

Living in Christ

saint mary's press

The Bible

The Living Word of God



Robert Rabe

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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 in your home there is at least one Bible. In my home there are three. 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 as 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 deeply grateful for them.

The third Bible in my office is the one I use personally 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 reverently placed on a shelf and rarely touched anymore and the one pulled off the shelf and consulted 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 know where I come from, what I was created for, and of 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, and that it will help you grow in your relationship with God, and guide you in how to live your life and bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to others.

8 Introduction

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, and a single semester, cannot teach you everything there is to know about God's Revelation. Seeking this understanding is a life-long 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 continually encounter the living Word of God.

Peace and Blessings,
Steven McGlaun, editor

Section 1

Revelation

Part 1

The Desire to Know God

We are created with a longing, a yearning, for God. Each of us yearns for a life of meaning and truth, which can find fulfillment only in our supreme, good, and loving God. God desires that we know him. It is 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.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 1: “Longing for God” (page 11)
- Article 2: “God’s Invitation” (page 13)
- Article 3: “Happiness in God Alone” (page 15)
- Article 4: “Saint Augustine and the Four Objects of Love” (page 17)

Article 1 Longing for God

Hunger . . . thirst . . . yearn . . . crave . . . long . . . need! When we use these words, we speak of the **desire** to fill an emptiness, a void, in our lives. We all have the need to satisfy this inner longing. Because this inner longing is “written in the human heart” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 27*) by God, people 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 the one true direction and destination is God alone.

Humanity as Religious Beings

Each one of us is a religious being. Whether we realize it or not, our **vocation** (from the Latin, meaning “to call”) as religious beings is to live fully human lives—lives in which we know, love, and freely choose God. When we call humans religious beings, we are saying they are made by and for God, “to live in communion with God” (*CCC, 45*). Within the human heart is a place—a God-shaped hole—desiring to be filled with God’s infinite love. From the moment of conception, we were knitted in our “mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13) with a desire for truth and happiness that only God



desire

From the Latin *desidero*, “to long for what is absent or lost.”

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), in a Christian Marriage, or in single life.

Pray It!

Holy Desire for God

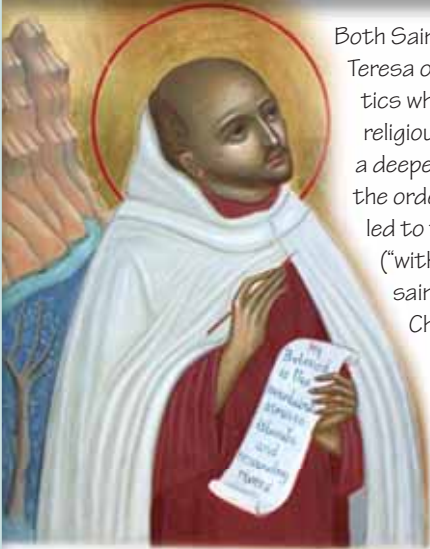
Have you ever felt a desire for silence and prayer? God’s love draws us to him and calls us to respond to him with love. Sometimes we experience his love as a yearning in our heart. Saint Teresa of Ávila, the first woman Doctor of the Church, wrote about how God reaches out to us every day. The next time you are in prayer, reflect on the following words of Saint Teresa:

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.

can satisfy. We find expressions of this desire in both the Sacred Scriptures and in the lives of the saints.

The Book of Psalms, in the Old Testament, illuminates that we are religious beings with 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 being thirsts for God, the living God” (verses 2–3). The psalmist, writer, and composer compares thirst for God to a deer that is parched, longing for refresh-

Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Ávila



Both Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Ávila were sixteenth-century mystics who sought to reform the Carmelite religious order. Their goal was to establish a deeper life of prayer and austerity for the order's members. The reform eventually led to the establishment of the Discalced (“without shoes”) Carmelites. The two saints are considered Doctors of the Church,

along with thirty-one other saints and holy people, because of their abundant writings on doctrine and the spiritual life. John is known for his writings *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, and *The Living Flame of Love*. Teresa is most notable for authoring *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*.



ing and plentiful water. In Psalm 23 we find a people desiring a shepherd who gives strength, provides protection, and sets a banquet of love.

The lives of the saints illustrate humanity’s “quest for God” (CCC, 28), a people moving toward God at all times to find completion. Saint John of the Cross (1542–1591) wrote: “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). In this poetic line, John speaks of his soul’s burning desire to be united with God, the Lover. Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) states, “In the measure you desire Him, you will find Him.” According to both saints, persistent longing and authentic desire are the direct paths to God.

Going Toward God

In the words of Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430), “The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire to see God as He is.” Because we came from God and are going toward him, our ultimate desire is union with him. As religious beings, our whole spiritual journey is characterized by an unceasing craving to know the saving hand of God. When we respond to the invitation to live in communion with God, we become more fully the people he created us to be. †

Article

2 God’s Invitation

We spend much of our time on earth building relationships. Science, psychology, and our experiences tell us healthy relationships are necessary for us to survive and thrive. The heart of any healthy relationship is a strong, intimate bond, closeness, or union, challenging us to become people of compassion and faith. The most important relationship we have is with God. Sacred Scripture reminds us of the critical importance of knowing God and his mighty power to save us (see Philippians 3:8–11).





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.

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.

God constantly calls us to relationship with him. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, 1965)* states that “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 and to experience the grace of his saving love. God wants to know, love, and hold us. Therefore, he “never ceases to draw man to himself” (CCC, 27).

Jesus Christ: God’s Greatest Invitation

Because God so longs for a relationship with us, he 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 has revealed himself and given himself” (CCC, 68) to human beings in a new way so we may heed and understand the message of **salvation**. In fact, the meaning of the name Jesus is “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” (68). The Incarnation of the Son of God is about God’s love for humanity. Because of his love for us, God sent his only Son, who is God himself, to invite us into a life-giving relationship with him. God’s dwelling among us is a further extension of 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. †

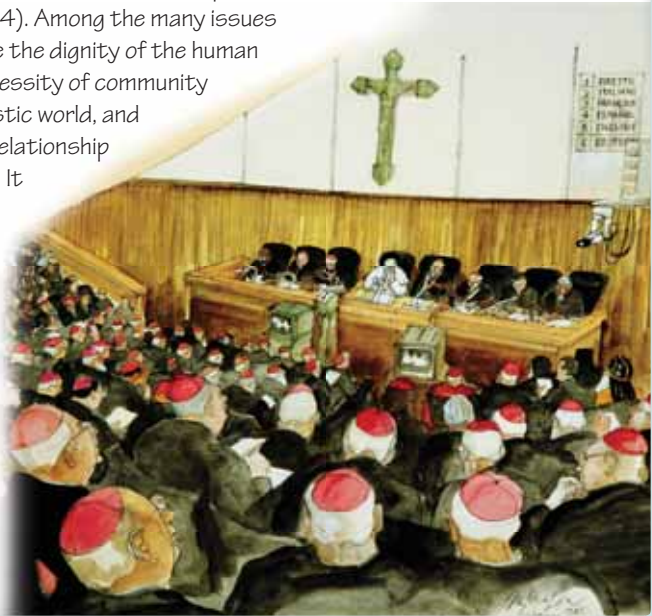
Catholic Wisdom

Facts about Pope John XXIII

Did you know that Pope John XXIII’s name was Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli? Roncalli came from a family of sharecroppers and knew the value of hard work. In 1915 he was drafted to serve his country as a sergeant in the medical corps as a priest. The guidance of the Holy Spirit, his deep spirituality, and his ministry in the Church gave him an understanding of the importance of renewal in the Church.

Gaudium et Spes

In 1962 Pope John XXIII opened the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican. This Council became known as Vatican Council II. This Council, like all Ecumenical Councils, was a gathering of the Church's bishops from all around the world, convened by the Pope. Pope John XXIII wanted the Church to respond in a relevant manner to the cares and concerns of people in a rapidly changing world. Vatican II ended in 1965. Among the many documents written at Vatican II was *Gaudium et Spes*. This document is also known as *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. It had the goal of “scrutinizing the signs of the times” and “interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (4). Among the many issues addressed were the dignity of the human person, the necessity of community in an individualistic world, and human beings’ relationship to the universe. It also dealt with the Church’s role in the formation of people, the sanctity of marriage and family life, and economic and social justice.



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Article

3 Happiness in God Alone

“What do I need to be truly happy in this lifetime?” All people encounter this question at some point. Most of us struggle with it throughout our entire lives. In our culture the media offer various answers to this question. They range from expensive homes, cars, and clothing to lives of promiscuous sex and experimentation with drugs and alcohol. Even

though people buy into these cultural approaches to happiness, they are still unhappy. Why?

The promises of this world are empty, lacking depth and meaning. Therefore they often provide momentary satisfaction or relief but eventually leave us looking for a fix to our unhappy and aching spirits. We may try to fill the void of unhappiness with the greatest and latest cell phone, computer, fashion trend, and so on. Through advertising, the media have been able to convince people that material goods answer our dissatisfactions with life. All these things, though good in moderation, will still leave us looking for true happiness.

According to Saint Augustine, we need not look anywhere for happiness but to God, “for our hearts are restless until they rest” in him. Happiness and truth can be found only when we live “in communion with God” (CCC, 45).

The Beatitudes

*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)

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

God is “our first origin and our ultimate goal” (CCC, 229). He is our beginning and our destiny. Thus happiness is found only in a life fully committed to him. 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. This is God's supernatural gift of faith, which leads us to choose God with our whole hearts and minds, so we neither prefer “anything to him” nor “substitute anything for him” (229). When we make this choice, we will 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 the Beatitudes as a key for living in true happiness. †

Article 4 Saint Augustine and the Four Objects of Love

Have you ever noticed that some people get along with everyone? It seems that the more friends they have, the more friends they make. This is possible because within our heart and soul is a tremendous capacity to love. The more we love, the more love we have to give—within limits, of course.

Love, sometimes referred to as *caritas*, from 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. As Christians our primary call is to give and accept love. Underlying much of the Christian understanding of love are the words and wisdom of Saint Augustine of Hippo, an early Father and Doctor of the Church, who proclaimed that there are four objects we should love: God, our neighbors, ourselves, and our bodies.

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 himself says this is the Greatest Commandment.

“The way of salvation is easy; it is enough to love.”

(Margaret of Cortona, 1247–1297)

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 to him and give ourselves fully 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.

Neighbors

According to 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 them because God has created every person “in his image” (Genesis 1:27). After all, Jesus did exclaim that the second Greatest Commandment is: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

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Saint Augustine taught that our love should focus on God, our neighbors, ourselves, and our bodies. Which of these four is easiest for you to love? Which is hardest?

Selves

To love ourselves is to love God. Self-love is the realization that God is imprinted on our heart, waiting, wanting to be displayed 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. Love of self must not become selfish or contrary to God’s will but should empower us to move beyond ourselves and build the Reign of God, where everyone can see their own value.

“At the end of life, we will be judged by love.”

(Saint John of the Cross, 1542–1591)

Bodies

Augustine said, “When God created the body, He showed a greater regard for beauty than for necessity.” In other words, our bodies are one of God’s great artistic masterpieces. These bodies, which will be resurrected someday, manifest God’s greatness, goodness, and glory. Because of this reality, we must hold our bodies in high esteem. The body bears God’s creative hand. Therefore “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 Holy Spirit”¹ (CCC, 364). †

Live It!

Loving by Listening

One way you can love is by listening well. Listening is more than just physical hearing. Good listening is a gift that takes time and energy. It demands your 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 your problems, you know what a wonderful gift it is to be able to get things off your chest. Listening to yourself—your own fears, needs, hopes, and dreams—is important in discerning your vocation in life. Athletes will attest to the importance of listening to our bodies, which speak to us in many ways. Take time to listen well. It’s an act of love!

Part 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? Why is it important?
4. What were the goals of the Vatican Council II document *Gaudium et Spes*?
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

God painted all creation with the truth of his existence. He also created us with the ability to know him by using our thinking ability, our reason. Through creation and reason, we can come to know God. This is called natural revelation, meaning that 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.

Natural revelation is pointed to in the Scriptures and in the wisdom of the Church Fathers. It is also pointed to in the “proofs” developed by scholastic theologians and in the teachings of recent Church Councils. However, historical conditions and the consequences of Original Sin often hinder the ability of the human mind to fully come to know the truth about God through natural revelation. Something more is needed. God, in his wisdom and goodness, provided Divine Revelation for us. This is God’s communication about himself and his plan for humanity, which he has made known to us most fully by sending his own Divine Son, Jesus Christ.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 5: “The Sacred Scriptures and Natural Revelation” (page 22)
- Article 6: “Natural Revelation and the Wisdom of the Church Fathers” (page 24)
- Article 7: “Natural Revelation and Scholastic Theology” (page 27)
- Article 8: “Natural Revelation: Vatican Council I to the Present” (page 29)



natural revelation

The process by which God makes himself known to human reason through the created world. Historical conditions and the consequences of Original Sin, however, often hinder our ability to fully know God's truth through natural revelation alone.

Article

5 The Sacred Scriptures and Natural Revelation

“The heavens declare the glory of God; / the sky proclaims its builder’s craft” (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 person lies the capacity to understand God “as the origin and the end of the universe” (CCC, 32). 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, God’s existence is proclaimed in all creation. The Old and New Testaments of the Bible emphasize natural revelation by calling attention to God’s glory in the universe he created.

Natural Revelation in the Old Testament

The Sacred Scriptures are filled with countless passages pointing to the Christian understanding of natural revelation. In the account of Creation, found in the Book of Genesis, we hear about God’s creative action during seven days. At the end of each day, after God has tirelessly worked to splash the earth with color and life, he sees how good and beautiful his creations are. The goodness of every created

Live It!

Seeing God in All Things

When creating a yearbook spread for the senior class, the editor decided to ask a few seniors to take pictures of their rooms at home so they could be added to the spread. The spread asked the reader to guess which seniors the rooms belonged to. Not surprisingly, those who knew the seniors the best could easily identify the rooms with their owners. Isn’t it funny how the manner in which you decorate your room can say a lot about you? After all, you are the interior designer.

The same is true with God and his creation. All of creation is able to tell us something about the one who made it. Take time to listen to what creation is telling you about God. Make a plan to take in the next available sunset. Go to a hill or open area and just take it in with all its colors. Then take a moment to see God’s imprint in it.

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).

The Book of Wisdom has a passage that mentions 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 him 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 world’s order and beauty” (CCC, 32), we are able to see the work of God, who is Creator of Heaven and earth.

Natural Revelation in the New Testament

Just as the Old Testament sheds light on our understanding of natural revelation, so too does the New Testament. The Book of Acts of the Apostles details the growth of the early Church under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In Acts of the Apostles, Saint Paul speaks of a God who “fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions” (17:26). Paul said this to point the Athenians to a magnificent truth: God is alive, real, and continually revealing himself throughout all creation.

Saint Paul affirms that God made himself evident in all creation. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul writes this about God: “Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been

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

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able to be understood and perceived in what he has made” (1:20). Acts of the Apostles and Romans, along with many other New Testament writings, point to our capacity to know God through the natural order. The Sacred Scriptures direct our eyes and heart toward the world and all its inhabitants, which enable us to recognize God’s existence and presence. †

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a French theologian who lived between 1881 and 1955. He was a member of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. The Jesuits are a group of priests and religious brothers following the ideas and spirituality of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Teilhard was schooled in theology and science. As both a mystic and a scientist, Teilhard sought to reconcile the world of religious thought with the rapidly increasing scientific data characteristic of the time in which he lived. 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.

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!’” These words of Saint Augustine, an influential Father of the Church, assert that the universe and created order point to the existence of God. Augustine invites us to open the “book of creation” and discover the presence of God. Along with Augustine, the other **Fathers of the Church** affirm the notion of natural revelation—knowledge of God in and through the natural world, informed by human reason. As the *Catechism* states, “by the natural light of human reason” (47), we can know God, the Creator and Lord, through the magnificence and glory of his creation. Historical conditions and the consequences of Original Sin, however, often diminish our ability to fully know God’s truth through natural revelation alone. This is why Divine Revelation is needed.

The Universe as a Sign of God

Essential to the theology and spirituality of the Church Fathers is the idea that the universe provides 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 the origin and the end" (CCC, 32) of all creation. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (335–394) was a Church Father and bishop. He recognized that as people come to know God through the created universe, their 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.



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.

Human Being as the Image of God

Many Church Fathers, especially Saint Athanasius (293–373), Saint Gregory of Nazianzen (325–389), Saint Gregory of Nyssa, and Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430), coupled 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

Pray It!

Your Presence in 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 living 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 tree-lined 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, to seek the truth, and to 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 Western Roman Empire in the 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.

Book of Genesis tells us God created us in his image. To look at humans in all their complexities is to see God. He is the fashioner of our souls. Saint Irenaeus (130–202), made this point in his famous quotation: “Man fully alive is the glory of God.”

Seeing God Revealed in All Creation

Saint Augustine stressed that, “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 created, especially on human beings. Nothing created by God, “even the tiniest insect,” is insignificant. From the smallest to the largest of his creations, God’s existence and glory are manifested. We can know him through the work of his hands. This is the fruit of the scriptural understanding of natural revelation. The Church Fathers proclaim the undeniable truth of God revealed in nature. When we recognize God’s Revelation in all creation and listen to God’s call to the deepest parts of our beings, we can be certain that God exists and that he is “the cause and the end of everything” (CCC, 46). †

Timeline of the Church Fathers

- Saint Athanasius (293–373), Bishop of Alexandria
- Saint Gregory of Nazianzen (325–389), Archbishop of Constantinople
- Saint Basil the Great (329–379), Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey
- Saint Gregory of Nyssa (335–394), Bishop of Nyssa in Cappadocia, located 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
- Saint Augustine (354–430), Bishop of Hippo Regius, now Annaba, located in Algeria
- Saint Gregory the Great (540–604), Bishop of Rome

Article 7 Natural Revelation and Scholastic Theology

During the **Middle Ages**, new ways of providing logical arguments to demonstrate the existence of God emerged. The centuries with particular influence were the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. These centuries gave rise to **scholastic theology**, a theological approach that used philosophical methods to better understand revealed truth. Grounded in the Scriptures and the Church Fathers' understanding of natural revelation, scholastic theologians also relied heavily on the use of reason and logic. These great thinkers of the Middle Ages maintained that through the use of our minds, we could logically develop "converging and convincing arguments" (CCC, 31) to attain truth and certainty about God and the human experience.

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

What do you think is significant about the two objects Saint Thomas Aquinas is holding in this painting?

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Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Five Proofs

One of the most prominent individuals in the development of scholastic theology was Saint Thomas Aquinas. He was a Dominican friar, prolific writer, and Doctor of the Church. His most notable written work is called the *Summa Theologica*. The *Summa Theologica* is a twenty-one volume work on theology and faith. One of Aquinas's many accomplishments in the area of philosophy and theology is *The 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 draws on the idea that the universe constantly moves. Because everything continuously moves and changes, human beings can logically deduce or see a need for a “First Mover,” who set everything in motion and 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 is an Ultimate Cause or First Efficient Cause, which is uncaused, or 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 were contingent, there would have to be a time where nothing would exist. This point in time would have been in the past. But things do exist. If they exist they cannot do so 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 finds its strength in our understanding of perfection. Most of us can point out the imperfections of the world and humanity. In naming imperfections we acknowledge there are varying degrees of beauty, goodness, and knowledge. The question then becomes, How do we know 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 asserts that the world is characterized by remarkable order. This proof asserts that it is

apparent that there are things in the universe that on their own have no intelligence. Yet regardless of their lack of intelligence, they still act toward and achieve their end. One can then deduce that if things that lack intelligence still achieve their end, something that does have an intelligence and knowledge of their end and directs all things to their appropriate end must exist. This something can be seen as the intelligent designer behind our complex universe. We name this intelligent designer and magnificent architect God.

The Proofs Point to God's Existence

All five 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). †

A Different Lens

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) was a monk and theologian. He proposed a rational and logical argument for the existence of God. His argument provided a proof that uses reason alone to assert the existence of God. Anselm's proof predates Aquinas's five proofs, and scholars today study it widely. Anselm's argument, which is presented in his work titled *Proslogion*, 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.

Article

8 Natural Revelation: Vatican Council I to the Present

Echoed throughout Church history is the assertion that God “can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason”³ (CCC, 36). However, at



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 confirmed or recognized by him.

conscience

The "interior voice," guided by human reason and divine law, that leads us to understand ourselves as responsible for our actions, and prompts us to do good and avoid evil. To make good judgments, one needs to have a well-formed conscience.

Vatican Council II

The Ecumenical or general Council of the Roman Catholic Church that Pope John XXIII (1958–1963) convened in 1962 and that continued under Pope Paul VI (1963–1978) until 1965.

various points in the Church's history the reality of natural revelation encountered opposition.

Between December 1869 and October 1870, Vatican Council I, the twentieth **Ecumenical Council** of the Church, was held. One of the main issues the Council attended to before being cut short due to outside circumstances was the relationship between faith and reason. Regarding this issue, there were those who claimed that human reason lacked the capacity to grasp religious knowledge. In other words, large parts of the population challenged the Church's teaching that God can be known in and through creation informed by human reason. In the constitution *Dei Filius* (1870), the Council affirmed that "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).

A Deeper Understanding

The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was noted for saying, "Have the courage to use your own reason!" This motto and the assertions of Vatican Council I gained the attention of the philosopher and theologian John Henry Cardinal Newman. Cardinal Newman lived between 1801 and 1890. He developed a theory known as the convergence of probabilities. This theory asserts that a number of probable hints, or indicators, point to the existence of God. These indicators range from people's experiences of beauty and goodness to the mystery of our world, from the voice of **conscience** to the enjoyment of freedom. The theory also asserts that no indicator alone necessarily proves the existence of God. Instead it claims that when the indicators are combined, they produce a powerful argument. The strength of these probable indicators together arrives at the same conclusion: God exists.

Karl Rahner (1904–1984) was a Jesuit theologian. He largely influenced the Catholic understanding of natural revelation. His work during **Vatican Council II** and his writings presented the idea that any time human beings experience limitation in knowledge, freedom, or perfection, there is an underlying awareness of God as Absolute Mystery. In speaking of God as mystery, Rahner used the image of a horizon. When we gaze at the horizon, we are not directly looking at the horizon. It is not actually something we can see. It



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

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. He is Absolute Mystery and forms the backdrop and setting to the stage of our lives. Rahner believed we come to know God through the universe, which is marked by deep mystery and complexity. Natural revelation coupled with human reason helps to give us an awareness of a God of awesome depth who wants to be known. †

Catholic Wisdom

Vatican Council II Attendees

Did you know that Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II both were present at Vatican Council II (1962–1965)? At the time of the Council, Pope John Paul II, who was born in 1920, was a bishop, and Pope Benedict XVI, who was born in 1927, was a priest. Pope John Paul II was one of more than twenty-six hundred bishops who participated. Pope Benedict XVI contributed to the Council as a theological expert.

The Wisdom of Vatican Council II

The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a share along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human.

*(Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
[Gaudium et Spes, 1965], 11)*

Part 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 was reasserted by the Pope and bishops at Vatican Council I about the relationship between faith and reason?

Divine Revelation

As we have seen, God makes himself known to people in many ways through natural reason. In the fullness of his love, God has also freely chosen to directly reveal himself and his plan for humanity. The Scriptures are the written accounts of God's Revelation to the Jewish people and the first Christians.

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, would carry on. 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.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 9: "Salvation History: God's Revelation" (page 34)
- Article 10: "Salvation History in the Old Testament" (page 36)
- Article 11: "Jesus Christ: The Fullness of All Revelation" (page 39)
- Article 12: "The Transmission of Divine Revelation" (page 41)
- Article 13: "Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition" (page 45)



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.

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.

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.

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 the stories of how our parents fell in love and how our grandparents survived tough times. We may also hear stories of pain and conflicts within the family, caused by selfishness and greed. If we listen carefully, these stories help us to understand who we are, whom to 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, which tells how God's saving hand has been at work in and through human history. In one 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 his people since the beginning of time. But more specifically, **salvation history** is 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 through 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 a window into the wisdom and knowledge of God. Although Divine Revelation is gradual, it culminated and took form "in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ" (53). Out of a desire to fully disclose himself and his plan, God provides us "access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit"⁴ (51). He did this so we can share in his divine nature, the eternal life of God. God alone has revealed to us the central mystery of the Christian faith, the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, by revealing himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the unfolding of salvation history, God invites us into communion with the blessed Trinity. Therefore he communicates "his own mystery in deeds and in words" (CCC, 69). Salvation history tells about God, who heals, refreshes, trans-

forms, reveals, and saves us. God revealed his name to our ancestors in ways beyond human imagination—from the time the divine name was disclosed 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 his children, God has “provided the definitive, superabundant answer to the questions that man asks himself about the meaning and purpose of his life” (CCC, 68). God reveals himself, especially in Jesus Christ, who is himself God, so we may know and love him beyond our “own natural capacity” (52). Yet in spite of his Revelation of himself, God “remains a mystery beyond words”(230). He stretches our hearts and minds so there is immeasurable space for divine knowledge and love. We can never fully grasp God. Human words and language can never capture the magnificence of our transcendent God.

In the words of John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801–1890), “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. †

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 back 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. Even the events we might have perceived as negative at one point can strengthen our relationship with God. How do you see God’s hand working in your life?

Story of a Soul

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897), 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.

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 live more fully at certain times in history, but they do not add to or change Christ’s definitive Revelation.



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Article 10 Salvation History in the Old Testament

The Sacred Scriptures—the Old and New Testaments—root us in God’s Divine Revelation to, and saving action on behalf of, those who have gone before us. The words of our ancestors in faith continually reveal the truth of God. Salvation history, as written about in the Scriptures, reveals God’s love for his people. Every time we read or hear the Word of God, we are led ever deeper into the mystery and wonder of God.

Old Testament Highlights

Salvation history begins with our first parents, who have the symbolic names Adam and Eve. Realizing there is “constant evidence of himself in created realities”⁵ (CCC, 54), 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” (54). Even when Adam and Eve turned away from God in sin, God remained faithful to his People, and “promised them salvation (cf. *Genesis* 3:15) and offered them his covenant” (70). 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. This universally present sin led to further sin among God’s People. The sins of his People resulted in broken communities and families and in 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 story of Noah. We hear how sin has spread throughout the whole world, making all people wicked and corrupt. God intends to destroy his creation through a great Flood. However, God gives Noah, the one remaining good and righteous man, instructions on how to build an ark that will save him and his family from disaster. The instructions and the rainbow that appears at the end of the Flood symbolize God’s **covenant** with all living beings—a covenant fertilized and nourished by God’s self-disclosure that “will remain in force as long as the world lasts” (CCC, 71).

Salvation history continues by telling how generations after the Flood, humanity had been scattered and divided



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.

covenant

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

Pray It!

Proclaiming the Word of God

Each time we gather to celebrate the Mass, we hear the Word of God. Lectoring, or proclaiming the sacred Word during the Mass, is one of the ways some members of the assembly are called to participate. Lectors proclaim the first and second readings. In preparation lectors immerse themselves in the Scripture passages by reading them and praying with them. Perhaps God is calling you to serve as a lector. Pray about it and, if you are interested, let your pastor or campus minister know.

by God. He did this because of human pride symbolized by the building of the Tower of Babel. Now God begins his plan to reconcile all humanity with himself by calling a special people to be his light to the nations. Thus he enters into a Covenant with the **patriarch** Abraham. God appears to Abraham in a vision, promising him descendants more numerous than the stars. God makes this promise even though Abraham's wife, Sarah, is barren, or unable to have children. Because Abraham is a man of great faith and righteousness, he obeys God. His obedience results in a bloodline of charismatic patriarchs, including Isaac and Jacob. It also results in Abraham's gaining land that yields in abundance.

Salvation history continues with the account of Moses and the Exodus. God, as liberator of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, enters into a Covenant with Abraham's descendants, who are now known as the Israelites. As the people's part of the Covenant, God gives Moses the Law at Mount Sinai. The Law is summarized in the Ten Commandments. Christians call this Law the Old Law. This Covenant gives the people an identity as the Chosen, Holy Children of God. Through Divine Revelation God promises to remain faithful to the Covenant and never to cease calling the Israelites to be faithful.

Although God revealed his will and plan to Adam, Eve, Abraham, and Moses, humanity's inclination to sin stood in the way of God's plan. The Israelites continued to turn



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

away from the Covenant and the Law. In response God revealed himself to the **prophets**, men 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 nations"⁶ (CCC, 64).

Further Hints of Salvation

Wisdom literature is the ancient Israelite writings that extol the virtue of wisdom. This literature also gives 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 streets" (Proverbs 1:20), trying to catch the attention of his beloved children.

Wisdom is sometimes personified in the wisdom literature (see Proverbs 1:20–21 and Wisdom 6:12–14). This personification of wisdom finds its realization in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the Wisdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:30). †

Article

11 Jesus Christ: The Fullness of All Revelation

The Sacred Scriptures reveal to us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (see Matthew 3:17). This title describes the unique and eternal relationship between God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is the only Son of the Father, and he is God himself. He is the perfect image of the Father and the fullness of Divine Revelation (see John 14:8–11). "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" (CCC, 73). God's Word "became flesh / and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). 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" (CCC, 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.



patriarch

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

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.

wisdom literature

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



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.

The Light Shines

All salvation history, as contained in the Sacred Scriptures, speaks of one single Word, a transforming Word. This Word is God himself, the Second Divine Person of the **Trinity**, who came to dwell among us by assuming a human nature. The same Word that created the universe and revealed himself to the sacred writers of the Scriptures is Jesus Christ. All of the Scriptures bear witness to Jesus Christ—the First and Last, the definitive Word of Revelation. There is no greater Word, and no greater Word can ever be conceived.

And We Saw His Glory

In the life of Jesus Christ, we 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—these reveal a God who chose to disclose himself by taking on our humanity. God’s Word, by revealing himself in the flesh, nursed our pain, bandaged our limitations, and counseled our souls.



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Full of Grace and Truth

Jesus Christ is our “instruction manual” for interpreting all creation and its final end. In studying 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 this lifetime, but by pursuing a relationship with Jesus Christ, we come to know his free offer of grace, which enlightens the human mind and heart.

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 W N—are abbreviations for “He Who Is.” Jesus is holding the Gospel of John. What do these titles and symbols tell us about Jesus Christ?

The Gospels use many images to convey the truth of Jesus' identity, 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 and all that takes away our freedom. What greater word has ever been spoken? None! Taken from the writings of Saint Patrick of Ireland (387–493), let us “bind” ourselves to Christ—the Eternal Word of God. †

A Prayer of Commitment: “Saint Patrick’s Breastplate”

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.

Article

12 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). Jesus Christ, the fullness of Divine Revelation, commanded the Apostles to tell all people and all nations what they had heard and seen regarding 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—his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. As they moved from village to village, city to city, the Apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, helped more and more people to believe in Jesus Christ through their preaching and writing. This handing on, or transmission, of the truths that Jesus Christ taught is known as **Sacred Tradition** and will continue “under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations, until Christ returns in glory” (CCC, 96).



Sacred Tradition

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



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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.

Through the process of **Apostolic Succession**, the authority of the original Apostles is passed on to their successors, the bishops of the Church. Every bishop of the Church can trace his special authority back to the original 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 at ordination a bishop is marked with an indelible, sacred character. In the Sacrament 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.

Through Tradition and the leadership of the bishops as teachers and interpreters, the Church, in “her doctrine, life, and worship”⁷⁷ (CCC, 78), proclaims the redemption found

in Jesus Christ. It is through the doctrine, life, and worship of the Church that she “perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes”⁷⁸ (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 converse”⁷⁹ (CCC, 79) with men and women through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit ignites the hearts of believers with a fire. The Holy Spirit enlivens and manifests all that was revealed in the Word made flesh—Jesus Christ. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit as our Advocate when the hour of his glorification had arrived (see John 14:15–17). The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and

Catholic Wisdom

Apostolic Succession: The Symbol of the Keys

Perhaps you have noticed a papal flag in your school or parish. One of the symbols you will notice on the flag is two keys. The keys symbolize the responsibility that Christ gave to Saint Peter, the first Pope (see Matthew 16:19). One key is silver, representing power in the world, and the other is gold, representing spiritual power. All popes have the keys in their coat of arms as a symbol of Apostolic Succession.

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 that he has revealed and to faithfully live as his own people.

Two Pillars

Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are intimately bound together. They are two pillars of strength. They 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, communicate effectively the whole of God's Revelation. Neither pillar can be understood without the other. They make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God. Therefore both "are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence" (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* [*Dei Verbum*, 1965], 9).

The **Deposit of Faith** is 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 living teaching office of the Church, made up of the Pope and all the bishops in communion with him, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The bishops of the Church, both individually and collectively, have the obligation and the 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 salvation. Our faith is in Jesus Christ and the One who sent him. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Deposit of Faith contained in the Scriptures and Tradition nurtures our faith with the sacred truth revealed by God.

The Vocation of All

Saint Vincent of Lerins (fifth century) 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



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.

Deposit of Faith

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

Magisterium

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

dogma

Teachings recognized as central to Church teaching, defined by the Magisterium and accorded the fullest weight and authority.



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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 radi-

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?

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 celebrated in liturgical feasts and others prayers, such as 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 an angel, Mary opened the doors to Heaven. She miraculously conceived by power of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God made man. 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, she is the Mother of God. The Scriptures and Tradition lift up Mary as a model of humble faith and amazing courage.



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ance of Jesus revealed through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The Church “cannot err in matters 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. †

Article

13 Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition

It is common to hear the teachings of the Catholic Church challenged with a question such as, Why do Catholics have beliefs and practices that are not in the Bible? In reality Sacred Tradition teaches the fullness of Divine Revelation. It began with the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written in the Scriptures, 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. Thus the Scriptures developed from Sacred Tradition. However, the Bible by itself does not communicate everything God reveals through Sacred Tradition.

As Catholics we are blessed in recognizing that God chooses to disclose the truths of Revelation through both Sacred Tradition and the Sacred Scriptures. “There exists a close connection and communication between Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture,” both of them “flowing from the same divine wellspring” (*Divine Revelation, 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 who is the “source of all of her riches” (*CCC, 97*).

Tradition helps us to understand the Revelation of Jesus Christ found in the Scriptures. As true successors to the Apostles and guided by the Holy Spirit, the bishops, in communion with the Pope, witness and give further understanding to God’s self-revelation in the Church’s “teaching, life and worship” (*Divine Revelation, 8*). In conversation with the Scriptures, Tradition passes on the message of the Gospel to



redemption

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.

be lived out in the life of the Church. The Church's Magisterium has a unique responsibility to interpret both Scripture and Tradition under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Again, all that is part of Sacred Tradition is a manifestation of what was disclosed through Jesus' teachings and

The Words of Saint John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church

“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 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. Is it a tradition? Inquire no further.



actions during his earthly ministry and the events of the Paschal Mystery—his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. Nothing taught or proclaimed by the Church ever contradicts the truth of Jesus Christ. In the words of the *Catechism*, Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture “makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own ‘always, to the close of the age’”¹⁰ (80). What an amazing Church to be a part of! †

Part 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 the Sacred Scriptures, 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 the Scriptures and Tradition?

Section 2

Interpretation and Overview of the Bible

Understanding the Scriptures

The Sacred Scriptures are the account of God's saving hand at work in human history and experience. God is the Bible's sole and supreme author, and all that is taught and proclaimed in Sacred Scripture is free from error regarding the truths he wishes to reveal for the sake of our salvation. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of the sacred books, who made full use of their human knowledge and intelligence to communicate the particular truths entrusted to them. Even though written in the language and styles of particular times and cultures, all of Sacred Scripture reveals the truth of who God is and of his work of salvation.

The canon of the Bible consists of forty-six Old Testament books and twenty-seven New Testament books. The contents of the canon were discerned based on their authentic Revelation and truth. Inspired by God, inerrant in truth, defined in number, and appearing in different translations, the words of both the Old and New Testaments lead to right understanding of God's Incarnate Word.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 14: "Divine Inspiration and Biblical Inerrancy" (page 50)
- Article 15: "From the Spoken to the Written Word" (page 51)
- Article 16: "When Was It Written?" (page 54)
- Article 17: "Setting the Canon of Scripture" (page 56)
- Article 18: "Different Translations: The Same Revelation" (page 58)



Divine Inspiration

The divine assistance the Holy Spirit gave the authors of the books of the Bible so the authors could write in human words the salvation message God wanted to communicate.

biblical inerrancy

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

Article

14 Divine Inspiration and Biblical Inerrancy

Writers sometimes talk about a time when they were inspired. This usually means that some person or event helped them to write something unique or to write especially well. Maybe you have felt that way at some time.

But the Bible's inspiration is unique. The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, inspired the human authors who wrote the Bible's books. This is called **Divine Inspiration**. God himself is the ultimate author of the Sacred Scriptures. Thus, the books of the Sacred Scriptures “without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures” (*Divine Revelation*, 11).

The Author of the Sacred Scriptures

God chose ordinary and often unsuspecting people to write the books of the Bible. The Holy Spirit “breathed into” (this is the literal meaning of *inspired*) human beings the ways and truths of God. Does this mean the human authors were only human word processors, writing down the words the Holy Spirit dictated to them? The answer is no. They kept full use of their human knowledge and creativity. The Bible's human authors were true authors. But in a truly marvelous way, God acted in them and through them as they wrote about the origins of creation and sin, the relevance of wisdom and prophecy, and the saving work of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God made man.

Faithfully and Without Error

Within the words of the Scriptures lies the delicacy of God's wisdom. His wisdom is absolute and without error. Even though human authors wrote the books of the Bible, God is the ultimate author, and the saving truths God willed us to know are inerrant (without error). In other words, the books of the Bible manifest and teach the truths of faith accurately and without mistake. This is called **biblical inerrancy**.

Through the Medium of Their Words

In the Sacred Scriptures, we come to know the amazing works of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's Revelation is understandable to us because in the Sacred Scriptures

he speaks to us using human words. It is a sign of God's tremendous respect for us that he uses human language, words, and symbols as vehicles of his saving grace.

We must, however, take into account that culture and time affect the Bible's words. The human authors used the languages and thinking of their times. We need to study "the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current" (CCC, 110) to understand what the authors intended to communicate. As we study the cultures in which the books of the Bible were written, we note that the human authors may not have been aware of the deeper truths God was intending to communicate. Just understanding what they intended to communicate is not enough. For a correct interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, we must also look for the truth that God wanted to reveal to us through the human authors' words. "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written"¹ (CCC, 111). †

The Bishop of Milan

Saint Ambrose was the Bishop of Milan, a diocese in Italy. He is a Father and Doctor of the Church who devoted much of his life to the study of the Sacred Scriptures. He delved into the Sacred Scriptures in an attempt to make them relevant and accessible to everyday people of faith. He was recognized as a powerful preacher, compassionate minister, prominent leader, and inspirational writer. He was so influential that Saint Augustine of Hippo attributes to the sermons of Saint Ambrose his own decision to be baptized.

Article

15 From the Spoken to the Written Word

Communication is essential to the survival of the human race. People have spent the past several thousand years developing new ways to exchange stories, thoughts, and feelings. Today we make those exchanges through cell phones, e-mail messages, text messages, television, radio, and iPods. We have developed these devices to help us effectively com-



oral tradition

The handing on of the message of God's saving plan through words and deeds.

written tradition

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the synthesis in written form of the message of salvation that has been passed down in the oral tradition.

communicate with one another. However, even with these new methods, there are still three basic forms of communication: nonverbal deeds and actions, the spoken word, and the written word. These types of communication were instrumental in the development of the Sacred Scriptures as we know them today.

Before anything can ever be spoken about or written down, human beings must have an experience. Central to the experiences of people during Old Testament times was their relationship with God. They experienced God as Creator, Liberator, and Covenant Maker. They also experienced God as Patriarchal Warrior, Father, Beloved Spouse, Dancing Wisdom, and Herald of Hope. Grounded in the heritage and wisdom of the past, the people of the Gospels personally saw and interacted with the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. They gathered around Jesus with attentive ears and hearts, listening to and loving his healing words. Their journey was different from that of the people of the Old Testament. Yet both were instructed to tell the world about God's saving action.

The Spoken Word

The Israelites' experience of God was originally handed down orally. Some of the methods used were prophesying, preaching, storytelling, and poetry. Their experience of God was also handed down through the manner in which they worshipped and kept the covenants made by God and his People. This handing on of truth-carrying and wisdom-filled words and deeds from generation to generation is called

Pray It!

Lament, Thanksgiving, and Praise!

The Psalms tell us about the Israelites' relationship with God. The Book of Psalms contains many kinds of prayer, including prayers of lament, thanksgiving, and praise. The Book of Psalms can be a great source for us when we pray.

Take some time to go through the Book of Psalms. Have a notebook handy and jot down the numbers of Psalms that catch your attention. Then, next time you pray, have your Bible and notebook ready and pray with the Psalms. Here are some suggestions to help you get started: Psalm 23, 109:105–112, 118, 121, 144, and 150.