

Living in Christ

saint mary's press

Jesus Christ

God's Love Made Visible



Carrie J. Schroeder

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Introduction

“Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord.’” (John 20:18)

How amazing it must have been for Mary of Magdala to proclaim those powerful words of faithful witness on that first Easter morning: “I have seen the Lord!” Sometimes I have wondered: If I had been there at the empty tomb with her, would I have had the challenges to my faith that I have encountered? The people who saw, knew, and talked with Jesus during his earthly ministry witnessed his miracles firsthand and heard his powerful preaching and storytelling with their own ears. Some even saw him alive after he had risen from the dead. Yet we know from Scripture that some of the disciples, like Peter and Thomas, did experience moments of profound doubt. They had been blessed with the privilege of walking with Jesus, knowing him face to face, feeling his touch, and hearing his voice. With that blessing, though, came the task of accepting that the one they had known personally as their teacher, companion, and friend was, in fact, more than all these things: he was the Word become flesh (see John 1:14).

I have come to understand that my own life of faith follows a similar pattern of knowing Jesus yet having moments when my faith is challenged. I have been blessed with the knowledge that Jesus is alive, present, and active in my life, daily offering me strength, grace, wisdom, guidance, and salvation. And yet, to be completely honest, with that blessing comes what is sometimes a hard task, even a struggle: to understand fully what having a relationship with Jesus means. What does it mean for me to say that I, as a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, dwell in a relationship of love, trust, and friendship with Jesus?

One of the ways in which I have tried, throughout my life, to answer that question has been through study. When I was a student in a Catholic high school, my religious studies classes were among my favorites. In high school I finally began to explore not just *what* Catholics believe but *why*; not just how to *read* the Bible but how to *apply* it to my life; and not just what prayer *is* but how to *really pray*. Studying cultivated my faith, and that faith grew stronger the more I learned and put it into practice. After high school I continued to follow a path that I found to be both intellectually and spiritually fruitful: I majored in religious studies in college. When I completed my graduate degree in theology, I began teaching religious studies in a Catholic high school, not unlike the one I had attended years ago. Through these many years, study of Scripture and Tradition has truly

helped me to grow in faith in Jesus. It has enabled me to root that faith—including its more affective or emotional aspects—in something solid, something that truly nurtures, challenges, and enlivens my whole self: mind, heart, body, and spirit.

One of the greatest privileges of my life has been to serve as a religious studies teacher and campus minister. In that role I have been delighted by the opportunity to accompany young people, like yourself, on their journeys of faith. I love your exuberant energy, your joy in living, your passion for justice, your challenging spirit, your intellectual curiosity, and your fierce loyalty: these are wonderful gifts you bring to our Church and to our world! If you bring all of these gifts to bear on your study of Jesus this semester, I guarantee that you will not be disappointed. Your efforts will return to you many times over, in the form of greater clarity of belief, deeper trust in God, and a more profound sense of purpose for your life.

This course begins by reflecting on the greatest mystery of our faith, the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We then look at how God has revealed himself throughout history and most fully in his Son, Jesus Christ. We will see how Jesus reveals to us what it means to be a child of God and how we are to live and act upon our faith.

As you learn about Jesus through this book and in this course, my sincere hope is that your academic work takes deep root in you, opening your mind, touching your heart, and nourishing your soul, so that you may grow and flourish as the person of faith you were created to be. I pray that all your work may draw you more completely into a loving relationship with the one who came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly (see John 10:10). May you, like Mary of Magdala so long ago, see the Risen Lord alive and active, and may you be forever changed by that life-giving encounter.

Wishing you every grace and blessing,
Carrie J. Schroeder

Section 1

The Trinity

Part 1

God Is One: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The faith of Catholics is rooted in the truth that there is one God in three Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Belief in one God is called monotheism. Belief that God is three Persons is called Trinitarianism. Trying to understand how Catholics can hold both beliefs is confusing for many people. How is it possible to be both monotheistic and Trinitarian? If God is a Holy Trinity, who are these three Persons? How are they united, and how is each Divine Person distinct? The articles in this part will help you to explore and become knowledgeable about these and other revealed truths about the Holy Trinity.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 1: “God Is One: Catholics Are Monotheistic” (page 11)
- Article 2: “God Is Three-in-One: Catholics Are Trinitarian” (page 13)
- Article 3: “The First Person of the Trinity: God the Father” (page 17)
- Article 4: “The Second Person of the Trinity: God the Son” (page 20)
- Article 5: “The Third Person of the Trinity: God the Holy Spirit” (page 22)

Article

1 God Is One: Catholics Are Monotheistic

The belief in and worship of only one God is called monotheism. Throughout much of human history, people of many cultures have practiced polytheism, which is the belief in many gods. You may have studied some polytheistic cultures, like the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, in other courses in school. You may know Hindus or Shintoists who worship many gods. When God began a **covenant** relationship with Abraham, he was revealing an essential truth: there is only one God, the Lord of all the earth. Over time Abraham and Sarah's descendants, who would become known as the Jews, understood and embraced this monotheistic faith.

As Jewish people came to fully understand and embrace this monotheistic faith, they incorporated this belief into their prayer and worship. The Shema, the prayer uttered daily by faithful Jews of ancient times and continuing to the present, begins with these words, found in a slightly different form in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" (*Shema Yisrael, Adonai eloheinu, Adonai ehad*). The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, consistently reveals that there is only one true God. For instance, in the Gospel of Mark (see 12:28–29), a scribe asks Jesus which is the greatest of all the Commandments. Jesus quotes the words of the Shema. Jesus himself tells us there is only one God.

One God or Three Gods?

When the early Christians first began to understand, speak, and write about the **doctrine** of the **Trinity**, many people thought they were rejecting monotheism in favor of polytheism. Even today praying "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" may lead some people to think that Catholics have three gods, not one. Those who mistakenly believe that Catholics worship Mary or other saints may even think we have four or more gods. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) firmly states our belief in one God. "To confess that Jesus is Lord is distinctive of Christian faith. This is not contrary to belief in the One God. Nor does believing in the Holy Spirit as 'Lord and giver of life' introduce any division into the One God" (202).



covenant

A personal, solemn promise of faithful love that involves mutual commitments, such as the sacred agreement between God and his people. In the Old Covenant, God revealed his Law through Moses and prepared his people for salvation. He established a new and eternal Covenant in Jesus Christ, his only Son.

doctrine

An official, authoritative teaching of the Church based on the Revelation of God.

Trinity

The truth that God, although one, is three Divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Catholics have always affirmed the truth that God is one. Indeed, we profess this each week at Sunday liturgy when we say the **Nicene Creed**: “[We] believe in one God.” †

Three Major Monotheistic Religions

Only Christians have recognized God as Trinity—one God in three Divine Persons. However, we share our belief in this one God—and our commitment to **monotheism**—with Judaism and Islam.

The very heart of Judaism is monotheism, as reflected in the Shema, which faithful Jews pray daily. Those who follow Islam, who are known as Muslims, also profess belief in one God. They too proclaim their monotheism as part of their regular prayer. Each day faithful

Muslims repeat the *Shahadah*. It is translated:

“There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”



The Second Vatican Council spoke of the “common spiritual heritage” shared by Jews and Christians (*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* [*Nostra Aetate*, 1965], 4). It expressed dismay for the hatred and persecution Jews have endured at many times throughout history. In this same document, the council expressed “esteem” for Muslims: “They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity” (3).

To understand what Catholics share with Jews and Muslims does not in any way lessen the truth of our Catholic beliefs. Rather, it helps us to appreciate and marvel at the many people of different times and places who have recognized the reality that there is only one God, Creator of all.



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Article

2 God Is Three-in-One: Catholics Are Trinitarian

Do you like a good mystery? Not the crime-solving kind. *Mystery* also means a revealed truth that is beyond our experience and ability to grasp fully. We hold to it by faith but also work to better understand it.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity—the mystery of one God in three Persons—is a unique defining trait of Christian faith. As the *Catechism* states, it is the Church’s “most fundamental and essential teaching” (234) and the central mystery of our faith, which only God can fully reveal to us. Every prayer we pray and every Sacrament we celebrate is done in the name of this Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

United, Yet Distinct

The three Divine Persons are inseparable both in what they are and in what they do. “Inseparable in what they *are*”? This means each Divine Person is fully God—complete, whole, and entire. All of God is contained in God the Father. All of God is contained in God the Son. All of God is contained in God the Holy Spirit. “Inseparable in what they *do*”? This means each Divine Person has the same job description, so to speak. Each of the three Persons is engaged in the work of our salvation. Each acts to create us in love, redeem us, and make us holy. As the *Catechism* states, “The whole **divine economy** is the common work of the three divine persons” (258). The work and mission of Father, Son, and Holy



Nicene Creed

The formal statement or profession of faith commonly recited during the Eucharist.

monotheism

The belief in and worship of only one God.

divine economy

Also known as the economy of salvation, this refers to God’s eternal plan and his actions for the salvation of humanity.

Pray It!

Blessed Be God Forever!

“**B**lessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.” Do you remember hearing these words at Mass? The celebrant says these words while praying during the Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts. The prayers he says emphasize that it is “through your [God’s] goodness” that we have the bread and wine to offer. It is because of God’s power that they will become “the bread of life” and “our spiritual drink.” The celebrant can say these prayers either aloud or silently. When said aloud, the assembly responds, “Blessed be God forever.” Next time you respond with these words at Mass, remember to thank God for the gifts he has already given us and those he will give us.



incarnate

Having become flesh; specifically, God the Son assuming human nature. The Incarnation means that Jesus, the Son of God and Second Person of the Trinity, is both fully God and fully human.

Spirit are inseparable. But “each divine person performs the common work according to his unique personal property” (CCC, 258). It was the Son who became Incarnate, assuming a human nature. It is the Holy Spirit who is sent into each believer’s heart and is sent to guide the Church.

Even though they are inseparable, the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are truly distinct from one another. This distinction does not divide the divine unity. The Father, Son, and Spirit are in perfect communion with one another.

The three Persons of the Trinity are also distinct in their origins. It is proper to speak of the Father as the generator, even though all three Divine Persons are eternal, existing without beginning or end. We express this Mystery of Faith by saying that the Son is begotten of the Father and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son.

If the Persons of the Trinity are united, how are they distinct? First, each carries out the work of our salvation in the way that is most proper. For example, God the Father draws us to follow Christ; God the Son became **incarnate**; God the Holy Spirit gives us the gifts of the Spirit. Second, the three Persons are distinct in their relationship to one another. God the Father is *unbegotten*, meaning he has always existed

Catholic Wisdom

Trinity Sunday

Trinity Sunday, officially known as The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, is celebrated the Sunday after Pentecost. This prayer is from the liturgy for this feast day:

*God our Father, who by sending into the world
the Word of truth and the Spirit of sanctification
made known to the human race your wondrous mystery,
grant us, we pray, that in professing the true faith,
we may acknowledge the Trinity of eternal glory
and adore your Unity, powerful in majesty.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.*

(Roman Missal)

without beginning or end. God the Son is *begotten* of God the Father; in the words of the Nicene Creed, “the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.” The Holy Spirit is sent out into the world, *proceeding from* the Father and the Son.

The Trinity Revealed by God in Sacred Scripture

Although the Church did not fully articulate the doctrine of the Trinity until the councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, the presence of the Trinity is clear in Sacred Scripture, especially in the New Testament. For example, in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus, “rejoiced [in] the holy Spirit” (10:21), stating that “no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son” (10:22). In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9). Later in the Gospel of John, just hours before Jesus’ death, Jesus prays to God the Father for his disciples, asking “that they may be one just as we are” (17:11). Finally, at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commissions his disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit” (28:19). These and other passages help us to understand that the God revealed to us in Scripture is a Trinity of Divine Persons. †

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The mystery of the Trinity is revealed in the Scriptures and Tradition. How would you explain this mystery to someone who has never heard of it?



“In the name of the Father . . .”



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“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Have you ever thought about how often you have said these words while making the Sign of the Cross? Hundreds of times? thousands? How often have you reflected on what these words and *gesture* really mean?

Everything Catholics do is done in the name of the Trinity. Most notably, every Catholic has been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. When we begin our personal and communal prayer in this way, including our celebrations of the Eucharist and other Sacraments, we recall that by the *grace* of Baptism, we are to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity. Maybe you make the Sign of the Cross before a difficult test or before you go to sleep. The Sign of the Cross helps us to remember—in both word and action—who we are: God’s beloved children, living always under the love, protection, and guidance of the Blessed Trinity.

The next time you make the Sign of the Cross, make sure you aren’t mumbling the words under your breath or making the motion in haste. Make both the words and the gesture a bold proclamation of your faith in the Triune God.

Article

3 The First Person of the Trinity: God the Father

If the Holy Trinity is three Divine Persons, who are these three Persons? The First Person of the Trinity is God the Father, the Eternal Source of all that exists. As we profess in the Nicene Creed, the First Person of the Trinity is the “maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.” Many religions, including Judaism, have understood God as Father, reflecting that God is the Creator and Lord of all the earth. When we profess that God is our Father, we acknowledge that he is the source of all life; that all creation exists because of God. Further, we acknowledge that God is all-powerful and desires to be in an intimate, loving relationship with his creation. He loves us, cares for us, provides for us, heals us, forgives us, and is just and faithful. Even if the love of an earthly father—or mother, or friend, or any other person—disappoints us, God’s faithful love will never, ever fail us.

Jesus Reveals God the Father

In the Gospels, Jesus calls God *Abba*, which, in his native language of Aramaic, means “Father.” This reveals two things about his relationship with God the Father:

- Jesus’ relationship with God was **filial**, a father-son relationship. In prayer Jesus knew his Father’s unconditional love, strength, and guidance. But even more important, Jesus reveals a new way of understanding God as Father—as the First Person of the Trinity, the Eternal Father of the Eternal Son.
- Jesus’ relationship with God the Father is an intimate one. In Jesus’ prayer we see him speaking to his Father directly and personally, revealing his inner thoughts and feelings (see Matthew 11:25–26 and Mark 14:36). Jesus also teaches about God the Father in his parables. For example, in the parable commonly known as the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:11–32), Jesus tells the story of a father who loves both of his sons with patience, compassion, and joy. If you have never read this story, read it now. It is a clear glimpse, given to us by Jesus, of the gentle, transforming love of God the Father.



filial

Having to do with the relationship of a child to his or her parents.



beatitude

The state of eternal happiness with God in Heaven.

We Are God's Adopted Children

Jesus does more than teach about his loving Father. He actually invites us to call God “Father” ourselves. In doing so Jesus invites us into the close relationship he has with his Divine Father—into the communion of the Holy Trinity. Through Baptism we become God the Father’s adopted daughters and sons. As Saint Paul writes: “You received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:15–17).

This does not mean that God cares for us only if we are baptized. On the one hand, “the Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal **beatitude**” (CCC, 1257). On the other hand, we believe that God’s infinite love and tender mercy extend to all people, even in ways we cannot fully understand. †

Live It!

God Is a Loving Parent

When we call God “Father,” we are reminded that we are his children. This means we are blessed with a heavenly Father who loves and cares for us. It means we have a loving Father we can always turn to. God is a great parent who wants to listen and provide support. He is always there no matter our mood or situation. We can tell him about triumphs, defeats, hopes, and fears. We can ask for help, advice, or forgiveness.

Have you ever talked with God as if you were talking with a loving parent? For the next three days, write down three or four things each day that happen to you. It could be as simple as “I got an A on a test,” “Volleyball practice was hard today,” or “I was really lonely at lunch.” Spend time going through the list and talking with God about each item. Tell him what is going on in your life, and thank him for being with you.

Is God Male?

The answer to that question is a most definite no. To say that God is our Father is to talk about the First Person of the Trinity, the Father of the Eternal Son, who has adopted us as sons and daughters. It does not mean God is a human being. It certainly does not mean God is literally male. Both Judaism and Christianity have always maintained that God has no gender. In other words, God is neither male nor female. Jesus affirms this in his conversation with a Samaritan woman when he asserts that “God is Spirit” (John 4:24). The *Catechism* reminds us that God has characteristics we associate with both fathers and mothers when it states: “God’s parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood,¹ which emphasizes God’s immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature. . . . We ought therefore to recall that God transcends the human distinction between the sexes” (239).

Both the Old and New Testaments use a great variety of symbolic images when speaking about God. Some of these are masculine images, like “the LORD, your God, carried you, as a man carries his child, all along your journey” (Deuteronomy 1:31). Others are feminine images. Jesus tells a parable about a woman searching for a lost coin (see Luke 15:8–10). The woman represents God, who patiently searches for us when we are “lost” in sin. Others are neither masculine nor feminine, like Psalm 19, which describes God as “my rock” (19:15). Praying with many scriptural images helps us to deepen our relationship with God. It reminds us that no human language can ever fully capture or describe the Divine Mystery.



Article 4 The Second Person of the Trinity: God the Son

The Second Person of the Trinity is God the Son, who assumed a human nature for our salvation. Jesus Christ is both truly and fully God and truly and fully human. He has a unique relationship with God the Father: he is the only, and the Eternal, Son of God.

Jesus Is Truly God

Several New Testament passages may help us to understand that Jesus is truly God, who became flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit. For example, the prologue to John's Gospel states:

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.

(1:14)

John's Gospel also contains another often-quoted line about the purpose of the Incarnation: "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" (3:16). In his Letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul says this of Jesus:

. . . though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance.

(2:6–7)

These and other Scripture passages, as well as the writings of the early Church councils, help us to understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—a title that signifies his unique and eternal relationship with God the Father. He is truly God's own self made flesh among us.

Jesus Is Truly Human

Jesus is not only truly and fully God but also truly and fully human. He is not only the Son of God but also the Son of Mary. As Saint Paul writes in his Letter to the Galatians: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (4:4). Jesus Christ has a fully human nature. So, he is able to teach us, through his words and actions, how to be the best, most authentic people we can be. Specifically, Jesus teaches us to love one another—even our enemies—as God the Father has loved him and as he has loved us. He teaches us to love the truth, to pray always in faith, and to forgive those who have wronged us. By assuming human nature, Jesus has shown us how to live in a way that reflects the fullness and beauty of God’s Reign.

Why Did God Become Incarnate?

The name Jesus, given to him by the angel Gabriel, means “God saves” in Hebrew. This tells us that the Incarnation is part of salvation history: God’s eternal plan to redeem and save humanity. The *Catechism* states that God became incarnate for the following four reasons (457–460):

- to save us by reconciling us with God
- to share divine love with us
- to show us how to be holy
- to enable us to share in God’s divine nature

Athanasius, a fourth-century saint, says that “the Son of God became man so that we might become God,”²² or share in God’s divine life (460). That is good and amazing news indeed! At his Ascension, Jesus’ humanity entered into God’s heavenly domain, from where he will come again at the **Last Judgment**.

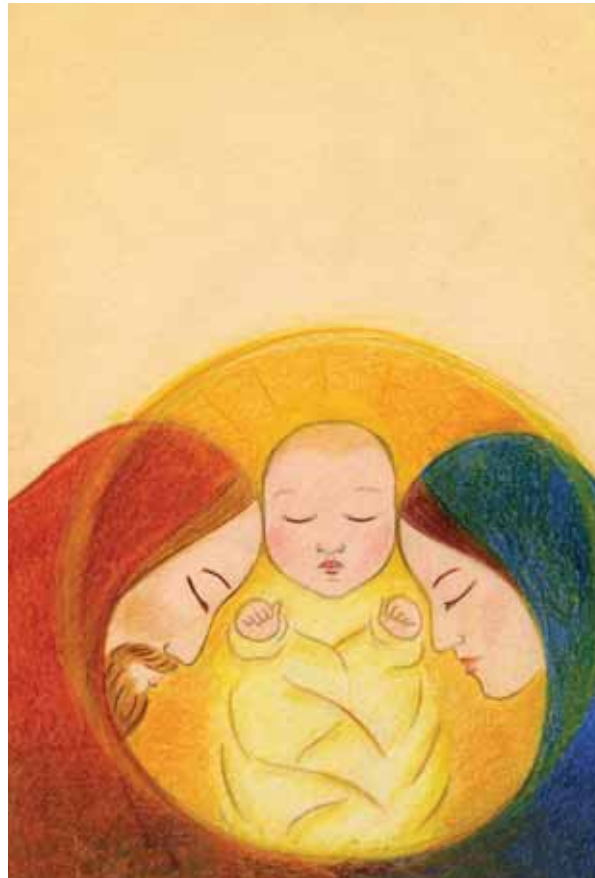


Last Judgment

The judgment of the human race by Jesus Christ at his second coming, as noted in the Nicene Creed. It is also called the Final Judgment.

The Nativity is a reminder of the Incarnation. Why do you think God chose to enter the world in the form of an infant born in a manger?

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Messiah

Hebrew word for “anointed one.” The equivalent Greek term is *christos*. Jesus is the Christ and the Messiah because he is the Anointed One.

Pentecost

In Sacred Scripture, the event in which the early followers of Jesus received the Holy Spirit. Today the Church celebrates this event on Pentecost Sunday, which occurs seven weeks after Easter Sunday.

Christ: Not Jesus’ Last Name

Because the Second Person of the Trinity is often referred to as Jesus Christ, some people mistakenly think that Christ is Jesus’ last name. *Christ* is a title given to Jesus, based on the Greek word *christos*, which means “anointed one.” The Hebrew equivalent is **Messiah**. In the ancient world, anointing with oil symbolized being chosen by God for some special mission or purpose. For example, in the Old Testament, priests, prophets, and kings were anointed as they prepared to undertake their new role in the community. In the case of Jesus, he is “anointed by the Holy Spirit, from the beginning of his human existence” (CCC, 486), anointed to be our Savior and Redeemer. †

Article

5 The Third Person of the Trinity: God the Holy Spirit

The Third Person of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. In the words of the Nicene Creed, the Holy Spirit is “the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.” The Holy Spirit has been active since the time of Creation, speaking to God’s people through the ancient prophets and anointing Jesus for his special mission to redeem and save us.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, but they are inseparable from one another. From the beginning of time until the end of time, wherever the Father sends his Son, he also sends his Spirit. They share a joint mission to bring us into the Body of Christ as God’s adopted sons and daughters. However, the Holy Spirit was not fully revealed until after Jesus’ death and Resurrection.

Promised by Jesus, Given at Pentecost

In John’s Gospel, when Jesus knows that the hour of his death is near, he promises his disciples that he will ask God to send them an advocate (in Greek, *paraclete*). An advocate is someone who is on our side, to help us, strengthen us, and empower us for holiness. This advocate Jesus promises is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. Jesus explains that the Spirit will teach the disciples everything they need to know.

After Jesus dies and rises, he makes good on his promise. The Risen Lord appears to the disciples, breathes on them, and says, “Receive the holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Moreover, at **Pentecost**, he sends the Holy Spirit, now fully revealed, to be with his disciples forever—both those who were his earliest followers and we who are his followers today. The Acts of the Apostles describes Pentecost in this way: “Suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit” (2:2–4).

Receiving the gift of the Spirit means that the mission of Jesus becomes the mission of the Church. In fact, it becomes *our* mission. The Spirit empowers us to follow the way of Jesus by sharing God’s love with our friends and families, being a healing presence to those in need, and preaching the Good News through our words and actions. Because Jesus is no longer physically present here on earth, the Paraclete blesses and strengthens our efforts to live as Jesus did: bringing justice, peace, and truth to all those we meet. †

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Wisdom	opens our eyes to see God at work, even in our common, everyday experiences.
Understanding	makes it possible for us to follow the correct course of action in difficult or confusing situations.
Counsel	also called right judgment, helps us to know right from wrong and to choose the good consistently.
Fortitude	or courage, enables us to do the right thing, even when we are afraid.
Knowledge	empowers us to use our intellectual abilities to learn more about our faith.
Piety	or reverence, reminds us that God is God, and we are not. With the gift of reverence, we recognize that all we are, all we do, and all we have comes from God.
Fear of the Lord	also called wonder and awe, fills us with a spirit of profound respect as we marvel at God’s power and goodness.

The Holy Spirit Makes *Us* Holy

The Holy Spirit sanctifies the People of God by offering us seven gifts to help us as we strive to live as Christians. Look at the chart on page 23 that describes the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and think about these questions:

- Of these gifts, for which are you most grateful?
- Which do you find most difficult to understand?
- Which do you need the most?



Part Review

1. What is monotheism?
2. What three major religions are monotheistic?
3. What does it mean that the three Divine Persons are united? What does it mean that they are distinct?
4. What evidence do the Scriptures offer for the existence of the Trinity?
5. What do we acknowledge when we profess that the First Person of the Trinity is Father?
6. In the Gospels what does Jesus reveal to us about his relation to the Father?
7. What four reasons does the *Catechism* give for the Incarnation?
8. What is the role of the Holy Spirit as the advocate for Christians throughout time?
9. What are the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Part 2

The Development of Trinitarian Doctrine

Have you ever studied something that you know is true but found it took a lot of effort to try to understand and explain it? The Mystery of the Trinity is like that.

For even the most thoughtful theologian, the most distinguished philosopher, or the holiest saint, the Trinity is a complex reality to grasp and express. God revealed the truth of our Trinitarian faith to the very earliest Christians, but it took time for the Church to clarify the depths of this truth. In fact, it took several centuries for early bishops and Church Fathers to develop and agree on language that would best express the subtle nuances of one God in three Divine Persons.

During these early centuries of Church history, varied ideas about the Trinity existed, especially about Jesus' place in it. The early Church sifted through all these ideas—some correct and some incorrect. Their efforts bore fruit in the early Ecumenical Councils. These Councils produced the Nicene Creed and other clear statements of core Catholic truths. They shaped the language and direction of Trinitarian theology for centuries to come.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 6: “The Early Church Faces Challenges to Apostolic Faith” (page 27)
- Article 7: “Early Christological Heresies” (page 29)
- Article 8: “The Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church” (page 32)
- Article 9: “The Nicene Creed” (page 34)
- Article 10: “The Trinity: Model for Human Relationships” (page 36)

Article

6 The Early Church Faces Challenges to Apostolic Faith

After Jesus died, rose, and ascended to Heaven, the early Church faced the enormous task of precisely articulating the doctrine about the Trinity and about Jesus and defending those truths against those who challenged them. During these first centuries, bishops and **Church Fathers** worked at these tasks. They often did so in official gatherings called **Ecumenical Councils**. They developed the language that would reflect, as fully as possible, the depth, breadth, and meaning of these sacred, revealed truths.

Many people had their own theories about who Jesus was and what his time on earth had achieved. Many of these ideas were heresies, or false teachings. This complicated the early Church's task. She was kept very busy defending the true teachings passed on from the Apostles when so many conflicting and false theories were circulating.

The Early Church Develops Trinitarian Language

In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul writes: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you" (13:13). This very early New Testament letter was written in the mid-50s AD. It shows the early Church's firm belief in the Trinity from the earliest times. However, it is one thing to know something is true; it is quite another thing to speak and write about that truth in a way that will make sense to other people. To express the doctrine of the Trinity, the Church Fathers turned to the language of **philosophy**. This language, though



Church Fathers

Teachers and writers in the early Church, many of whom were bishops, whose teachings are a witness to the Apostolic Tradition.

Ecumenical Council

A worldwide gathering of Catholic bishops convened by the Pope to discuss and resolve issues and problems the Church is facing.

philosophy

In Greek this word literally means "love of wisdom." It refers to the study of human existence using logical reasoning.

Catholic Wisdom

The Words of Saint Irenaeus

"The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth."

often difficult for us to understand, was in common use at that time. Paragraph 252 of the *Catechism* explains the following words, which are used to describe Trinitarian doctrine:

- The word *substance* is used to name “the divine being in its unity.”
- The word *person* (in Greek, *hypostasis*) is used to refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each fully God, yet each distinct.
- The word *relation* is used to indicate that the distinction among the three Persons lies in the relationship of each to the others.

Developing this standard vocabulary in speaking and writing about the Trinity was a great help to the Church Fathers. They could more easily express the faith of the early Christian community and defend that faith to those who challenged it. †

Saint Irenaeus, Defender of the Faith

Saint Irenaeus was a second-century bishop in what is now Lyons, France. As a prolific writer, he was a key figure in the many controversies that developed as the early Church sought to clarify her Trinitarian faith. His most famous work is a series of books called *Against Heresies*. In it Irenaeus stresses how crucial it was for the Church to safeguard her apostolic faith. This was the faith that Jesus had shared with the Apostles and that they had passed on to their successors. Irenaeus is particularly concerned about Gnosticism. This was one of the false teachings about Jesus that was circulating in the Church at that time. Irenaeus’s courageous effort to defend apostolic faith against Gnosticism and other heresies can inspire us. We too need to speak the truth without fear, trusting always in God’s steadfast love.

Saint Irenaeus’s feast day is June 28.



Article 7 Early Christological Heresies

How can 100 percent man and 100 percent God equal 100 percent Jesus? That just doesn't seem to add up! The mystery of Jesus' being fully human and fully divine doesn't make sense as math or science. The early bishops and Church Fathers struggled to articulate and defend this Mystery of Faith against errors and misinterpretations. This is because during the first several centuries of the Church, some **Christological** heresies, or incorrect beliefs about Jesus, developed.

Focusing on Jesus' Humanity Only

Have you ever debated with someone who was so convinced he or she was right that he or she completely lost sight of the truth on the other side? Player X, for them, is the best, so player Y has no value. Something like that happens with the heresies about Jesus.

Some heresies downplayed or denied the divinity of Jesus. For example, Arianism claimed that Jesus was created, just as we were. Arius, its proponent, said that Jesus did not exist before he was conceived in Mary's womb. Arius believed that Jesus was a higher creature than humans but less than God. Nestorianism believed that in Jesus there were actually two Persons. One was divine and one was human. Nestorius argued that it was wrong to say things like "God suffered and died for us" or "God was born of the Virgin Mary." These statements would apply to the human person Jesus, but not to the Divine Person. Nestorius was really concerned about stressing the humanity of Jesus. He would not even allow the Virgin Mary to be known as the Mother of God.

Focusing on Jesus' Divinity Only

Other heresies played down the humanity of Jesus. Docetism alleged that Jesus' humanity was a sort of disguise—he looked like a human and acted like a human, but inside, he was really just God. For example, Docetists claimed that Jesus didn't really suffer on the cross. They said he *appeared* to be suffering, but he couldn't *really* suffer a human death because he was God. Monophysitism believed that Jesus' divinity fully absorbed his humanity, so that, in the end, he was only divine and not human.



Christology

Literally the study of Christ; the systematic statement of Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ, including his identity, mission, and saving work on earth.

The name Gnosticism comes from *gnosis*, the Greek word for “knowledge.” It was a series of religions, common in the Greco-Roman world. It claimed that salvation can be reached only by getting special, secret knowledge from God

Heresies Focusing on Jesus’ Humanity

Name	Belief
Arianism	Jesus was created, just as we were, and he did not exist before he was conceived in Mary’s womb. Jesus was a higher creature than humans but less than God.
Nestorianism	In Jesus there were actually two Persons, one divine and one human. It was improper to say statements that would apply to only the human person Jesus, not the divine Person.

Heresies Focusing on Jesus’ Divinity

Name	Belief
Docetism	Jesus’ humanity was a sort of disguise—he looked like a human and acted like a human, but inside he was really just God.
Monophysitism	Jesus’ divinity fully absorbed his humanity, so that, in the end, he was only divine and not human.
Gnosticism	Salvation can be attained only by acquiring special, secret knowledge from God or God’s agent.

Pray It!

Prayer for Sharing the Truth

Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, Sharing truth with the world can be difficult and intimidating. Help us to speak and act in accord with your teaching. Guide us in treating all of your children with respect, care, and understanding. Inspire us to overcome any anxiety we might have in sharing your Good News with the world. Teach us to befriend, pray, and sacrifice so that all may know your truth.

Loving God, strengthen us in times we falter and struggle in sharing your Good News. Help us to always remember that you embrace us in your love and forgiveness. Amen.

or God's agent. The Christian form of Gnosticism said that Jesus was not a man at all, but a semidivine being. God sent him to share this special knowledge with a select, elite group of people God wanted to save.

The Church Defends the Truth

These Christological heresies caused a great deal of division within the Church. Most of the heresies were incorrect teachings about either Christ's human nature or his divine nature. Because of all of this controversy, the Church Fathers needed to present the doctrine of the Incarnation in clear, careful, and balanced teaching. We can benefit from their writings

Mary, Mother of God: The *Theotokos*

The Catholic Church's teachings and beliefs about Jesus are closely related to her teachings and beliefs about his mother, Mary. As early as the New Testament period, Mary was revered as the Mother of Jesus. However, she did not receive the title Mother of God until the Nestorian heresy was renounced at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431. This Council affirmed Mary as the *Theotokos*, a Greek word that literally means "God-bearer" but is often translated as "Mother of God." Today both the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches continue to venerate her with this title. Honoring Mary as the *Theotokos* acknowledges the unique role she played in our salvation. She brought the presence of God into the world in a way no one else could. Because she is the Mother of Jesus, she is also the Mother of God.

How can you bring God's presence into your home, school, and other activities? Let Mary's example of faith and courage motivate and empower you to carry God's life, love, and grace to a world in great need of healing and hope.



today. They are easily available to those who take the time to find them. The Incarnation is truly a mystery, but that does not mean it is completely beyond our understanding. Rather it is a Mystery of Faith because its truth is so deep that we can never exhaust everything that it has to teach us. †

Article

8 The Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church

Throughout the Church's history, bishops have met in gatherings called Ecumenical Councils to discuss the challenges facing the Church. A particular focus of the Ecumenical Councils in the early centuries of the Church was the challenges to Christological and Trinitarian doctrines. Between AD 325 and AD 787, seven Ecumenical Councils were held. We will discuss the two most important of these; both took place in ancient cities located in modern-day Turkey.

The Council of Nicaea

In AD 325 the Council of Nicaea declared that Jesus is truly God. In technical language, it declared that God the Son is “of the same substance” as God the Father. Stating and defending this belief countered the heretical claims of Arianism, which maintained that Jesus was more than human but less than God—a sort of “in-between” creature.

The Council of Nicaea also produced the first draft of what is now known as the Nicene Creed. You may be familiar with this Creed from praying it at Sunday liturgy. It states

Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church

Location	Year	Outcome
Council of Nicaea	325	the Nicene Creed
Constantinople	381	revised the Nicene Creed by adding the clauses referring to the Holy Spirit
Ephesus	431	defined the true personal unity of Christ and declared Mary the Mother of God (<i>Theotokos</i>)
Chalcedon	451	defined the two natures of Christ (divine and human)

that Jesus is “born of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.” These lines, written nearly seventeen hundred years ago, continue to express, with both beauty and clarity, Jesus’ identity as the Second Person of the Trinity.

The Council of Chalcedon

Whereas the Council of Nicaea focused on understanding the Trinity, especially the relationship and distinction between God the Father and God the Son, the Council of Chalcedon focused on understanding the inner life of God the Son. In

The Second Vatican Council

Not all Ecumenical Councils are part of ancient history. In fact, the Church has continued to hold Ecumenical Councils from time to time throughout her history. Ecumenical Councils are convened by the Pope, the successor to Saint Peter and the Vicar of Christ, or are at least confirmed or recognized by him. The Pope must confirm the decisions made during the Council.

The most recent Ecumenical Council was the Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII and held from 1962 to 1965. Sometimes it is referred to simply as Vatican II. This Council issued sixteen documents dealing with a variety of topics, including the liturgy, Christian education, religious freedom, and the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions. Many of the decisions made at Vatican II continue to affect the spiritual lives of Catholics today.

Periodically holding Ecumenical Councils, synods, and other gatherings is a sign of the Church’s willingness to explore pressing needs and issues. She wants to respond to these concerns with the message, values, and truth of the Gospel.





solemnities

Important holy days in the Catholic liturgical calendar, such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and All Saints' Day.

other words, what is the relationship between Jesus' humanity and his divinity? In the year 451, the 350 bishops attending the Council of Chalcedon declared that Jesus' two natures (his human nature and his divine nature) are undivided and inseparable. Jesus is 100 percent human and 100 percent divine. He is not half man and half God; nor is he two Persons somehow pushed into one. Jesus, God the Son, is *one* Divine Person with *two* natures. As the *Catechism* states, quoting a document produced by the Council of Chalcedon, Jesus is "consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity"³ (467). †

Article 9 The Nicene Creed

Chances are you've studied the Declaration of Independence already. Part of it sums up what people in the British colonies of North America believed in 1776 about their civil rights. A creed does something like that also. A creed is a summary statement of the beliefs of an individual or a community. The creed most Catholics are familiar with is the Nicene Creed. The formal name for this creed is the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. It is the product of two Ecumenical Councils—the Council of Nicaea held in AD 325 and the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, at which it was promulgated.

Proclaiming Shared Beliefs

Catholics say the Nicene Creed at Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist as well as at **solemnities**, Baptisms, and other special liturgical celebrations. This recitation of the Creed during a liturgy is called the profession of faith. Saying the Creed together in this way allows the gathered assembly to "respond to the word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the homily and that they may also call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith" (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, 67). It also underscores our unity as one community of faith. We can help and support one another in our efforts to be faithful to the truths we profess together. Moreover, because we belong to a global Church, we are united in faith, through the Creed, with Catholics throughout the world.

The Creed and Baptism

From the early centuries of the Church, the Creed has played an important role in the liturgy of Baptism. Because Baptism is the Sacrament by which one becomes a Christian, it was important for the people being baptized to know and profess the beliefs of the community they were joining. Most Catholics today were baptized as babies, so our parents and godparents promised to raise us according to the faith of the Church as stated in the Creed. Thus, praying the Creed each Sunday is a way for us to dedicate ourselves again to the Catholic faith. We renew our commitment to the promises made by us, or by others on our behalf, at our Baptism.

Key Concepts in the Nicene Creed

Even if you are familiar with the Nicene Creed, take the opportunity to read it carefully now and find where it expresses these key doctrines of our faith:

- The Creed expresses a Trinitarian faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- The Creed identifies Jesus' birth, death, Resurrection, and Ascension as key events in our salvation.
- The Creed states the four "marks" or characteristics of the Church: the Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.
- The Creed affirms belief in the resurrection of the dead and in the Last Judgment.

When we pray the Nicene Creed, we renew our baptismal promises. Read the Creed on page 36. Identify what it states about the three Divine Persons of the Trinity and the Church.

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The core truths of the Church expressed clearly and concisely, in a way that invites prayer, reflection, and further study—this is the wisdom and the appeal of the Nicene Creed. †

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

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

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day

in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the
Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the
Son,
who with the Father and the Son is
adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the
forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection
of the dead
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Article

10 The Trinity: Model for Human Relationships

What does the Trinity have to do with you? For many Catholics the Trinity can seem like an incomprehensible mystery, a distant reality, or an abstract theory. In fact, the Trinity isn't unrelated to our human experience. The *Catechism* tells

us that “there is a certain resemblance between the unity of the divine persons” (1890) and the kind of relationships we should have with one another.

What is this “certain resemblance”? How should our human relationships reflect what we see in the Trinity? The Trinity is a dynamic communion of Persons who dwell together in love and unity. They never cease to reach out with grace, compassion, and mercy to all humanity. Our Triune God is not distant from us, unconcerned with our joys and struggles; rather, our God is involved in human history. Our God is so involved, in fact, that he became part of human history through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

This is the God in whose image we are created, and this is the God with whom we are destined to live forever in Heaven. While we live on earth, we are to live like this God—in relationship with others, not in isolation. As the *Catechism* states, through “exchange with others, mutual service and dialogue”⁴ (1879), we grow as people, discover our gifts and talents, and learn to live in the way God wants. In this way the Trinity, as a communion of Divine Persons, gives us a foundation for relationships built on unity, truth, and love.

How can you use the Trinity as a model for your own relationships?

Live It!

Take Time to Listen

How can we live a Trinitarian life, in communion with God and with others? How can we grow in that “mutual service and dialogue” (*Catechism*, 1879) that God wants for us as sharers in his life and love? Building upon our baptismal grace that unites us in love with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—we can work toward mutual respect and love toward one another. Mutual respect and love require that we take time to listen.

Listening is not always easy. If you sense a conversation will be difficult, pray first. Ask the Holy Trinity for help in seeing the other person as a child of God and a brother or sister in Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to listen.

Then focus on the person speaking and give your full attention. Try not to think of what you might say in return. Eliminate distractions—such as a cell phone or TV. If you don’t understand something, ask questions. Make eye contact.

When it is time for you to respond, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to speak with love and to provide the advice, encouragement, or support the other person needs.

- You can be involved in the lives of your family members, even when it is inconvenient.
- You can reach out to a new student at your school.
- You can enlarge your circle of friends and acquaintances to include people that others may have overlooked or excluded.
- You can take on a new role or ministry in your parish community.

Can you think of other ways?

When we live out our call to community in these and other ways, we are truly following God's design. That design is revealed for us in the Mystery of the Holy Trinity: three Persons living forever in unity and love as One. †

God created us to live as a part of a community, supporting, serving, and loving one another. How do you support, love, and serve those in the communities of your family, school, church, and city?

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Part Review

1. What difficult tasks did the early Church face in safeguarding the apostolic faith?
2. What were the two main types of heresies about Jesus in the early Church?
3. Why do we use the title “Mother of God” to refer to Mary?
4. What did the Council of Nicaea declare about Jesus? What belief about Jesus was the Council defending?
5. What did the Council of Chalcedon affirm about the relationship of the human and divine natures in Jesus?
6. Why do Catholics say the Nicene Creed at certain liturgical celebrations?
7. What are some of the key doctrines of the Catholic faith that the Nicene Creed states?
8. In what ways can the Trinity be a model for human relationships?

Section 2

Revelation

The God-Human Relationship

We believe that God has been engaged in a loving relationship with us since the beginning of human history. He has planted in our hearts the desire to be united with him and has freely offered us the gift of Revelation. Through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, he has saved and redeemed us through the power of the Holy Spirit. When you respond to God in faith, you yourself become a part of this great drama of salvation history.

Responding to God with wholehearted faith can be challenging at times. Although he freely offers us the gifts of faith and reason, we still find ourselves confronted with difficult, complex questions. For example, we may wonder if God really exists. We may question why he doesn't seem to be doing anything about all the suffering and evil in the world. The resources of our Catholic faith can help us to probe difficult questions like these as we seek to respond in love to the God who first loved us.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 11: "What Is Revelation?" (page 42)
- Article 12: "Sharing in God's Life" (page 45)
- Article 13: "Salvation History" (page 47)
- Article 14: "How Do We Know God Really Exists?" (page 50)
- Article 15: "Evil and Suffering and a Good and Powerful God" (page 53)



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.

Article

11 What Is Revelation?

Have you ever wanted to get to know someone better? How do you do this? You might really listen to what the person says and watch what the person does. To really get to know someone means that the person has to share who she or he is in words and deeds. That is what God has done and continues to do throughout salvation history.

Revelation is God's self-disclosure to us. Self-disclosure means that God gradually reveals himself and the divine plan of salvation to humanity through deeds and words. God offers "an enduring witness to Himself in created realities" (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation [Dei Verbum]*, 1965], 3). This means we can learn about God in the events and experiences of our daily lives, the order and beauty of the natural world, the lives of the saints and other believers, and the wondrous abilities of our human intellect and reason. But God further reveals a type of knowledge that we would not be able to grasp on our own.

Revelation Is a Gift

Revelation is a loving gift offered to us, not something that God needs to provide. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* refers to God's "utterly free decision" (50). To be known by us and to give himself to us, he freely chooses to share his Divine Self with us. This allows us to know God more fully than we ever could on our own. Revelation also empowers us to respond to him with love and devotion. The more you know God, the more you will love him.

How Does Revelation Occur?

Revelation of the divine plan, which also discloses much about who God is, has unfolded slowly, in stages, throughout **salvation history**. The Old Testament tells the story of how God, over many centuries, reached out to our ancestors in faith—Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and David, for example. Over time God formed his people into a holy nation. He spoke to them through the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos, among many others. The New Testament tells the story of God's final and full Revelation in the Person of Jesus

Doctors of the Church

When someone refers to doctors, you might first think of people with a medical degree. But the word *doctor* comes from the Latin verb *docere*, meaning “to teach.” It can refer to those who are well qualified to teach. The Catholic Church has recognized thirty-three theologians with the title Doctor of the Church. Theologians are scholars who study the history and teachings of the Church as their life’s work. All the Doctors of the Church were not only theologians but also saints. They were individuals whose lives showed great holiness in the service of God and his people. The Doctors of the Church help us through the witness of their lives and the wisdom of their theological writings. They guide us in understanding and interpreting the Revelation of the divine plan in salvation history.

The first four Doctors of the Church were designated in 1295 by Pope Boniface VIII. They were Saint Ambrose (pictured below), Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, and Saint Gregory the Great. The three Doctors of the Church named most recently have all been women. In 1970 Pope Paul VI honored Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Teresa of Ávila with this title. Pope John Paul II bestowed the same honor on Saint Thérèse of Lisieux in 1997.

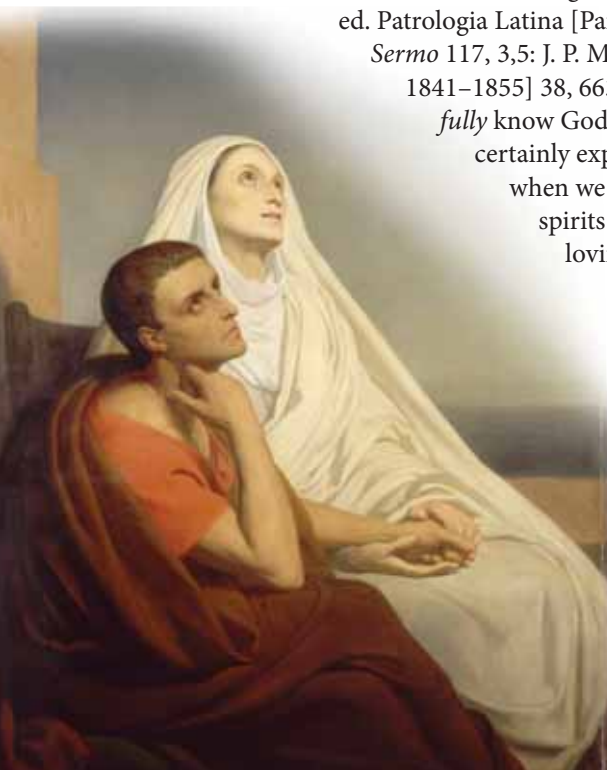


Christ, the incarnate Word of God and Son of the Father. Today the Holy Spirit continues to empower the Church to interpret and shed light on the mystery of God's Revelation. In this way, over many centuries, God revealed the divine plan of loving goodness.

In Jesus Christ, Revelation is complete. There is nothing that we need to know for our salvation that wasn't revealed through Jesus' life, teachings, Passion, death, and Resurrection. God's people will continue to grow in understanding of what he has revealed, but there won't be new public Revelation until his plan is fulfilled.

We Cannot Fully Know God

If Revelation is complete in Jesus Christ, does that mean we've got God "all figured out"? Unfortunately, no. Though having answers to our many questions about God might sound appealing, we cannot *fully* know him during our earthly lives. Even with the benefit of Revelation, God is beyond our limited human capacity for thought, words, speech, and understanding. As the *Catechism* states, quoting Saint Augustine, a fourth-century bishop: "God remains a mystery beyond words: 'If you understood him, it would not be God'" (Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 52, 6, 16: J. P. Migne, ed. *Patrologia Latina* [Paris: 1841–1855] 38:360 and *Sermo* 117, 3,5: J. P. Migne, ed. *Patrologia Latina* [Paris: 1841–1855] 38, 663) (230). Even though we cannot *fully* know God while we live on earth, we can certainly experience divine love and mercy when we attune our minds, hearts, and spirits to the many signs of God's active, loving presence in the world. ✝



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For Saint Augustine, his mother, Saint Monica, was a sign of God's active and loving presence in the world. Who or what is a sign of God's love for you?

Article

12 Sharing in God's Life

Revelation makes it possible for humanity to respond to God's plan of loving goodness for us. What is God's plan for us? It is to live in communion with him, to have a share of God's own life, to love as God loves. God has planted in our hearts the desire for him; through Revelation this divine-human bond becomes clear.

We Are Made for God

Human beings are, "by nature and **vocation**," religious beings because we are "coming from God" and "going toward God" (CCC, 44); "the desire for God is written in the human heart" (27). In other words, we have been created to be in communion with God. We have a built-in longing to be a part of this bond between humanity and divinity.

As evidence for this, the *Catechism* points to the many "prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations" (28) that are key parts of nearly every human culture. In fact, most of the world's people, in all places and in all times, have believed in, worshipped, and sought out the Divine. This is not a coincidence; rather, it is a sign that we reach the fullness of our humanity only when we heed this built-in bond with our Creator.

God Calls Us to Fullness of Life

God would not place the desire for him within our hearts and then leave us to our own devices to figure out how to reach God. Rather, God has reached out to humanity over and over again throughout history, seeking to connect with us in mutual love. From the very beginning of time, through the age of the **patriarchs**, through the time of the Exodus, and through the era of the Israelite kings and prophets, God has revealed himself. His self-disclosure has been fulfilled in the Incarnation of the Divine, Eternal Son, Jesus Christ. The Incarnation is the ultimate work of Divine Revelation. Jesus' saving mission shows us how much God loves us by God's becoming one of us in order to save us. In the Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul writes of this "plan for the fullness of



vocation

A calling from God to fulfill a particular purpose or mission in life.

patriarchs

The ancient fathers of the Jewish people, whose stories are recounted in the Book of Genesis.

times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth” (1:10). The Second Vatican Council explains it this way:

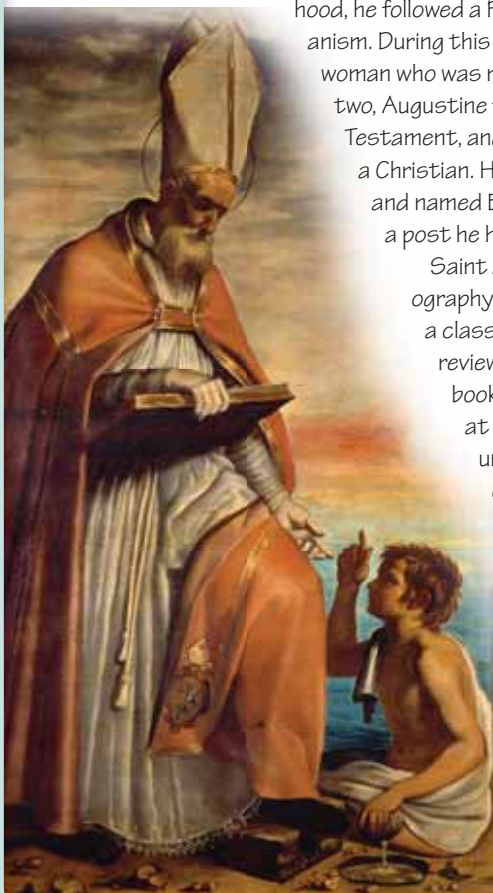
Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. (*Divine Revelation*, 4)

Saint Augustine of Hippo

The life of Saint Augustine of Hippo demonstrates how God never fails to seek us out, even when we are lost, confused, or burdened.

Saint Augustine was born in AD 354 in North Africa. In his young adulthood, he followed a Persian religion called Manichaeism. During this time he fathered a child with a woman who was not his wife. At the age of thirty-two, Augustine felt drawn to reading the New Testament, and he resolved to be baptized as a Christian. He was later ordained a priest and named Bishop of Hippo, in North Africa, a post he held until his death in AD 430.

Saint Augustine’s spiritual autobiography, *The Confessions*, is considered a classic of western literature. As he reviewed his life in the pages of the book, he clearly saw the hand of God at work, even though he had been unaware of it at the time. He especially perceived God’s presence in the love, concern, and prayers of his mother, Saint Monica. Saint Augustine realized that even when he was lost in sin, God’s plan was slowly unfolding in his life. God had never stopped searching for him. Speaking to God in his book, he wrote, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”



Today in the ministry and Sacraments of the Church, God continues to offer friendship. In Baptism we become adopted daughters and sons of the Divine Father, as we enter into the life and death of Jesus. When we participate in the Eucharist, we share in the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son. When we take part in these Sacraments, and when we engage in prayer and reflection on the Scriptures, we do so through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not acting on our own initiative; rather, we are responding, in faith, to the promptings placed in our hearts by the Triune God. †

Article 13 Salvation History

The first and universal witness to God's love is creation itself. If we are open to it, creation makes known to us a loving, caring, and wise God who wants to be in loving union with all his creation, especially human beings. When human sin threatened God's purpose for creation, God responded with a plan for our salvation, a plan that culminates in his new creation in Christ Jesus.

God's plan to save us from sin and death occurs within history, not outside it. In other words, God acts *within* historical events. He uses both the events of the world and the events of our own daily lives to redeem and save humanity. We call the unfolding of God's plan for us salvation history. Salvation history began at the dawn of the universe and continued through all the events of the Old Testament. It culminated in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The fullness of God's loving plan for humanity will be revealed at the end of time.

The Promise of the Old Testament

The Old Testament tells the story of God's loving relationship with all humanity—beginning with the family of Adam and Eve. God created us to live in communion with him and thus find our happiness. Even when Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God—an event known as the Fall—their Creator did not abandon them. Rather, God “buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption” (*Divine Revelation*, 3). As salvation history continued to

unfold, God established a covenant with Noah and, later, with the ancient Israelites.

The history of ancient Israel began with God's call to Abraham to leave his and his wife Sarah's homeland and to become the ancestors of God's Chosen People:

I will make of you a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
so that you will be a blessing.
(Genesis 12:2)

Abraham and Sarah's grandson Jacob had a large family, consisting of two wives—Rachel and Leah—twelve sons, and one daughter. When Israel became a nation, the Twelve Tribes would be named for these twelve sons of Jacob.

When the Israelites later became enslaved in Egypt, God brought them to freedom through the leadership of Moses, aided by his brother, Aaron, and his sister, Miriam. At Mount Sinai, God formed a new covenant with the Israelites and revealed the Law. This covenant is often called the Sinai Covenant or the Mosaic Covenant.

As salvation history continued, God called kings and priests to be the Israelites' political and religious leaders. God also sent prophets to call them back to fidelity when they sinned. The prophets offered them the hope of a new and everlasting covenant: "I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33).

Pray It!

Lesson from Abraham







When we hear about Abraham's relationship with God, we might be tempted to say, "I wish God would speak to me directly and tell me what he wants me to do with my life." God might not come to your house and sit down at the table to tell you what he wishes for you, but God continues to speak to each one of us. We just have to be willing to listen. Some of the ways we listen to God include praying, being active in our parishes, attending Mass, and reading Sacred Scripture.

Be ready! When you take the time to listen to God, you might be challenged like Abraham to make dramatic changes in your life. As he said to Abraham, God is saying to you, "Fear not . . . / I am your shield; / I will make your reward very great" (Genesis 15:1).

Through these many centuries, God never ceased to share mercy, love, and grace with the people of Israel. They never ceased to be God’s Chosen People, “the first to hear the Word of God”¹ (*Catechism*, 839).

Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World

The Revelation of God’s loving plan in history finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation. In the words of the Letter to the Hebrews, “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son” (1:1–2). Indeed, what better way to reveal the divine plan to us than by becoming one of us? The life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus—the Eternal Son of God made flesh—is God’s definitive effort to save us, to reveal the truth, and to bring us to the fullness of life. †

Salvation History Timeline		
Adam and Eve (<i>Genesis</i> , chapters 1–2), Noah (<i>Genesis</i> , chapters 6–9)		Biblical Prehistory
Patriarchs and Matriarchs (<i>Genesis</i> , chapters 12, 25–36)		1850–1750 BC
Moses (<i>Exodus</i> , chapters 14, 20)		1290 BC
Kings and Priests (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings)		1250–922 BC
Prophets		922–587 BC
Jesus		5 BC–AD 30

Article

14 How Do We Know God Really Exists?

If you have ever wondered whether God really exists, you are not alone. This question has captivated the imaginations of the greatest religious thinkers of many generations. It can be hard to accept something we can't see with our eyes, and trusting in a spiritual reality requires self-surrender. We don't believe in God only because it makes good sense to do so; rather, we believe because he is trustworthy (see CCC, 156). Nevertheless, he has given us several sources that can help to assure us of his existence.

Sacred Scripture: The Witness of an Inspired Text

In the Gospels, Jesus sends the Twelve Apostles on a mission: “He summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal [the sick]” (Luke 9:1–2). After Jesus' death and Resurrection, these Twelve Apostles—with many other disciples as their coworkers—continued this mission. They preached the Good News of God's Reign through their words and actions. Eventually the witness of these very early followers of Jesus—those people who had been commissioned by Christ himself—was preserved in the writings of the New Testament. The New Testament is a rich and varied collection of Gospels, epistles, sermons, speeches, parables, and accounts of miracles. Because it was written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is a privileged place for us to encounter God's strong, reliable, and active presence.

Other Believers: The Witness of Faith-Filled Lives

The testimony of those with a strong belief in God can inform our own approach to the question of God's existence. God offers the same gift of faith to all people, but sometimes we hear of people who have responded to that gift with extraordinary trust despite trials, suffering, and persecution. Their stories are especially powerful. The fact that so many people—both in ancient times and quite recently—have