important event in God's work of salvation?
4. What were the goals of Vatican Council II's document *The Church in the Modern World*?
5. What do we find when we respond to God's call to live in communion with him?
6. What did Jesus give us as a framework or as the keys for living in true happiness?
7. According to Saint Augustine, what are the four objects of love?

Natural Revelation

Introduction

God painted all creation with the truth of his existence. He also created us with the ability to know him by using our ability to think—our reason. Through creation and reason, we can come to know God. This is called natural revelation. Because of natural revelation, we can logically and reasonably deduce the existence of God through the natural order. God shaped all living things as a sign and symbol of his desire to be known through his magnificent universe.

Sacred Scripture calls our attention to our ability to know God through natural revelation. So do the writings of the Church Fathers, the proofs developed by scholastic theologians, and the teachings of recent Church Councils. However, the ability of the human mind to fully know the truth about God through natural revelation has been hindered because of historical and social conditions and the consequences of Original Sin. Something more is needed. God, in his wisdom and goodness, provided Divine Revelation for us. Divine Revelation is God's communication about himself and his plan for humanity, which he made known to us most fully by sending his own Divine Son, Jesus Christ. Natural revelation is the subject of this chapter; you will read about Divine Revelation in chapter 3.



natural revelation

The process by which God makes himself known to human reason through the created world.

Article 5: Sacred Scripture and Natural Revelation

“The heavens declare the glory of God; / the firmament proclaims the works of his hands” ([Psalm 19:2](#)). God reveals himself in many and varied ways. We can come to know God by contemplating his wondrous and majestic universe. The process by which God makes himself known through the natural and created order is called **natural revelation**. Within each of us lies the capacity to understand God as the beginning and the end of the universe. From the sun and moon to the trees and changing seasons, from the uniqueness of every person to the endless energy that flows through all living things, all creation proclaims God’s existence. Both the Old and New Testaments emphasize natural revelation by calling attention to God’s glory in the universe he created.

Natural Revelation in the Old Testament

Sacred Scripture contains countless passages that point to the Christian understanding of natural revelation. In the account of Creation in the Book of Genesis, we learn



Live It!

Seeing God in All Things

When creating a yearbook spread for the senior class, the editor asked a few seniors to submit pictures of their rooms at home to be printed in the spread. The headline asked readers to guess which room belonged to which senior. Not surprisingly, the friends who knew the seniors the best could easily match the rooms with their owners. It makes sense that the way you decorate your room says a lot about you. After all, you are the interior designer.

The same is true with God. All creation is able to tell us something about the Creator, as we come to know God better and better. Take time to consider what the natural world is telling you about God. Make a plan to experience the next sunrise or sunset. Go to a hill or to a shoreline, or any open area, and just take it in with all its colors. Then pause for a moment to see if you can perceive God’s hand in it.

about God’s creative action over the course of seven days. At the end of each day, after God worked to splash the earth with color and life, he saw how good and beautiful his creations are. The goodness of every created thing points to the Absolute and Supreme Good: God. Light, darkness, water, sky, earth, plants, trees, sun, moon, stars, animal life, and human beings—God’s most important creation—all point to God as “the first cause and final end of all things” ([CCC, 34](#)).

A passage in the Book of Wisdom describes people who were unable to recognize God from the things they could see. The passage describes as foolish those “who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing the one who is” ([13:1](#)). They didn’t recognize that all created things point to the Creator. When we take time to wonder and marvel at the beauty and order of the world, we are able to see the work of God, who is Creator of Heaven and earth.

Natural Revelation in the New Testament

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also sheds light on our understanding of natural revelation. The Acts of the Apostles details the growth of the early Church under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read [Saint Paul’s](#) description of a God who “fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions” ([17:26](#)). Paul offered this description to direct the Athenians to a magnificent truth: God is alive and real, and he continually reveals himself throughout all creation.

The letters of Saint Paul also affirm that God has made himself evident in all creation. In his Letter to the



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Creation itself gives witness to the glory of God, the Creator. What parts of creation cause you to think about God and give thanks to God?

Romans, Paul writes this about God: “Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made” (1:20). Acts and Romans, along with many other New Testament writings, point to our capacity to know God through the natural order. Sacred Scripture directs our eyes and heart toward the world and all its inhabitants, enabling us to recognize God’s existence and presence.

In light of natural revelation, how can science promote faith?



Faith in Action

The White Violet Center: Caring for God’s Creation



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The White Violet Center for Eco-Justice was established by the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in Indiana in 1995. Its mission is to “foster a way of living that recognizes the interdependence of all creation.”

From the time that Saint (Mother) Theodora Guerin traveled from France to Indiana in 1840, the Sisters of Providence have been rooted amidst the farms and forests of this midwestern state. Mother Theodora loved her new home in the forest. Having been taught by her mother to use plants and herbs for healing, she used her knowledge to benefit her new neighbors in Indiana.

Today the Sisters of Providence recognize reverence for the natural world as an integral part of their charism.

The White Violet Center has become a center of education where the sisters and other experts teach the practical skills necessary for living in harmony with the world that God created and entrusted to us as a sign of his love and care. Every year the center sponsors an Earth Day celebration. The sisters also offer workshops in weaving, using the wool from their own herd of alpacas. The White Violet Center website posts action alerts to encourage involvement in important political decisions that affect the environment. Visitors to the center are welcome to enjoy touring the sisters’ well-cultivated organic farmland, walking the bluebird trail, and meeting the alpacas.

Article 6: Natural Revelation and the Wisdom of the Church Fathers

“Creation is a great book. . . . [God] set before your eyes the things he had made. . . . Heaven and earth cry out to you, ‘God made me!’” With these words Saint Augustine, an influential **Father of the Church**, proclaimed that the universe and created order point to the existence of God. [Saint Augustine](#) invited us to open the “book of creation” and discover the presence of God. Many other Fathers of the Church affirmed the notion of natural revelation—our ability to know God, the Creator and Lord, in and through the magnificence of his creation, informed by our human reason. However, historical conditions and the consequences of **Original Sin** often diminish our ability to fully know God’s truth through natural revelation alone. This is why we need Divine Revelation.



Fathers of the Church (Church Fathers)

During the early centuries of the Church, those teachers whose writings extended the Tradition of the Apostles and who continue to be important for the Church’s teachings.

Did You Know?

Time Line of the Church Fathers

Father of the Church is a title given to an important teacher in the early Church whose work extended the tradition of the Apostles. Many worked to correct early heresies, but all promoted teachings that are still important for the Church today. The Church has named dozens of Church Fathers, including these saints:

- Saint Athanasius (296–373), Bishop of Alexandria
- Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (325–389), Archbishop of Constantinople
- Saint Basil the Great (330–379), Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, in modern-day Turkey
- Saint Gregory of Nyssa (335–394), Bishop of Nyssa in Cappadocia, in modern-day Turkey
- Saint Ambrose (340–397), Bishop of Milan
- Saint John Chrysostom (347–407), Archbishop of Constantinople
- Saint Jerome (347–419), of Bethlehem, known for the Vulgate, the first Latin translation of the Bible
- Saint Augustine (354–430), Bishop of Hippo Regius, now Annaba, in modern-day Algeria
- Saint Gregory the Great (540–604), Bishop of Rome



Original Sin

From the Latin *origo*, meaning “beginning” or “birth.” The term has two meanings: (1) the sin of the first human beings, who disobeyed God’s command by choosing to follow their own will and thus lost their original holiness and became subject to death, (2) the fallen state of human nature that affects every person born into the world, except Jesus and Mary.

The Universe as a Sign of God

Essential to the theology and spirituality of the Church Fathers is the idea that the universe provides us with visible evidence of God’s existence. Therefore, when we notice a beautiful sunset, enjoy the changing colors of a tree, or recognize the cycle of life, we can arrive at a deeper knowledge of God as both the beginning and the end of all creation. [Saint Gregory of Nyssa](#), a Church Father and bishop, recognized that as we come to know God through the created universe, our desire for God grows stronger and deeper. According to the Church Fathers, because the universe shows God’s existence, it draws us into a closer relationship with him.

The Human Being as the Image of God

Many Church Fathers—especially [Saints Athanasius](#), [Gregory of Nazianzus](#), Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine of Hippo—paired the idea that God can be known through natural revelation with the belief that humanity is the summit of creation. In other words, the Church Fathers saw human beings as the high point of God’s creative action in the world. After all, the Book of Genesis tells us that God created us in his image. To look at humans in all our complexities is to see God. He is the fashioner of our souls. [Saint Irenaeus](#) made this point in a well-known saying: “Man fully alive is the glory of God.”

Seeing God Revealed in All Creation

Saint Augustine emphasized, “Even the tiniest insect cannot be considered attentively without astonishment and without praising the Creator.” The Church Fathers truly recognized the imprint of God on everything he created, especially on human beings. Nothing created by God, not even the smallest bug, is insignificant. God’s existence and glory are manifested in the smallest to the largest of his creations. We can know him through the work of his hands. This is the fruit of the scriptural understanding of natural revelation. The Church Fathers proclaimed

the undeniable truth of God revealed in nature. When we recognize God's Revelation in all creation and listen to God's call in the deepest parts of our being, we can be certain that God exists and that he is the origin and the end of all things.

How does a seemingly insignificant insect or plant point to the undeniable imprint of God on creation?

Pray It!

God's Presence in Creation

Do you feel spiritually awed by mountains or thunderstorms? Many people find it easy to experience God when they contemplate a wonder of nature. The following prayer can help you to remember that God is the author of all creation:

God,
Help me to see that all creation flows from you.
You reveal yourself in the wind,
in the stars and planets of the night sky.
All plants and animals remind me of your glory.
Although my life is sometimes chaotic,
I marvel at the order in the universe.
The majestic mountains, the forests,
and the vast beaches that line our oceans
give witness to the peace and harmony you place within creation.
Remind me often that I am your child,
for you created me in your image and likeness.
Help me to develop my capacity to love,
seek the truth, and use my freedom wisely.
And as I continue to see the beauty and wonder of all your creation,
may it lead me to a deeper longing for you.
Amen.



Middle Ages

Also known as the medieval period, the time between the collapse of the Roman Empire in the late fifth century AD and the beginning of the Renaissance in the fourteenth century.

scholastic theology

The use of philosophical methods to better understand revealed truth.

The goal of scholastic theology is to present the understanding of revealed truth in a logical and systematic form.

Doctor of the Church

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

Article 7: Natural Revelation and Scholastic Theology

New, rational arguments to demonstrate the existence of God emerged during the **Middle Ages**, particularly in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. These centuries saw the beginning of **scholastic theology**, an approach to the study of God that uses philosophical methods to better understand revealed truth. Grounded in Sacred Scripture and in the Church Fathers' understanding of natural revelation, scholastic theology also relies heavily on the use of logic. The great scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages maintained that we can use our minds to develop logical, convincing arguments to attain truth and certainty about God and the human experience. Two of these great thinkers were Saint [Anselm of Canterbury](#) and [Saint Thomas Aquinas](#).

The goal of scholastic theology is to present the understanding of revealed truth in a logical and organized form. Scholastic theology continues to be an energizing force behind current arguments regarding the genuineness of God's existence.

Saint Anselm of Canterbury: One Proof of God's Existence

Saint Anselm of Canterbury, a **Doctor of the Church**, monk, and scholastic theologian wrote a prayer, or meditation, called *Proslogion*, he proposed an argument that uses reason alone to assert the existence of God. His argument is as follows:

1. God is "that than which nothing greater can be thought."
2. It is greater to exist in reality than to exist merely in the mind.
3. Then God must exist in reality, not only in mind and understanding.

Today scholars still study Saint Anselm's argument.

Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Five Proofs

[Saint Thomas Aquinas](#), a Dominican friar, is arguably the most influential scholastic theologian. He too was named a Doctor of the Church. He is best known for his work called *Summa Theologiae*. *Summa Theologiae* is a twenty-one-volume work on theology and faith. One of Aquinas's many accomplishments in philosophy and theology is his five proofs of God's existence. According to Aquinas, the reality of God can be proved, or logically demonstrated, in five ways.

First Proof: The First Mover

The first proof or argument is known as the First Mover. It begins with the idea that the universe constantly moves. Because everything is always moving and changing, human beings can logically see a need for a First Mover, who set everything in motion and still guides the actions of humanity. We call that First Mover God.

Second Proof: Causality

The second proof of God's existence is referred to as Causality, or First Efficient Cause. By reflecting on the cycle of life, we realize that all things are caused by something else. We equally realize that nothing can create itself. Therefore common sense tells us there must be an Ultimate Cause or First Efficient Cause, which is uncaused, not created by something else. This uncaused First Cause is God.

Third Proof: Contingency

The third proof is based on a theory of **contingency**. This argument states that the universe contains many contingent things—that is, things that came into existence because of something else. But if everything is contingent on something that already existed, there



contingency

A state in which something relies or depends on something else.

After reading this section, what do you think is significant about the two objects Saint Thomas Aquinas is holding in this painting?



© National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY

must have been a time in the past when nothing existed. Yet we know that things do exist. If they exist, they cannot exist without a Necessary Being. A Necessary Being is one who creates but is not created. That Necessary Being, which gives life to all beings, is God.

Fourth Proof: Perfection

The fourth proof begins with our understanding of perfection. Most of us can point out the imperfections of the world and humanity. In naming imperfections we acknowledge that there are varying degrees of beauty, goodness, and knowledge. But how do we recognize perfect beauty, goodness, and knowledge? According to Aquinas, we know perfection because there is one All-Perfect Being, God, who sets the infinite standard for wisdom and truth.

Fifth Proof: Intelligent Being

The fifth and final proof points out that the world is characterized by remarkable order. This proof begins by recognizing that many things in the universe have no intelligence of their own. Yet despite their lack of intel-

Primary Sources

Know the Cause by Examining the Effect

Have you studied cause and effect in your science classes? For example, you might have learned that a motionless object will not move unless something exerts force on it. Saint Thomas Aquinas used similar logic to explain natural revelation. He pointed out that everything we witness in nature can lead us to understand its divine cause, even when the cause is hard to perceive directly:

When an effect is more apparent to us than its cause, we come to know the cause through its effect. Even though the effect should be better known to us [because it is easier for us to witness], we can demonstrate from any effect that its cause exists, because effects always depend on some cause, and a cause must exist if its effect exists. We can therefore demonstrate that God exists from what is not evident to us on the basis of effects which are evident to us.

(Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*)

ligence, they still act toward and achieve their end. One can then deduce that if things that lack intelligence still fulfill their purpose, there must be something intelligent that does have knowledge of their end and directs all things to their appropriate conclusion. This something can be seen as the intelligent designer behind our complex universe. We name this Intelligent Designer and Magnificent Architect God.

All five of Aquinas's proofs logically point to the existence of God as the First Mover, First Cause, Necessary Being, Model of Perfection, and Intelligent Being. In the words of the *Catechism*, each argument emphasizes that we “can come to know that there exists a reality which is the first cause and final end of all things, a reality that everyone calls “God””² (34).

How can God be both the cause and the end of everything?

Article 8: Natural Revelation: Vatican Council I to the Present

Church history echoes with the assertion that God “can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason”³ (CCC, 36). At various points in the Church's history, the reality of natural revelation has encountered opposition. At these times the Church has benefited from the wisdom of the **Magisterium** and from noted theologians in affirming the role of natural revelation in helping people to experience the existence of God.

In December 1869 Vatican Council I, the twentieth **Ecumenical Council** of the Church, was convened. Before it was cut short due to outside circumstances, the Council closely examined the relationship between faith and reason. Some claimed that human reason lacks the capacity to grasp religious knowledge. Many throughout the world were challenging the Church's teaching that God can be known in and through creation, informed by



Magisterium

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

Ecumenical Council

A gathering of the Church's bishops from around the world to address pressing issues in the Church. Ecumenical Councils are usually convened by the Pope or are at least approved by him.



conscience

The “inner voice,” guided by human reason and Divine Law, that enables us to judge the moral quality of a specific action that has been made, is being made, or will be made. This judgment enables us to distinguish good from evil, in order to accomplish good and avoid evil. To make good judgments, one needs to have a well-formed conscience.

human reason. In its constitution *Dei Filius* (1870), the Council affirmed, “God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason” (2).

The philosopher Emmanuel Kant (1724–1804) is noted for saying, “Have the courage to use your own reason!” This motto, along with the assertions of Vatican Council I, gained the attention of the philosopher and theologian [John Henry Cardinal Newman](#) (1801–1890). Cardinal Newman developed a theory known as the convergence of probabilities. This theory says that a number of probable hints, or indicators, point to the existence of God. These indicators range from the mystery of our world to our frequent experiences of beauty and goodness, from the voice of **conscience** to the enjoyment of freedom. The theory also says that no single indicator necessarily proves the existence of God. Instead, when these hints are combined, they produce a powerful argument. The strength of these probable indicators, taken together, points us to the same conclusion: God exists.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a French theologian who was a member of the Society of Jesus, also called the Jesuits. The Jesuits are a group of priests and religious brothers who follow the ideas and spirituality of [Saint Ignatius of Loyola](#). Teilhard was educated in theology and science. As both a mystic and a scientist, he sought to reconcile the world of religious thought with the rapid growth of scientific knowledge during his lifetime. One of his most significant contributions to the Church’s understanding of natural revelation is the belief that creation reveals the sacred face and blazing heart of God.

Karl Rahner (1904–1984), another Jesuit theologian, largely influenced the Catholic understanding of natural revelation. His work during Vatican Council II, and his many writings, presented the idea that whenever we experience a limitation in knowledge, freedom, or perfection, we have an underlying awareness of God as Absolute Mystery. To help us understand God as mys-

tery, Rahner used the image of a horizon. When we gaze at the horizon, we are not directly looking at it, because it is not something we can actually see. The horizon is where the sky and sea only appear to meet. It is beyond us, but it is the background of everything we see. Just as we do not see the horizon directly, we are unable to see God directly. Nonetheless he is always there. As Absolute Mystery, he forms the backdrop for our lives. Rahner believed that we come to know God through the deep mystery and complexity of the universe. Natural revelation, paired with human reason, helps us to become aware of a God of awesome depth who wants to be known.



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Karl Rahner spoke of God as the “horizon of being.” How would you explain what this means to someone who has never heard the phrase?

Can you think of another metaphor, besides the image of the horizon, to explain God’s mystery?

Chapter Review

1. What is natural revelation?
2. How does the Book of Wisdom support the concept of natural revelation?
3. Why is natural revelation alone insufficient for us to know God fully?
4. How do the Church Fathers explain human beings’ place as the summit of creation?
5. What was the goal of scholastic theology?
6. List and give a brief explanation of the five proofs for the existence of God given by Saint Thomas Aquinas.
7. What did the Pope and bishops reassert at Vatican Council I about the relationship between faith and reason?

Introduction

As we have seen, God makes himself known to us in many ways through the natural order, informed by our God-given intellect. However, we can only know God in a limited way through natural revelation. That is why, in the fullness of his love, he has also freely chosen to reveal himself and his plan for humanity more directly. This is called Divine Revelation.

We study Divine Revelation in a course about the Bible because Sacred Scripture contains the written accounts of God's Revelation to the Jewish People and the first Christians. But we also must recognize that the Bible itself is not the fullness of Divine Revelation. The definitive and most exquisite moment in the Revelation of God took place when the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, became flesh. Jesus Christ is the fullness of Divine Revelation and salvation. He forged a new path for all of us to follow. This is the same path the Apostles and their successors, the bishops, have followed. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to continually teach and live the mysteries revealed by Christ. Together Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are the means by which Divine Revelation is transmitted to every generation.

Article 9: Salvation History: God's Revelation

Many of us are lucky enough to have storytellers in our families. From these people we learn our family history. We may hear about how our parents fell in love and how our grandparents survived tough times. We may also hear stories of pain and conflict within the family, caused by selfishness and greed. If we listen carefully, these stories help us to understand who we are, whom we can model our lives after, and what family pitfalls to avoid.

But we are also part of a much larger and more important history. The Church calls this **salvation history**. Salvation history tells us how God's saving hand has been at work in and through human history. In a general sense, we can say that all human history is salvation history. By this we mean that the one true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has been present and active in the lives of all his people since the beginning of time. But salvation history is more precisely understood as the pattern of specific events in human history in which God clearly revealed his presence and saving actions. Salvation was accomplished once and for all through Jesus Christ, a truth **foreshadowed** and revealed throughout the Old Testament.

At the heart of salvation history is **Divine Revelation**. Over time God revealed the fullness of his loving plan to save the human race from our bondage to sin and death. “God has revealed himself to man by gradually communicating his own mystery in deeds and in words” (CCC, 69). Divine Revelation, also called supernatural Revelation, is our window into the wisdom and knowledge of God. Although Divine Revelation happened in a gradual way, the Father chose to fully disclose himself and his plan through the life, Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of his Divine Son, Jesus Christ. He did this so we can share in his divine nature and his eternal life. God alone has revealed to us the central mystery of the Christian faith—the mystery of the **Trinity**—by revealing



salvation history

The pattern of specific events in human history in which God clearly reveals his presence and saving actions. Salvation was accomplished once and for all through Jesus Christ, a truth foreshadowed and revealed throughout the Old Testament.

foreshadow

To represent or prefigure a person before his or her life or an event before it occurs.

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.



Trinity

From the Latin *trinus*, meaning “threefold,” referring to the central mystery of the Christian faith that God exists as a communion of three distinct and interrelated Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to human reason alone and is known through Divine Revelation only.

himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There will be no new Revelation until Jesus Christ comes again in glory.

As salvation history has unfolded, God has continually invited us into communion with the Blessed Trinity through both actions and words. Salvation history tells us about God, who heals, refreshes, transforms, speaks to, reveals himself to, and saves us. God revealed his name to our ancestors in ways beyond human imagination—from the time he disclosed his divine name to Moses in the **theophany** of the burning bush to the time the angels heralded the name of Jesus Christ, God Incarnate.

Out of love for us, his children, God has provided the definitive and complete answer to our universal questions about the meaning and purpose of our lives. God reveals himself especially in Jesus Christ, who is himself God, to help us know and love him beyond our own ability to do so. Yet despite his Revelation of himself, God remains a mystery, one that we can never fully grasp. He stretches our hearts and minds so there is immeasurable space for divine knowledge and love, yet human language can never capture the magnificence of our transcendent God.



Live It!

God’s Hand in My History

If we believe God’s saving hand has been active throughout all of history, then that means it has been active in our own individual lives as well. God is often present to us through the people and events in our lives. Prayerfully reflecting on this can be a good spiritual exercise.

One way to do this is by charting your own personal history as a journaling activity. Begin by reflecting on your life. Then tell your story in terms of the people or events that have brought you closer to God. Remember that our relationship with God is not always sweet and rosy, but even the events we might have perceived as negative at one time can strengthen our relationship with God. How do you see God’s hand working in your life?

In the words of [John Henry Cardinal Newman](#), “As prayer is the voice of [human beings] to God, so revelation is the voice of God to man.” Divine Revelation is the voice of God, who has revealed himself as Truth and Love. He is trying to get our attention and attract our souls. God wants us to know truth, beauty, goodness, and peace. He knows these can be found only in his revealed Word of Life, Jesus Christ. Divine Revelation is about God’s love for his most perfect creations: each of us.

How is God trying to get your attention?

Article 10: Salvation History in the Old Testament

Salvation history, as recorded in Sacred Scripture, reveals God’s love for his people. Sacred Scripture—the Old and New Testaments—roots us in God’s Divine Revelation to those who have gone before us. This is why we study the Bible: to learn about God’s self-communication to us and his countless saving actions on our behalf. Every time we read or hear the Word of God, we are led ever deeper into the mystery and wonder of God. Let’s first look at how the Old Testament, the words of our ancestors in faith, reveals the truth of God.

Old Testament Highlights

Salvation history begins with our first parents, whom we know by the symbolic names of Adam and Eve. Even though all his creation continually provides evidence of his existence, God wanted to further manifest himself to our first parents. “He invited them to intimate communion with himself and clothed them with resplendent grace and justice” ([CCC, 54](#)). Even when Adam and Eve turned away from God in sin, God remained faithful to them and promised them his salvation (see [Genesis 3:15](#)). The sin of Adam and Eve is called Original Sin. It led to the loss of original holiness, made humans subject to death, and made sin universally present in the world.



theophany

God’s manifestation of himself in a visible form to enrich human understanding of him. An example is God’s appearance to Moses in the form of a burning bush.



covenant

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

This universally present sin led to further sin among God's people. Their sins resulted in broken communities and families and in their separation from God. Yet despite their sinful actions, God still heard the cries of his People and offered them the hope of salvation.

Salvation history continues with the account of Noah. We learn how sin was spreading throughout the whole world, making all people wicked and corrupt. God intended to destroy his creation through a great Flood. However, God gave Noah, the one remaining good and righteous man, instructions to build an ark that would save him and his family from disaster. Both the instructions and the rainbow that appeared at the end of the Flood symbolize God's **covenant** with all living beings—a covenant nourished by God's self-disclosure. This covenant will last until the end of time.

The account of Noah and the Flood is an important part of salvation history. Why did sin become so widespread? How does the story of Noah give us hope?

Generations after the Flood, salvation history tells us, God scattered and divided humanity. He did so because of human pride, symbolized by the building of the Tower of Babel. Then God began his plan to reconcile all humanity with himself by calling a special people to be his light to the nations. Thus he entered into a covenant with the **patriarch** Abraham. God appeared to Abraham in a vision, promising him descendants more numerous

than the stars. God made this promise even though Abraham's wife, Sarah, was unable to have children. Because Abraham was a man of great faith and righteousness, he obeyed God. His obedience resulted in a bloodline of charismatic patriarchs, including Isaac and Jacob. It also helped Abraham to gain land that yielded in abundance.



Salvation history continues with the well-known account of Moses and the Exodus. After freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God entered into a covenant with these descendants of Abraham, who were now known as the Israelites. At Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the Law as the people's part of the covenant. The Law is summarized in the Ten Commandments. Christians call this Law the Old Law, and we call this covenant the Old Covenant. This covenant gave the people an identity as the Chosen, Holy Children of God. Through Divine Revelation, God promised to remain faithful to the covenant and never to cease calling the Israelites to be faithful.



patriarch

The father or leader of a tribe, clan, or tradition. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the patriarchs of the Israelite people.



Faith in Action

Story of a Soul



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Saint [Thérèse of Lisieux](#), known as the Little Flower of Jesus, was a Carmelite nun and a woman of profound wisdom. Her life on this earth was brief, but she became known to the world through her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*. Her superiors had recognized her unique holiness and directed her to write it. In the book she shares with us the many ways God revealed himself to her simple soul. She describes a path, called “the little way,” in which she explains how every charitable action performed for God is a manifestation of God’s existence. In *Story of a Soul*, she describes her fear that she could not measure up to the holiness of the great saints of the Church. But instead of giving up, she writes, she looked for “some

means of going to heaven by a little way which is very short and very straight, a little way that is quite new.” Her “little way” of practicing true charity is one factor that earned her the title Doctor of the Church.

The manner in which God made himself known to Saint Thérèse is known as private revelation. This is distinct from Divine Revelation. Private revelations help people to live more fully at certain times in history, but they do not add to or change Christ’s definitive Revelation.



prophet

A person God chooses to speak his message of salvation. In the Bible, primarily a communicator of a divine message of repentance to the Chosen People, not necessarily a person who predicted the future.

Although God revealed his will and plan to Adam, Eve, Abraham, and Moses, one obstacle continued to stand in the way of God's plan: humanity's tendency to sin, as a result of Original Sin. The Israelites repeatedly turned away from the covenant and the Law. In response, God revealed himself to the **prophets**, people like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. He called the prophets to speak God's Word and to announce the "radical redemption of the People of God, purification from all their infidelities, a salvation which will include all the nations" ([CCC, 64](#)).

Further Hints of Salvation

In addition to the historical accounts just described, we also find hints of salvation in the group of Old Testament books called **wisdom literature**. Wisdom literature, as you might imagine, refers to Israelite writings that extol

Pray It!

Help Me to Know You, Jesus

It can be hard to imagine the awesomeness and immensity of God. Focusing on building a relationship with Jesus Christ, his Son, is sometimes easier. We know that Jesus is the fullness of Divine Revelation, the Second Divine Person of the Trinity. But because he became man, we sometimes find Jesus easier to talk to—knowing that he experienced human joy, sorrow, and fear, just as we do. Use this prayer to ask Jesus to help you know him. Then talk to Jesus about your day, sharing your joys and frustrations like you would with any friend.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd:
 Open my eyes,
 that I might see your glorious light.
 Open my mind,
 that I may know your truth.
 Open my heart,
 that I might receive your healing touch.
 And open my ears,
 that I might hear you say,
 "I love you."
 Amen.

(The Catholic Youth Prayer Book, page 13)

the virtue of wisdom and give practical advice on what it means to be wise. Wisdom literature speaks of a God who intervenes and discloses himself in the events of people's lives. We find God's divine wisdom crying "aloud in the street" (Proverbs 1:20), trying to catch the attention of his beloved children.

Wisdom is sometimes personified in the wisdom literature. The word *personify* means to describe something as one might describe a human being. You can find examples in [Proverbs 1:20–21](#) and [Wisdom 6:12–14](#). This personification of wisdom is fully realized in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the Wisdom of God (see [1 Corinthians 1:30](#)).

Which events from salvation history do you want to read about again in the Old Testament, or perhaps read for the first time? Why?

Article 11: Jesus Christ: The Fullness of All Revelation

And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.

([John 1:14](#))

And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

([Matthew 3:17](#))

As you can see in these two quotations from the Gospels, Sacred Scripture reveals that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This title describes the unique and eternal relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Second Divine Person of the Trinity. Jesus Christ is the only Son of the Father, and he is God himself. He is the perfect image of the Father and is the fullness of Divine Revelation (see [John 14:8–11](#)). As the *Catechism*



wisdom literature

The Old Testament books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon.

explains: “God has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, in whom he has established his covenant for ever. The Son is his Father’s definitive Word; so there will be no further Revelation after him” (73). Jesus Christ is “the Father’s one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one” (65). Because Christ, the Son of God, humbled himself in taking on our humanity, we have been invited into communion with the Blessed Trinity in a whole new way.

The Definitive and Transforming Word

All salvation history, as contained in Sacred Scripture, speaks of one single Word, a transforming Word. This Word is the Second Divine Person of the Trinity, God himself, who came to dwell among us by assuming a human nature. The same Word who created the universe and revealed himself to the sacred writers of Sacred Scripture is Jesus Christ. All of Sacred Scripture, therefore, bears witness to Jesus Christ—the First and Last, the definitive Word of Revelation.

In the life of Jesus Christ, described in the Gospels, we especially see the glory of God. The Word being born in a lowly stable, the Word welcoming the sinner, the Word healing pain and naming demons, the Word washing the feet of friends, the Word hanging on a cross, and the Word rising from the dead—these all reveal a God who chose to reveal himself by taking on our humanity. In the Gospels we learn how God’s Word, by revealing himself in the flesh, came to nurse our pain, bandage our limitations, and counsel our souls. There is no greater Word, and no greater Word can ever be imagined.

Full of Grace and Truth

Wouldn’t it be nice if God’s grace and truth came with an instruction manual? Good news—we already have one. Because he is the definitive Word of God, we can think of Jesus Christ as our instruction manual for interpreting all creation and its final end. When we study the life of Jesus

Christ, who reveals the New Covenant, we come to know the fullness of salvation. We cannot fully understand this plan in our lifetime. But by developing a relationship with Jesus Christ, we come to know his free offer of grace, which enlightens the human mind and heart.

The Gospels use many images to convey the truth of Jesus' identity as the culmination of Divine Revelation. Shepherd, Friend, Savior, Doctor, Bread, Vine, Gate, and Light—all these images point to Jesus, the Son of God, who perfectly reflects and reveals his Father. He is the Word that can free us from all that enslaves us.

Like Saint Patrick of Ireland, let us bind ourselves to Christ, the Eternal Word of God:

I bind to myself today

The virtue of the Incarnation of Christ with that of his
Baptism,

The virtue of His Crucifixion with that of His Burial,

The virtue of His Resurrection with that of His Ascension,

The virtue of His Coming on the Judgment Day.

(from "Saint Patrick's Breastplate")

How do the images for Jesus used in the Gospels help you to understand who he is?



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In this Greek icon, the top letters—*IC XC*—are abbreviations for the Greek spelling of Jesus Christ. The three letters in the halo—*O WN*—are an abbreviation for “He Who Is.” What does this title tell us about Jesus Christ?

Article 12: The Church and the Transmission of Divine Revelation

“What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.”

([Matthew 10:27](#))

Do you know what Jesus was asking of the Apostles in this quotation from Matthew? Jesus Christ, the fullness of Divine Revelation, commanded the Apostles to tell all people and all nations what they heard and saw regarding



Sacred Tradition

Tradition comes from the Latin *tradere*, meaning “to hand on.”

Sacred Tradition 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 Sacred Scripture, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Apostolic Succession

The uninterrupted passing on of apostolic preaching and authority from the Apostles directly to all bishops. It is accomplished through the laying on of hands when a bishop is ordained in the Sacrament of Holy Orders as instituted by Christ. The office of bishop is permanent, because at ordination a bishop is marked with an indelible, sacred character.

the salvation of God. He entrusted them with the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower them to authentically teach and interpret the sacred truths revealed through his teachings and actions during his earthly life and through the events of the **Paschal Mystery**—Jesus’ Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. As they moved from village to village, city to city, the Apostles helped more and more people believe in Jesus Christ through their preaching and writing, inspired by the Holy Spirit. This handing on, or transmission, of the truths Jesus Christ taught is known as **Sacred Tradition**. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Sacred Tradition will continue to be transmitted to each new generation until Christ returns in glory.

Through the process of **Apostolic Succession**, the original Apostles have passed on their authority to their successors, the bishops of the Church. Every bishop of the Church can trace his special authority back to the original Twelve Apostles in an unbroken chain of succession through the laying on of hands in the Sacrament of Holy Orders as instituted by Christ. The office of bishop is permanent because this Sacrament marks a bishop with an indelible, sacred character. In the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the Holy Spirit empowers a bishop with the gifts needed to fulfill his role in the Church, including the gift of authentically teaching and interpreting Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. As true successors to the Apostles who are guided by the Holy Spirit, the bishops, in communion with the Pope, witness to, and develop a deeper understanding of, God’s self-revelation in the Church’s life, doctrine, and worship.

Tradition helps us to understand the Revelation of Jesus Christ found in Scripture. Through Tradition and the leadership of the bishops as teachers and interpreters, the Church proclaims the redemption found in Jesus Christ. It is through her life, teachings, and liturgy that she “perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes” (CCC, 78).

In fulfilling this mission, the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit. The God who spoke to people of the

past continues to communicate with men and women through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit ignites the hearts of believers with a fire. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as our Advocate when the hour of his glorification arrived (see [John 14:15–17](#)), and the Holy Spirit continues to enliven and manifest all that has been revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word Made Flesh. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, guides the Church into the fullness of God’s revealed truth, and opens the hearts and minds of God’s people to know the truth he has revealed and to faithfully live as his own people.

How can you be more open to the power of the Holy Spirit in your own life of faith?

Article 13: Scripture and Tradition: The Two Pillars of God’s Revelation

What exactly is the difference between Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture? Why do Catholics have beliefs and practices that are not in the Bible? Earlier in this chapter, you learned that Sacred Tradition is the handing on, or transmission, of the truths Jesus Christ taught us. Put more simply, Sacred Tradition teaches us the fullness of Divine Revelation. It began with the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written in Sacred Scripture, continues to be handed down and lived out in the life of the Church, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Notice that Sacred Scripture developed from Sacred Tradition. However, the Bible alone does not communicate everything God reveals through Sacred Tradition. In conversation with Scripture, Tradition passes on the message of the Gospel to be lived out in the life of the Church.



Paschal Mystery

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



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At the Last Supper, Jesus commanded the Apostles to “do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19). The Apostles fulfilled this command even at the cost of their lives.



redemption, redemptive

From the Latin *redemptio*, meaning “a buying back,” referring, in the Old Testament, to Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel and, in the New Testament, to Christ’s deliverance of all Christians from the forces of sin.

As Catholics we are blessed in recognizing that God has chosen to disclose the truths of Revelation through both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. “There exists a close connection and communication between Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture,” both of them “flowing from the same divine wellspring” ([*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation \[Dei Verbum, 1965\], 9*](#)). They communicate the whole of God’s **redemptive** and reconciling love. Together “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God” (10). This deposit of the Word of God enables the Church to contemplate God, the source of everything she is, does, and believes.

Are you beginning to see how Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are intimately bound? They are two pillars of strength that hold up the Church as a light for all to know the mystery of Christ. These two pillars—the written, inspired Word of God and the living transmission of the Word of God—effectively communicate the

Did You Know?



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Mary, the Mother of God

Within the Tradition of the Church lies a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Devotion to the Blessed Mother is found in liturgical feasts and in prayers like the Rosary. Because of the teachings of the Apostles, we have come to realize the significant role Mary played in salvation. By saying yes to God’s call to be the mother of his Son, Mary opened the doors to Heaven. She miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and she gave birth to Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God Made Flesh. Thus Mary remained a virgin through the conception and birth of Jesus

and throughout her entire life. Mary is honored as the *Theotokos*, Greek for “God-bearer”—a title affirming that as the mother of Jesus Christ, who is God himself, Mary is the Mother of God. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition lift up Mary as a model of humble faith and amazing courage.

whole of God’s Revelation. Neither pillar can be understood without the other. Therefore each is “to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence” (*Divine Revelation*, 9).

The Deposit of Faith

The **Deposit of Faith** is a term we use to describe the heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The task of interpreting the Deposit of Faith is entrusted to the Magisterium. The Magisterium—the “living teaching office of the Church” (*Divine Revelation*, 10)—is made up of the Pope and all the bishops in communion with him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Both individually and collectively, the bishops of the Church have the unique obligation and right to authentically teach and interpret Scripture and Tradition. Thus the Magisterium, rooted in its teaching authority and moved by the Holy Spirit, defines the **dogma**, or doctrine, of the faith.

Faith is necessary for our salvation. Our faith rests in Jesus Christ and the One who sent him. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (*John 3:16*). The Deposit of Faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition nurtures our faith with the sacred truth revealed by God.

Sacred Tradition Is Faithful to Sacred Scripture

As you can see, it is not accurate to say that some Catholic beliefs and practices are not faithful to the Bible. Everything that is part of Sacred Tradition manifests what was disclosed through Jesus’ teachings and actions during his earthly ministry and during the events of the Paschal Mystery. Nothing the Church teaches or proclaims ever contradicts the truth of Jesus Christ. In the words of the *Catechism*, Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make “present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own



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.

dogma

Teachings recognized as central to Church teaching, defined by the Magisterium and considered definitive and authoritative.

‘always, to the close of the age’⁶⁹ (80). What an amazing Church to be a part of!

How do you understand the difference between tradition and Tradition?

Article 14: The Vocation of All

[Saint Vincent of Lérins](#) stated: “Keep the talent of the Catholic faith inviolate and unimpaired. What has been faithfully entrusted, let it remain in your possession, let it be handed on.” By virtue of our Baptism, we are all called to treasure our faith as a priceless gem. We are to hold it in the treasure chest of our lives. We are also to share the gem with others. In this way we can bring forth the light and radiance of Jesus revealed through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The Church “cannot err in matters

Primary Sources

Saint John Chrysostom on Sacred Tradition



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You might wonder why the Church’s Tradition is as important for our faith as Sacred Scripture is. After all, Scripture is the result of divine inspiration—but is Tradition? Let’s consider an insight from Saint John Chrysostom. Chrysostom was an early Church Father and Doctor of the Church known for his wonderful preaching, his work in liturgical theology, and his fierce arguments against political and Church abuse:

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions that you have been taught, whether by word or by our letter” [[2 Thessalonians 2:15](#)].

From this it is clear that they [the early Church] did not hand down everything by letter, but there was much also that was not written. Like that which was written, the unwritten too is worthy of belief. So let us regard the tradition of the Church also as worthy of belief.

(Homily IV on 2 Thessalonians)

of belief” (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium, 1964], 12*), because the Holy Spirit guides her in the ways of truth and righteousness. Gifted by Apostolic Succession and led by the universal call to holiness, the entire Church—which includes each one of us—must speak what she has heard, in the light and from the housetops.



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How do you speak the truth of your faith in your own life?

We all share in the responsibility to learn about God’s revealed truth and to share it with others. Besides in classes at school, how do you continue to learn about your faith?

Chapter Review

1. What is Divine Revelation?
2. What is salvation history?
3. What is Original Sin, and what are some of the consequences of Original Sin?
4. What is Sacred Tradition?
5. What is the relationship between Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and Revelation?
6. What is the Deposit of Faith?
7. What is the Magisterium? What is the Magisterium’s responsibility in regard to Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition?