

saint mary's press

Revelation and Sacred Scripture

A Primary Source Reader



Timothy Milinovich

Revelation and Sacred Scripture

A Primary Source Reader

Timothy Milinovich



saint mary's press

The publishing team included Gloria Shahin, editorial director; Steven McGlaun, development editor; prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary's Press.

Cover Image @ The Crosiers / Gene Plaisted, OSC

Copyright © 2011 by Saint Mary's Press, Christian Brothers Publications, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320, www.smp.org. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

1358

ISBN 978-1-59982-127-6, print

ISBN 978-1-59982-467-3, Kno

ISBN 978-1-59982-233-4, Saint Mary's Press Online Learning Environment

Contents

Introduction 7

Part 1: How Do We Know about God? 9

**1 Humanity Seeks God, and God Reveals His Plan
in a Grand Drama 10**
Excerpt from the *United States Catholic Catechism
for Adults*, by the United States Conference of
Catholic Bishops

**2 God Reveals Himself through Creation, Reason,
and His Word 18**
Excerpts from *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine
Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, by the Second Vatican
Council

**3 God’s Light Shines in the Human Heart and on the
Face of Christ. 24**
Excerpt from *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis
Splendor)*, by Pope John Paul II

4 God’s Signature in Creation Points to His Existence 29
Excerpts from *Summa Theologiae*, by Saint Thomas
Aquinas

5 The Personal Character of Christian Faith 35
Excerpt from *Introduction to Christianity*,
by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI

Part 2: About Sacred Scripture	41
6 Searching for God Requires Both Faith and Reason . . .	42
Excerpt from <i>On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason (Fides et Ratio)</i> , by Pope John Paul II	
7 God Reveals Himself in History and Scripture	48
Excerpt from <i>Revelation Theology</i> , by Avery Dulles	
8 Scripture Study Reveals God’s Word	54
Excerpt from <i>Letter 53</i> , by Saint Jerome	
9 Meaning Below the Surface: Faith and Science and the Literary Character of the Scriptures	59
Excerpts from the <i>United States Catholic Catechism for Adults</i> , by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops	
10 Scripture: God Reveals Himself through the Words of Inspired Human Preachers and Writers	66
Excerpts from <i>Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)</i> , by the Second Vatican Council	
11 Praying the Word of God: <i>Lectio Divina</i>	73
Excerpt from <i>The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality</i> , by Evan Howard	
Part 3: Understanding Scripture	79
12 Diplomacy and Scripture: Pope Pius XII Navigates Catholic Biblical Scholarship into the Modern Era	80
Excerpt from <i>Divino Afflante Spiritu</i> , by Pope Pius XII	

13	Moderation for Interpretation	85
	Excerpt from the <i>United States Catholic Catechism for Adults</i> , by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops	
14	A Matter for the Whole Church: The Rules and Responsibility of Interpreting the Scriptures	91
	Excerpts from <i>Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)</i> , by the Second Vatican Council	
15	The Four Senses of Scripture in the Early Church.	96
	Excerpt from <i>The Conferences</i> , by John Cassian	
16	The Historical Method Is Indispensable for Studying a Historical Faith	101
	Excerpt from <i>Jesus of Nazareth</i> , by Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI	
	Part 4: Overview of the Bible.	107
17	Ignorance of Scripture Is Ignorance of Christ.	108
	Excerpt from <i>Commentary on Isaiah</i> , by Saint Jerome	
18	The Relationship between the Church and the Jewish Scriptures	112
	Excerpt from <i>The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible</i> , by the Pontifical Biblical Commission	
19	Unity of the Old and New Testaments	119
	Excerpt from the <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	

20	The Council of Trent: Closing the Canon of Authoritative Scripture	122
	Excerpt from <i>Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures</i> , by the Council of Trent	
21	The Formation of Scripture: Traditions, Texts, and Canons	126
	Excerpt from <i>Beginning Biblical Studies</i> , by Marielle Frigge	
	Part 5: The Gospels	133
22	A Glorious Puzzle: The Formation of the Gospels	134
	Excerpt from <i>Saint Mary's Press® College Study Bible: Introduction to the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles</i> , by Christopher McMahon	
23	The Gospel of Matthew	139
	Excerpt from <i>The Gospel of Matthew</i> , by Rudolf Schnackenburg	
24	The Gospel of Mark	145
	Excerpt from <i>Reading the New Testament</i> , by PHEME PERKINS	
25	The Gospel of Luke	151
	Excerpt from <i>The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke</i> , by Jerome Kodell	
26	The Gospel of John	159
	Excerpt from <i>An Introduction to the New Testament</i> , by Raymond E. Brown	
	For Further Reading	167
	Acknowledgments	169

Introduction

As you have come to learn with your family and friends, communication is the most important part of a relationship. A relationship in which the parties do not talk, write, or express their feelings to one another is a relationship that cannot last.

Our relationship with God is no different. We require communication with God to make the relationship work. On our part, we express our love to God through prayer, worship, stewardship of creation, and love of neighbor. For his part, God communicates to us through Revelation—meaning, God reveals himself to us to initiate and foster our covenant relationship.

The fact that God reveals himself to us tells us two things: (1) God loves us enough to communicate with us and maintain this relationship with his creation, and (2) God knows we can recognize and understand his love and his will that he reveals to us in both infinite and finite ways.

Although broken at times, we remain God's beloved children, created in his glorious image—it is this initial loving connection of Creator and creation that marks humanity as unique among the rest of the created world. We can understand God's revealed will and can return with responses of loving worship of our own—it is a love story, a relationship, like no other in the world.

God reveals himself in a variety ways; through the beauty and order of natural creation and life, in the Holy Scriptures, in the Tradition of the Church, and in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is our faith: that Jesus Christ, "God with us," remains with us in the Church through the Holy Spirit, demonstrated in the Sacraments, and the liturgy of the Mass—in which Christ, God's living Word, is proclaimed to be heard with the ear of our hearts and by which we take part in Christ's sacrifice for the new covenant.

This reader, *Revelation and Sacred Scripture*, serves as a companion for your study of Sacred Scripture. It contains readings from saints, popes, Church documents, and modern scholars that

fall under five parts. The first part engages the issue of how we can know God. In the second part, we find readings that discuss the nature and importance of the Scriptures. The third part provides a variety of methods for interpreting the historical and spiritual levels of God's Word. An overview of the Scriptures and the innate relationship of the Old and New Testaments is found in the fourth part. Finally, the fifth part addresses the four Gospels.

The goal of this reader is to make relevant Catholic teaching about the Scriptures accessible to you. This reader is intended to empower you with the ability to study and understand God's Word in a way that will deepen your relationship with God and your love for his Church.

Part 1

How Do We Know about God?

1 Humanity Seeks God, and God Reveals His Plan in a Grand Drama

Introduction

Catechism means “teaching.” For the Catholic Church, this term reflects the Apostolic **Tradition** that has been taught and handed down through the centuries. Throughout the Church’s history, Church leaders have written many forms of minor catechisms. One of the earliest known is called the *Didache* (the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), which dates to the late first or mid second century. Saint Augustine (AD 354–430), Saint John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407), and other major teachers in the early Church wrote their own catechisms to teach the message of salvation in an organized manner to a particular audience. These catechisms cited the Scriptures often and relied on an educationally effective structure to aid their audience in understanding the teachings.

During the Middle Ages, the quality and content of many minor catechisms declined. A minor catechism is a resource developed to help teach specific

Tradition From the Latin, *tradere*, meaning “to hand on,” referring to the process of passing on the Gospel message. Tradition, which began with the oral communication of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written down in the Scriptures, is handed down and lived out in the life of the Church, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

groups or regions, and is intended to be a summary of a major catechism. A major catechism is a resource developed to guide the creation of minor catechisms and is intended for use primarily by clergy, teachers, and catechists. The minor catechisms at

this time often presented questions and direct answers that paraphrased Tradition and rarely cited or quoted the Scriptures directly. Martin Luther (1483–1506), a Roman Catholic monk who began the Protestant Reformation, criticized this form of catechism. In response the bishops at the Council of Trent decreed the development of a new major catechism to guide the development of sound and accurate minor catechisms. The catechism developed by the Council of Trent and published in 1566 consisted of four main parts: creed, sacraments, morality, and spirituality.

In the mid 1980s, about twenty years after the close of Vatican Council II, a synod of bishops requested that a compendium of Catholic doctrine be created. In 1986 Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) called together a commission of bishops and cardinals for this purpose. Three years later, in 1989, the commission sent the text they had created to all the bishops worldwide for review and consultation. The final draft of this document, which incorporated the responses from the world’s bishops, was submitted in 1991 to Pope John Paul II for his official approval.

On June 25, 1992, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), a new major catechism, was officially approved by Pope John Paul II. The CCC follows the same four-part structure as the Trent catechism. Although it is one of the best-selling Catholic books in America (second only to the Bible), this edition was originally intended primarily for bishops, priests, scholars, teachers, catechists, and lay ministers of pastoral formation. This is why the CCC is often difficult for a nontheologian to read.

The CCC was published with the understanding that national conferences of bishops would publish adaptations to this official *Catechism* that would teach faithfully the Apostolic Tradition in a way that engaged particular local issues for each national audience. In the United States, the most recent adaptation, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (also known as the *Adult Catechism*), was published by the **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops** in 2006. It was written to be accessible to a wide audience and follows the same effective four-part structure used in

United States Conference of

Catholic Bishops The organization that consists of all U.S. Catholic bishops, who address matters related to the Church on the national level. They also publish materials for Catholics in the United States.

the 1566 and 1992 catechisms. This catechism also includes stories about American saints and reflection questions relevant to Catholics living in the United States today.

The reading for this chapter addresses humanity's inner desire to seek God and ponder questions like "Why am I here?" "Why do bad things happen?" and "How should I live my life?" This excerpt from the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* teaches that these questions are answered by God's Revelation. God reveals himself in the beauty of creation. In a special way, God reveals his saving plan for humanity in the covenant with Abraham and the Israelites and through the words of his prophets and the Apostles. Thus, God's Revelation takes place within the drama of salvation history. The message of this salvation—found in the Scriptures, Tradition, and the teaching of the Magisterium—provides an ongoing Revelation through the Church for all those who continue to seek God today.

Excerpt from the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*

By the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Through the use of reason, we can learn much about God from both creation and conscience, but Revelation enables us to learn about God's inner life and his loving plan to save us from sin and share in his divine life. No amount of unaided thinking could penetrate such a mystery. God freely chose to share this hidden mystery with us. God's sharing was an act of friendship for us, revealing himself as one reveals his or her heart to a friend. Love does such things.

“Revelation is the self-disclosure of the living God.”

God's Revelation unfolded gradually throughout history. "Wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation, he manifested himself to our first parents from the very beginning. After the fall, he buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption" (Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* [*Dei Verbum*; DV], no. 3; cf. Gn 3:15).

God continued over the succeeding centuries to provide providential care for those he created in his image and likeness. He called Abraham to make of him a great nation, a chosen people through whom salvation would come to the world. In the encounter of God with Moses, God reveals himself as "*I AM WHO AM*." These words reveal something about God, who, nevertheless, still remains mysterious. God is revealed as the source of all that is, but who he is will be revealed still further as he continues his loving work for his people. The prophets, in reflecting on God's actions, will make clearer the nature of God. But the clearest Revelation will come in Jesus Christ.

"In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors; in these last days he spoke to us through a son" (Heb 1:1–2). This Son was Jesus Christ, the fullness of Revelation. Wonderful indeed is this mystery of our faith in Jesus Christ, as we say in professing it, "[He] was manifested in the flesh, / vindicated in the Spirit; / seen by angels; / proclaimed to the Gentiles, / believed throughout the world, / taken up in glory" (1 Tm 3:16).

Revelation is the self-disclosure of the living God. God shows himself by both great deeds, as narrated for us in Scripture, and by the words that illumine the meaning of these deeds (see DV, no. 2). In Revelation, the tremendous gulf between God and the human race is bridged. More profoundly God desires to have an intimate relationship with all people. The process of Revelation, which took centuries to unfold, reached its magnificent fulfillment in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Revelation is the act by which God speaks to and forms a covenant people.¹ The covenant between God and humanity was first established with Noah after the great Flood, when God in his mercy promised that never again would there be a catastrophe that threatens the existence of all of humanity. God entered into a covenant later with Abraham and then

with the people of Israel at the time of their exodus from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. He affirmed that they will always be his people.

This is the grand drama of the dialogue between God and his people that takes place in the lived history of the people encompassed by his love. It includes the people's **inspired** interpretation of historical events that reflects an ever greater understanding of God's will and presence as they advanced on their pilgrimage through the centuries.

It requires faith to respond to God's revealing word and to perceive the divine action in history. There are those who do not have faith or who consciously reject living in faith. They cannot or will not perceive God's presence or action in the world and sometimes scoff at or ridicule those who do. But for many people, God makes faith possible and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit faith helps those people to grow in an appreciation of how God has worked in history to love and save us.

God's Revelation disturbed and changed the patriarchs, prophets, Apostles, and others. When Moses encountered God in the burning bush, Moses trembled and took off his shoes, for he stood on holy ground (cf. Ex 3:1–6). **Isaiah** beheld the glory of God, and when the vision disappeared he saw himself in a brand-new light, "Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips" (Is 6:5). Faced with the revelation of divine power in Jesus, Peter begged, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Lk 5:8). Revelation calls for a response of faith and conversion, not just in times past, but today as well.

Because the Christian covenant is definitive, there will be no new

inspired Written by human beings with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to teach without error those truths necessary for our salvation.

Isaiah One of the most prominent prophets of the Old Testament. New Testament authors often cite him as one who prophesied Christ's Incarnation and Crucifixion.

public Revelation until the final glorious manifestation of Jesus Christ at the end days (DV, no. 4). All that is needed for salvation has already been revealed. What are called *private revelations*, that is, messages such as those given by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Lourdes and

Fatima, add nothing to what was publicly revealed up and through Christ but can help inspire a more profound commitment to what has been revealed through public Revelation. . . .

Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God become man, is the fullness of Revelation by his teaching, witness, death, and Resurrection. On the road to Emmaus, the risen Jesus showed the two disciples how the teachings of the prophets were fulfilled in him and proclaimed by his own lips. Just before his Ascension, Christ commissioned the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all whose hearts would be open to receive them. The revealed Word of God in the Gospel would be for everyone a source of saving truth and moral discipline.

He commanded the Apostles to proclaim and witness his Kingdom of love, justice, mercy, and healing, foretold by the prophets and fulfilled in his **Paschal Mystery**. Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit to enable them to fulfill this great commission, to give them needed courage, and to help them in their evangelizing work.

Graced by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles did what Jesus commanded them. They did this orally, in writing, by the heroic sanctity of their lives, and by ensuring that there would be successors for this mission. The first communication of the Gospel was by preaching and witness. The Apostles proclaimed Jesus,

The Paschal Mystery

The word *paschal* refers to Passover. Christ is called the Paschal Lamb because, like the lamb sacrificed during the Passover, whose blood saved the Jews from slaughter, Jesus' sacrifice redeems humanity. The Paschal Mystery concerns Christ's Passion, or suffering, and his death, Resurrection, and Ascension, through which God's plan to save humanity was accomplished. In the Eucharist at Mass, we celebrate and remember the Paschal Mystery.

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

his Kingdom, and the graces of salvation. They called for the obedience of faith (hearing and obeying God's Word), the reception of Baptism, the formation of a community of believers, gathering for the Eucharist, and generosity to the poor.

The Apostles chose men to be bishops to succeed them and handed on to them "what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit" (CCC, no. 83). The popes and bishops in union with him are successors of the Apostles and inherit the responsibility of authoritative teaching from them. We call this teaching office the **Magisterium**. "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone" (CCC, no. 85, citing DV, no. 10).

All the faithful share in understanding and handing on revealed truth. "The whole body of the faithful cannot err . . . in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, 'from the bishops to the last of the faithful,' they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals" (CCC, no. 92, citing Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium; LG]*, no. 12). Another way of understanding this truth is the principle that the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Church, draws the whole body of the faithful to believe what truly belongs to the faith. "By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*magisterium*), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Thes 2:13), the faith once for all delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3)" (LG, no. 12).

Tradition is the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church. The oral preaching of the Apostles and the written message of

salvation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Bible) are conserved and handed on as the Deposit of Faith through the Apostolic Succession in the Church.

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

Both the living Tradition and the written Scriptures have their common source in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This is particularly important to understand and believe when one is faced with the postmodern attitude that Tradition cannot be trusted, and that what the Church teaches as Tradition is really just a reflection of particular judgments and biases. Knowing that what Tradition teaches has its ultimate foundation in Jesus Christ helps a person of faith to respond to Tradition with trust. The theological, liturgical, disciplinary, and devotional traditions of the local churches both contain and can be distinguished from this Apostolic Tradition (cf. CCC, Glossary, “Tradition”).

Endnotes

1. A covenant was originally a treaty in which an overlord and a vassal accepted certain responsibilities toward each other. In the Old Testament, this idea of covenant became the primary analogy for the relationship between God and his people.

For Reflection

1. The reading states that “God’s Revelation unfolded gradually throughout history.” What examples in the reading illustrate this point?
2. How does God’s Revelation bridge the gulf between us and God?
3. Why is faith essential for recognizing and responding to God’s Revelation?
4. Explain how Jesus’ commission of the Apostles “to preach the Gospel to all whose hearts would be open to receive them” is continued in the Church today.

2 God Reveals Himself through Creation, Reason, and His Word

Introduction

When Pope John XXIII convened Vatican Council II in 1962, one of his goals was for the Church to reflect on its identity and mission in a rapidly changing world. The era following World War II saw an emerging global economic market, increased exposure to other faith traditions through immigration, an emphasis on science for answers to human problems, and a growing question of the place and practice of faith in the modern world.

Vatican Council II made several changes to the daily practices of Catholics, including allowing the Mass to be said in the local language rather than Latin alone. Documents were produced that addressed different areas of modern life. For example, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965) addressed the relationship of the Church to other religions, and *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965) explored faith and the political sphere. *Dogmatic Constitution on **Divine Revelation*** (*Dei Verbum*, 1965) delved into God's Revelation to humanity through the Scriptures and Tradition and addressed the question "How can we know God?"

Divine Revelation responded to this question by explaining that God reveals himself to humanity through his creation, in the Scriptures, in Tradition, and in the teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium. In a culture that sought to hold science over religion, *Divine*

Divine Revelation God's self-communication and disclosure of the divine plan to humankind through creation, events, persons, and, most fully, Jesus Christ.

Revelation countered that the Catholic intellectual tradition and the Scriptures demand that one seek God through both faith and reason. Together, faith and reason are necessary aspects by which we can recognize and encounter God in a substantive relationship of love.

This selection from *Divine Revelation* deals with the question “How can we know about God?” *Divine Revelation* responds to this question, universally asked by humanity throughout time. Additionally, this reading reminds us that the Church, in her earthly ministry, has a duty to manifest the light of Christ and reveal God’s plan of salvation to those outside the Catholic faith.

Excerpts from *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*

By the Second Vatican Council

1. Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred **synod** takes its direction from these words of St. John: “We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:2–3). Therefore, following in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council, this present council wishes to set forth authentic **doctrine** on divine revelation and how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love.

Revelation Itself

2. In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of

synod A gathering of bishops to discuss important theological issues.

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

His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation,

“*In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will . . .*”

therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14–15) and

lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds

and words having in inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.

Prophets

Prophets acted as God’s ambassadors to call the Israelites, and even their kings, to follow God’s laws and keep his covenant. They conveyed God’s messages through poetry, visions, public speeches, and parables. Stories of the prophets Samuel, Nathan, and Elijah can be found in the books of Samuel and Kings. Other prophets’ writings can be found in eighteen books in the Old Testament, including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos.

3. God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (see Rom. 1:19–20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents. Then after their fall His

promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (see Gen. 3:15) and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (see Rom. 2:6–7). Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation (see Gen. 12:2). Through the **patriarchs**, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.

4. Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, “now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2). For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (see John 1:1–18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as “a man to men.” He “speaks the words of God” (John 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (see John 5:36; John 17:4). To see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason 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. Moreover He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.

The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 6:14 and Tit. 2:13).

5. “The obedience of faith” (Rom. 13:26; see 1:5;

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

2 Cor 10:5–6) “is to be given to God who reveals an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,” and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving “joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it.” To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts.

6. Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind.

As a sacred synod has affirmed, God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason (see Rom. 1:20); but teaches that it is through His revelation that those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in this present state of the human race.

For Reflection

1. According to the reading, why does God choose “to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will”?
2. Explain how God’s Revelation is most fully realized in Jesus Christ.
3. What is the role of grace in helping us understand God’s Revelation?

3 God's Light Shines in the Human Heart and on the Face of Christ

Introduction

"What is truth?" In the Gospel of John (18:38), Pontius Pilate asks Jesus this question at Jesus' trial, and humanity has pondered the question for ages. The modern and postmodern eras have only underscored the question. Because of the increasing influence and acceptance of **relativism** in modern society, in place of objective truth, it has become harder to point to an objective truth.

Pope John Paul II, a theologian and philosopher, responded to the cultural phenomenon of relativism in 1993 with the **encyclical** *The Splendor of Truth* (*Veritatis Splendor*). In this encyclical, he explains that he is writing to address the growing cultural dismissal of truth as an obtainable goal, as well as to address questions regarding some of the Church's foundational moral teachings. He is concerned with the pervasiveness of moral relativism from both outside and within the Church.

This encyclical strategically followed the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992, a complete deposit of the Church's teaching, and sought to underscore "the principles of

a moral teaching based upon Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic tradition" (*The Splendor of Truth*, 5).

The arguments found in *The Splendor of Truth* are influenced by John Paul II's life experience

relativism The position that there is no objective truth, only subjective opinions.

encyclical A pastoral letter issued by the Pope to the whole Church and sometimes to the whole world. Encyclicals address important topics, such as the Sacraments, faith, and social issues.

and faith. His belief in objective truth aided him in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, Poland, as he entered an underground seminary to study theology and philosophy. His faith that God's truth is revealed not only in the Scriptures and Tradition but also in creation and in the hearts of all people permeates his theology.

This chapter's reading comes from the introduction to *The Splendor of Truth*. It outlines Pope John Paul II's major reflections on how God's truth is revealed: in the heart and conscience of humanity, in Sacred Scripture and the Tradition of the Church, and in particular, it is reflected in the face of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Excerpt from *The Splendor of Truth* (*Veritatis Splendor*)

By Pope John Paul II

1. Called to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, “the true light that enlightens everyone” (Jn 1:9), people become “light in the Lord” and “children of light” (Eph 5:8), and are made holy by “obedience to the truth” (1 Pet 1:22).

This obedience is not always easy. As a result of that mysterious original sin, committed at the prompting of Satan, the one who is “a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44), man is constantly tempted to turn his gaze away from the living and true God in order to direct it towards idols (cf. 1 Thes 1:9), exchanging “the truth about God for a lie” (Rom 1:25). Man's capacity to know the truth is also darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened.

“*Jesus Christ, the “light of the nations,” shines upon the face of his Church, which he sends forth to the whole world to proclaim the Gospel to every creature.*”

Thus, giving himself over to relativism and scepticism (cf. Jn 18:38), he goes off in search of an illusory freedom apart from truth itself.

But no darkness of error or of sin can totally take away from man the light of God the Creator. In the depths of his heart there always remains

Relativism and Post-modern Thought

Relativism is a cultural perspective that developed following World War II regarding each person's belief or "truth" as being influenced by one's own state or location in life and experience. To be fair, this is a logical assumption. But this cultural perspective at times extended the idea to an extreme—namely, that objective truth can never be obtained. *Relativism* refers to the idea that all things are relative to one's subjective viewpoint.

a yearning for absolute truth and a thirst to attain full knowledge of it. This is eloquently proved by man's tireless search for knowledge in all fields. It is proved even more by his search for the meaning of life. The development of science and technology, this splendid testimony of the human capacity for understanding and for perseverance, does not free humanity from the obligation to ask the ultimate religious questions. Rather, it spurs us on to face the most painful and decisive of struggles, those of the heart and of the moral conscience.

2. No one can escape from the fundamental questions: What must I do? How do I distinguish good from evil? The answer is only possible thanks to the splendour of the truth which shines forth deep

within the human spirit, as the Psalmist bears witness: "There are many who say: 'O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord'" (Ps 4:6).

The light of God's face shines in all its beauty on the countenance of Jesus Christ, "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), the "reflection of God's glory" (Heb 1:3), "full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). Consequently the decisive answer to every one of man's questions, his religious and moral questions in particular, is given by Jesus Christ, or rather is Jesus Christ himself, as the Second Vatican Council recalls: "In fact, it is only in the mystery of the Word incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of man. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of the future man, namely, of Christ the Lord. It is Christ, the last Adam, who fully discloses man to himself and unfolds his noble calling by revealing the mystery of the Father and the Father's love."

Jesus Christ, the “light of the nations,” shines upon the face of his Church, which he sends forth to the whole world to proclaim the Gospel to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15). Hence the Church, as the People of God among the nations, while attentive to the new challenges of history and to mankind’s efforts to discover the meaning of life, offers to everyone the answer which comes from the truth about Jesus Christ and his Gospel. The Church remains deeply conscious of her “duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, so that she can offer in a manner appropriate to each generation replies to the continual human questionings on the meaning of this life and the life to come and on how they are related.”

3. The Church’s Pastors, in communion with the Successor of Peter, are close to the faithful in this effort; they guide and accompany them by their authoritative teaching, finding ever new ways of speaking with love and mercy not only to believers but to all people of good will. The Second Vatican Council remains an extraordinary witness of this attitude on the part of the Church which, as an “expert in humanity,” places herself at the service of every individual and of the whole world.

The Church knows that the issue of morality is one which deeply touches every person; it involves all people, even those who do not know Christ and his Gospel or God himself. She knows that it is precisely on the path of the moral life that the way of salvation is open to all. The Second Vatican Council clearly recalled this when it stated that “those who without any fault do not know anything about Christ or his Church, yet who search for God with a sincere heart and under the influence of grace, try to put into effect the will of God as known to them through the dictate of conscience . . . can obtain eternal salvation.” The Council added: “Nor does divine Providence deny the helps that are necessary for salvation to those who, through no fault of their own, have not yet attained to the express recognition of God, yet who strive, not without divine grace, to lead an upright life. For whatever goodness and truth is found in them is considered by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel and bestowed by him who enlightens everyone that they may in the end have life.”

For Reflection

1. The splendor of truth shines deep within the heart of each person and leads to fundamental questions. What questions do you believe draw us closer to God? How can we seek the answers to find truth?
2. Based on this reading, how do we answer the questions: What must I do? How do I distinguish good from evil?
3. Why must the Church examine and interpret the signs of the time in the light of the Gospel?

4 God's Signature in Creation Points to His Existence

Introduction

Saint Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274), along with Saint Augustine, was one of the most important theologians in Church history. Before joining the Dominican order about 1243, he was educated in the Benedictine order and by Albert the Great, one of the great thinkers of the Middle Ages. Thomas became a doctor of philosophy and theology. At first, his wealthy family opposed his decision to join the Dominicans and even held him captive for months in an attempt to prevent him from joining the order. After a time, they released him. As a Dominican, Thomas taught theology at the renowned University of Paris.

During Thomas's time, the writings of Aristotle had been rediscovered in the West. During his university education, Thomas was exposed to Aristotle's works, as well as those of Arabian writers and thinkers. Thomas was able successfully to explain a number of theological problems by merging meaningful examples from Aristotle and the Arabian thinkers. Thomas's principle of using other sources came from his conviction that any logical conclusion that is true, regardless of who says it, must be from the Holy Spirit. However, this principle provoked tension from a number of his colleagues and his bishop.

In the end, Thomas's work overcame the objections of his critics. His four-volume work, the ***Summa Theologica*** ("*Sum of All Theology*"),

Summa Theologica Literally, "the sum of all theology." One of the most influential works in Catholic theology, written by Thomas Aquinas. Often referred to simply as the *Summa*.

is considered an authoritative masterpiece of theology that explains many questions surrounding the Apostolic Tradition. One of the most prominent of Thomas's works is his proofs for God's existence. Thomas's proofs presuppose that activity in the world points to something or someone that started that movement. Thomas calls this initial push the "First Cause." The proofs in the world that require and point to such a First Cause include: (1) change in the natural world, (2) creative activity, (3) necessity and interdependence, (4) greatness and perfection, and (5) order in the world that requires a primary director. These are all aspects of the world that individuals can accept as universal truth.

The following reading from Thomas remains important today, because the proofs show that God's existence can be deduced logically through reason and observation of the world. At a time when some people wish to separate faith from reason or religion from science, Thomas teaches us that all serve the same purpose in aiding our reception of God's ongoing Revelation.

Excerpts from *Summa Theologicae*

By Saint Thomas Aquinas

Whether God's Existence Can Be Demonstrated

There are two types of demonstration. There is demonstration through the cause, or, as we say, "from grounds," which argues from cause to effect. There is also demonstration by means of effects, following the order in which we experience things, arguing from effect to cause. Now when an effect is more apparent to us than its cause, we come to know the cause through its effect. Even though the effect should be better known to us, we can demonstrate from any effect that its cause exists, because effects always depend on some cause, and a cause must exist if its effect exists. We can therefore demonstrate that God exists from what is not evident to us on the basis of effects which are evident to us. . . .

Whether God Exists

The existence of God can be proved in five ways. The first and most obvious **proof** is the argument from change [*ex parte motus*]. It is clearly the case that some things in this world are in the process of changing. Now everything that is in the process of being changed is changed by something else, since nothing is changed unless it is potentially that towards which it is being changed, whereas that which changes is actual. To change something is nothing else than to bring it from potentiality to actuality, and a thing can be brought from potentiality to actuality only by something which is actual. Thus a fire, which is actually hot, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, thus changing and altering it. Now it is impossible for the same thing to be both actual and potential in the same respect, although it may be so in different respects. What is actually hot cannot at the same time be potentially hot, although it is potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that, in the same manner and in the same way, anything should be both the one which effects a change and the one that is changed, so that it should change itself. Whatever is changed must therefore be changed by something else. If, then, whatever is changing it is itself changed, this also must be changed by

Aristotle

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato (ca. 427–347 BC) and his student Aristotle (384–322 BC) were two of the most influential philosophers of ancient Greece. They wrote on a wide range of topics, including the creation and form of the world, order in nature, ethics, and rhetoric. Aristotle's writings in particular established a comprehensive system of Western philosophy, encompassing morality and aesthetics, logic and science, and politics and metaphysics that still influences Western society today.

proof A step-by-step explanation of a thesis with support and a logical conclusion that points to objective knowledge. Often found in philosophy.

something else, and this in turn by something else again. But this cannot go on forever, since there would then be no first cause to this process of change, and consequently no other agent of change, because secondary things which change cannot change unless they are changed by a first cause, in the same way as a stick cannot move unless it is moved by the hand. We are therefore bound to arrive at a first cause of change which is not changed by anything, and everyone understands that this is God.

The second way is based on the nature of an efficient cause. We find that there is a sequence of efficient causes in the observable world. But we do not find that anything is the efficient cause of itself. Nor is this possible, for the thing would then be prior to itself, which is impossible. But neither can the sequence of efficient causes be infinite, for in every sequence the first efficient cause is the cause of an intermediate cause, and an intermediate cause is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether there are many intermediate causes, or just one. Now when a cause is taken away, so is its effect. Hence if there were no first efficient cause, there would be no ultimate cause, and no intermediate cause. But if there was an infinite regression of efficient causes, there would be no first efficient cause. As a result, there would be no ultimate effect, and no intermediate causes. But this is plainly false. We are therefore bound to suppose that there is a first efficient cause. And everyone calls this "God."

The third way is from the nature of possibility and necessity. There are some things which may either exist or not exist, since some things come to be and pass away, and may therefore exist or not exist. Now it is impossible that all of these should exist at all times, because there is at least some time when that which may possibly not exist does not exist. Hence if all things were such that they might not exist, at some time or other there would be nothing. But if this were true there would be nothing in existence now, since what does not exist cannot begin to exist, unless through something which does exist. If nothing had ever existed, it would have been impossible for anything to begin to exist, and there would now be nothing at all. But this is plainly false, and hence not all existence is merely possible. Something in things must be necessary. Now everything which is necessary either derives its necessity from somewhere else or does not. But we cannot go on to infinity with necessary things which have a

cause of their necessity, any more than with efficient causes, as we proved. We are therefore bound to suppose something necessary in itself, which does not owe its necessity to anything else, but which is the cause of the necessity of other things. And everyone calls this “God.”

The fourth way is from the gradation that occurs in things, which are found to be more good, true, noble and so on, just as others are found to be less so. Things are said to be more and less because they approximate in different degrees to that which is greatest. A thing gets hotter and hotter as it approaches the thing which is the hottest. There is therefore something which is the truest, the best, and the noblest, and which is consequently the greatest in being, since that which has the greatest truth is also greatest in being. . . . Now that which most thoroughly possesses the nature of any genus is the cause of all that the genus contains. Thus fire, which is most perfectly hot, is the cause of all hot things. . . . There is therefore something which is the cause of the being of all things that are, as well as of their goodness and their every perfection. This we call “God.”

“ There is therefore something which is the cause of the being of all things that are, as well as of their goodness and their every perfection. This we call “God.” ”

The fifth way is based on the governance of things. We see how some things, like natural bodies, work for an end even though they have no knowledge. The fact that they nearly always operate in the same way, and so as to achieve the maximum good, makes this obvious, and shows that they attain their end by design, not by chance. Now things which have no knowledge tend towards an end only through the agency of something which knows and also understands, as in the case of an arrow which requires an archer. There is therefore an intelligent being by whom all natural things are directed to their end. This we call “God.”

For Reflection

1. Based on this reading, explain how knowing or witnessing an effect helps us know the cause of that effect.
2. Identify and summarize the five proofs Thomas identified for the existence of God.
3. What examples have you observed from the order and beauty in nature and creation that point toward the existence of God?