

New Testament: An Introduction

Introducing Faith and Witness...G6

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THE CHURCH'S BOOK

Adult Focus

This chapter clarifies three important concepts in the historical process of the formation of the biblical writings we call the Scriptures: revelation passed on through tradition, recorded in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thus becoming Scripture, the written word of God.

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit guided the human authors in discerning "what God wanted put into the sacred writings." The Holy Spirit guided the human authors in both the content of their writing and in choosing the truth God wanted taught. The Holy Spirit used their human gifts of language and expression to transmit the truth God intended for all people.

Does this mean that the Bible teaches every kind of truth in the world? No. In earlier ages, the truths of faith were not distinguished from the truths of history or science. Gradually we came to realize that Scripture was written to teach the truths of faith, not of science or of history.

Continue to encourage the young people to consider Scripture a source of guidance, strength, comfort, and correction so that they may be "equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:1-7). For it is in Scripture that "the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talk with them" (*Catechism*, 104).

Catechism Focus

The theme of Chapter 4 corresponds to paragraphs 83, 104-107, 113, 120, and 134-135 of the *Catechism*.

Enrichment Activities



Computer Connection

Invite the young people to use a crossword software program, such as *WordCross*®, to make crossword puzzles that feature terms and names presented in Chapters 1 through 4.

Have the young people work in small groups. Direct each group to confer among themselves to make up a list of words and corresponding clues. If necessary, allow the groups to refer to the text.

When all are ready, direct the groups to enter their words and clues into the computer to be processed into crossword puzzles. Then have the groups print and exchange puzzles. Allow ample time for the young people to solve one another's puzzles.



Easier Access

If the young people have their own Bibles or New Testaments, suggest that they make tabs to indicate the different books.

They may want to use tabs available for purchase from a stationery or office-supply store or make their own. This can be done by cutting small strips of paper, writing the names of the books on the strips, and then placing clear tape over both sides of the tabs. Then tape each tab to the first page of the particular book.

Suggest that the young people use a color code for the different types of books. The following is an example:

- historical books—tan
- prophets—green
- gospels—red

Teaching Resources

Overview

To discover that the Bible does not contain any errors about the truths of faith; to learn why the Bible is the Church's book.

Opening Prayer Ideas

Read and reflect on Matthew 6:19-21.

Pray together Psalm 1:1-3.
or
Make a commitment to study and to pray God's word.

Materials

- Bibles, journals, and highlighters
- box or bag decorated like a treasure chest

REPRODUCIBLE MASTERS

- *True Colors*, page 30C
- *Chapter 4 Assessment*, page 37A
- *Highlights for Home*, page 37B



New Testament Journal:

For Chapter 4, use pages 10-11.

Supplemental Resources

VIDEOS

Journeys to the Edge of Creation
Ignatius Press
P.O. Box 1339
Ft. Collins, CO 80522

Understanding the Bible

Part 1: "God's Word: An Invitation"
St. Anthony Messenger Press
1615 Republic Street
Cincinnati, OH 45210-1298

CHAPTER four

True Colors

Jesus used many colorful words to teach the truths of our faith. Reading and meditating on his teaching may help you to distinguish between the times you disguise yourself under false, colorful layers of selfishness and times when you reflect the true colors of God's love.

Read and reflect on each of the passages listed in the left column below. Draw a line to match it with the theme-related petition in the right column. Then try writing your own colorful prayer of petition. Don't forget to list the gospel chapter and verse.

Luke 19:1–10

Help me to scrape off the green layer of jealousy or envy for what others have. Help me to remember that green is a symbol of growth and hope in your promises.

Luke 11:29–37

Help me to remove the yellow layer of cowardice. Help me to follow the yellow and orange light of your guidance.

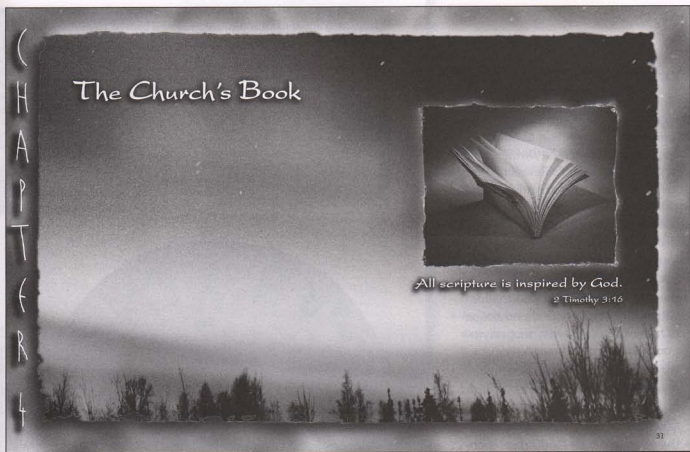
Matthew 20:20–28

Help me to scrape off the blue layer of coldness to others. Help me to remain a true-blue friend to you by showing my concern and serving others.

John 6:60–71

Help me to remove the purple layer of false pride. Help me to remember that purple symbolizes reconciliation and peace.





Objectives: To discover that the Bible does not contain any errors about the truths of faith; to learn why the Bible is the Church's book.

Introduction ___ min.

Note: Before the session begins, decorate a large box or gift bag to serve as a treasure chest. Place a Bible inside the chest. Then keep the treasure chest from the young people's view until the point suggested.

Opening Prayer: Invite a prepared volunteer to read Matthew 6:19–21. Allow about five minutes for reflection. Then ask the young people to list in their journals their treasures—people, places, things, qualities, talents, gifts.

Then present to the group the treasure chest you have prepared. Have a volunteer open the chest and show the group the treasure he or she has found. Ask

the young people—if they have not done so—to add the Bible to their list of treasures. Ask, “Why does the Church consider the Bible a treasure?”

Then invite the young people to look at the photos on pages 30 and 31. Ask, “How do the various readings from Scripture give us uplifting thoughts and add color to our lives?” Then share the following prayer with the group:

Write upon our hearts, O Lord God, the lessons of your holy word. Help us to be doers of the same, and not forgetful hearers only.

Forum: Have a “Principal Planner” call on volunteers to share the plans they have written on the handout *Making Plans*. Ask the young people to listen carefully to each presenter. This will give them practice in listening when the word of God is read at Mass.

Presentation — min.

◆ Before the session begins, draw a flow chart on the board that is helpful in conveying information about the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*. (See “God’s Revealing Activity.”) The designed outline should include topics listed below. During the session invite the young people to help you complete the chart by filling in the information (indicated here in parentheses) in the appropriate places.

- the two major areas of information with which it deals (*God’s revelation of himself to us and how that revelation is transmitted through time*)
- the two communities to which God revealed himself (*community of Israel and apostolic community of the Church*)
- the ways in which God’s revelation was made known (*testimony given by word of mouth—tradition; recorded in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—Scripture*).

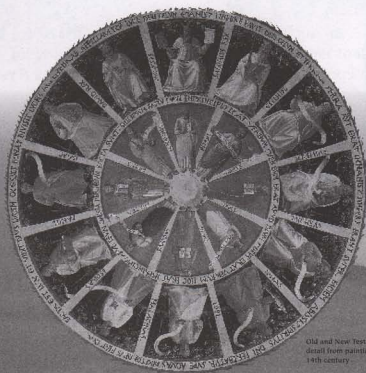
◆ Discuss with the young people the key statements they underlined on pages 32 and 33. Have the group highlight the main ideas highlighted on the reduced pupil pages.

What is the origin of Sacred Scripture?
Why do you think the Bible is a book unlike any other?

God’s Revealing Activity

When Jesus and members of the early Church used the word *Scripture*, they were referring to what we now call the Old Testament. They believed that these sacred writings were divinely inspired, and this belief was handed down to them from their Jewish heritage. Before the time of Christ, belief in biblical inspiration was common in Judaism. So it was a part of Jesus’ beliefs and those of the early Church, too.

From the earliest days of the Church, the idea of inspiration was accepted and applied to the writing of the New Testament as well. For almost nineteen centuries belief in divine inspiration remained unquestioned. But in modern times people began to question everything, and different theories about inspiration were developed, some of which we have already seen. It was not until the Second Vatican Council opened in 1962 that the Church considered writing a document giving a clear and detailed teaching about divine inspiration and its importance.



Old and New Testament figures, detail from painting by Fra Angelico, 14th century.

The document produced by the council is called the *dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*. It deals with God's revelation of himself to us and how that revelation is transmitted through time. God revealed himself and his intentions for us at a particular time in history to a particular group of people. He did this first in the community of Israel and later in the apostolic community of the Church. God's revelation was made known by the testimony of those who received it. Passed on by word of mouth, it became tradition. Recorded in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it became *Scripture*.

In presenting a clear explanation of inspiration, the Vatican II document indicates the strong New Testament foundation for our belief in divine inspiration. Here are two important passages with which Catholics should be familiar.

- "All scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16).
- "There is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Understanding Inspiration

A book that has both divine and human authorship is unique in human history. We cannot compare the Bible and its origins with any other book or type of writing. So when we talk about inspiration, we are dealing with a mystery of faith. By calling it a mystery, we do not mean that it is totally beyond our understanding. It simply means that there is much more to inspiration than we will ever fully understand.

Scripture INSIGHT

Inspiration is a very colorful term. It comes from a word meaning "to breathe." From Old Testament times the image of breathing was applied to God's influence upon the human authors of the Bible. So it was the "breath of God" that came upon the prophets and gospel writers. Their work had authority in the community because it was filled with the very breath of God. This image of "breath" can help us understand the true meaning of inspiration and why we can say God's word is alive and powerful.

33

◆ Have the young people read the **thought provoker** on page 34.

Encourage the young people to pray in this manner during the coming week.

◆ Ask a volunteer to summarize *Scripture Insight* on page 33. Then invite the young people to do a breath meditation in which they close their eyes and breathe deeply. Guide them with the following directions, speaking slowly and softly:

- As you breathe in, be conscious of the Holy Spirit entering into you.
- As you breathe out, feel yourself expelling negative thoughts and fears.
- Enjoy the sensation of the Holy Spirit breathing in you, a beloved son or daughter of God.

◆ Direct attention to the reproduction of Fra Angelico's painting on page 32. Share the identifications of the biblical figures shown.

- outer circle, moving clockwise from top: Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Micah, Jonas, Joel, Malachi, Ezra, Daniel, Isaac, King David, Moses, King Solomon
- inner circle: Peter, Mark, Jude, Luke, Jacob, Matthew, Paul, John

Note: Jacob connects the Old and New Testaments because he was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

FYI

Giorgio II, a monk and Christian mystic, gave this advice on ways to be fed by the Bible:

- Choose a short passage that appeals to you.
- Savor the words by reading or saying them slowly.
- Give the words time to become part of you, to "go into your heart."
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a taste of the passage's true meaning.

Presentation (cont'd)

◆ Have the young people form small time-traveling groups. Each group is visiting the sixteenth century. The group members are with people who have just heard Copernicus's theory about the Earth and the Sun. Have the groups roleplay the reactions in the crowd. Then work together to prepare explanations about the truths in Scripture.

Allow about ten minutes for the groups to "get their acts together;" then have them give their presentations to the entire group.

◆ Have volunteers summarize "The Real Truth." Ask, "What truth of faith does the Genesis account of creation teach us?"

Discuss with the young people the statements they underlined on pages 34 through 36. Have them highlight the key concepts highlighted here.

That being the case, what can we say about God's activity in inspiring the human authors? In a marvelous way God somehow moved the minds of the human authors. He did this so that they could produce works they otherwise would not have been able to write. For example, the powerful and yet loving portrait of God given to us by Paul in his letters could never have come from Paul alone. Nevertheless, in moving Paul's mind and heart, God respected his freedom. That is why Paul's letters are different from other books of the Bible. The letters are truly the work of Paul and inspired by God, too. Both God and Paul are the authors.

How exactly did the Holy Spirit inspire the human authors? The Holy Spirit guided them in the content of their writing and in choosing the truth God wanted taught. The human authors looked at the traditions of the faith community and the opinions that were held by different members of that community. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they made the right choices that would transmit the truth God intended for all people.

When people of faith come to the Bible and enter more deeply into the mystery of inspiration, they come face-to-face with the divine word. The *Catechism* expresses this beautifully: "In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, but as what it really is, the word of God: 'In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them'" (104).



Use one of the Scripture passages in today's lesson as part of your evening prayer. Write your passage here.

The Real Truth

Does being inspired mean that the Bible cannot contain any errors? The answer is yes if we mean that the Bible does not contain any errors about the truths of faith. But what about the truths of history and science? Before modern times, questions of faith, history, and science were all mixed together without any distinctions. In fact most people felt that the Bible was concerned with more than just questions of faith. They looked to the Bible to answer just about every kind of question, even those dealing with science.

Things began to change in the sixteenth century, during the time of Copernicus. He was a Polish astronomer whose theories about the movement of the Sun challenged the way people looked at their world. Until that time people thought that the whole universe revolved around planet Earth. Earth and humankind formed the center of everything.

The evidence for this Earth-centered existence was easy to see. People's everyday experience led them to believe that the Sun revolved around Earth. The Sun "rose" in the east and "set" in the west.

There was more than visual evidence, however. People thought the Bible itself, God's holy word, testified to an Earth-centered world. According to their reading of Scripture, God put the Sun, the Moon, and the stars in the sky for our benefit. Think what happened when Copernicus said that Earth revolved around the Sun. No longer was Earth the center of the universe. Copernicus's theory seemed to mean that we could not trust our experience and that the Bible was in error. If the Bible was wrong about this, could it be wrong in other areas?

Over time it has become clear that the truth of Scripture is the truth of faith, truths for our salvation. The Bible does not teach every kind of truth in the world. It is not our primary source for

the truth of history or science, for example. The Church teaches that "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation" (*Divine Revelation*, 11).

The Church's Book

Knowing about inspiration helps us to understand how the Church chose the writings that would be part of the Bible. After all, there were many important writings that were held in high esteem and circulated among the various communities of the early Church. Along with the seventy-three books chosen to be in the Bible, there were the beautiful letters of Ignatius of Antioch and those of Clement of Rome, just to name a few. There were even other gospel accounts besides those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. One of the most famous was called the Gospel of Thomas.



35

◆ Ask the young people to explain the Church's use of the word *canon*. (*the measuring rod of faith*) On the board write *canon of Scripture*. Have a volunteer define the term. (*the official list of biblical books*)

◆ Have volunteers explain why we say that the Bible is the Church's book. They should include the points explained in the last paragraph of "The Church's Book" on page 36.

◆ Have a volunteer summarize *Catholic Teachings* on page 36.

Conclusion

Have the young people explain in their journals why the question of Jesus is important and record questions they think about. Then discuss together the first question of things to think about.


◆ Direct attention to Word to Remember. Both terms are on page 36.

Assessment: If you plan to administer Chapter 4 Assessment, page 33A, allow about ten minutes for its completion.


FYI Share the following excerpt from the Letter to the Trallians (9) written by Ignatius of Antioch.

Close your ears, then, to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David's lineage, of Mary. He was really born, ate and drank; was really persecuted in the days of Pontius Pilate, was really crucified and died, in the sight of all heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead.

Presentation (cont'd)

- ◆ Discuss the  **thought provoker** on page 36.
- ◆ Direct the young people's attention to the photo on page 36. Explain that the person is holding up the lectionary used during liturgical celebrations. Explain that listening intently to the Scripture read during these celebrations will help us to realize that "the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word" (*Catechism*, 113).
- ◆ Distribute the handout *True Colors*. Have the young people work with a partner. Invite volunteers to share their colorful petitions.

Conclusion ___ min.

-  Have the young people respond in their journals to the first question of *Things to Share* and the second question of *Things to Think About*.

Then discuss together the first question of *Things to Think About*.

- ◆ Direct attention to *Words to Remember*. Both terms are on page 36.

Assessment: If you plan to administer *Chapter 4 Assessment*, page 37A, allow about ten minutes for its completion.




From all the writings that were in circulation, the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, recognized only seventy-three as being truly inspired by God. How did the Church do this? For one thing, it saw in these books a certain sublime quality that other works just did not have. More than this, the books seen as sacred played a special role in the faith life of the Church. They expressed the Church's apostolic tradition and origin. They had a real authority about them. Most important, the Church saw in these books a true and necessary reflection that mirrored its own faith.

Already in apostolic times the books of the Old Testament were accepted as Scripture. By the beginning of the second century, official lists of New Testament books were being developed. In fact, by A.D. 200 a Christian writer named Tertullian was the first to use the term *New Testament*. Christians saw in these books standards of their faith and practice.

The seventy-three books of the Bible are called the canon of Sacred Scripture. The English word *canon* comes from a Greek word meaning "measuring rod."

In the Church it came to signify a measuring rod of faith. Catholics use the word when speaking about the official list of biblical books, the *canon of Scripture*.

From all this we can truly see that the Bible is the Church's book. It was the Church that assembled these books. It is the Church that has passed them on through the centuries. It is the Church that interprets them in the light of its own tradition. The Bible comes from the Church and serves the Church. The *Catechism* states this very beautifully: "Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church's heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word" (113).

 The *Catechism* also states that in Scripture "the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children and talk with them" (104). How might these words affect you each time you read or listen to Scripture?



Answers for Chapter 4 Assessment

1. a 2. c 3. b 4. a 5. b
6. c 7. d 8. a 9. b 10. See page 36.

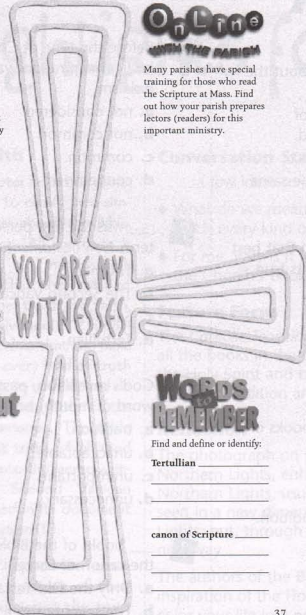
Things to SHARE

Someone asks you whether the Bible was written by God or by human authors. How would you respond?

One of your friends believes that everything in the Bible is literally true. What example might you give to show that the Catholic approach to the Bible is not like a fundamentalist's view?

Online WITH THE PARISH

Many parishes have special training for those who read the Scripture at Mass. Find out how your parish prepares lectors (readers) for this important ministry.



YOU ARE MY
WITNESSES

Things to Think About

Is the Old Testament as important to us as the New Testament? What do you think?

What does it mean to you to know that Scripture is written in the "Church's heart"?

WORDS REMEMBER

Find and define or identify:

Tertullian _____

37

Conclusion (cont'd)**FORUM Assignment**

- ✓ Read pages 38–45. Underline in pencil the statements that express six main ideas.
- ✓ Prepare your response for the second question of *Things to Share*. Be prepared to share your response at the beginning of the next session.
- ◆ Encourage the young people to share *Highlights for Home*, page 37B, with their families.

Closing Prayer: Write on the board the following Prayer Before Reading Scripture. Pray the words together.

Give me a word,
O Word of the Father,
touch my heart:
enlighten the understandings
of my heart:
open my lips and fill them
with your praise

Evaluation: Do the young people understand that human authors wrote Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Do they appreciate that the Bible contains no errors about the truths of faith?

FOR CHAPTER

5

- copies of handout *The Truth of History*, page 38C
- copies of *Chapter 5 Assessment*, page 45A
- copies of *Highlights for Home*, page 45B
- lyrics of a song about Jesus, the Light of the World
- drawing paper

Assessment

H
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- 1 In the Bible
- there are no errors about the truths of faith.
 - the scientific theory of evolution is explained.
 - God is not heard.
 - all authors write in the same way.
- 2 The image of inspiration that best helps us to understand its true meaning is
- a flowing stream.
 - a quill pen.
 - the "breath of God."
 - rainbow of color.
- 3 The Church chose the books of the canon for their
- interesting stories.
 - authority.
 - non-expression of tradition.
 - "headline" quality.
- 4 Both the Old and New Testaments
- are sacred and canonical.
 - teach accurate science.
 - teach accurate geography.
 - are completely historical.
- 5 Jesus and members of the early Church used the word *Scripture* to refer to
- the Gospel of Thomas.
 - the Old Testament.
 - all the gospels.
 - the New Testament.

- 6 Before the time of Christ, belief in biblical inspiration was ___ in Judaism.
- not considered
 - not common
 - common
 - condemned
- 7 ___ was the first person to use the term *New Testament*.
- Thomas
 - The Second Vatican Council
 - Saint Paul
 - Tertullian
- 8 God's revelation, passed on by word of mouth, became
- tradition.
 - unacceptable.
 - unimportant.
 - unnecessary.
- 9 ___ books of the Bible are called the canon of Sacred Scripture
- Only the Old Testament
 - The seventy-three
 - Only the New Testament
 - Only the historical
- 10 Explain briefly why we say that Scripture is written "principally in the Church's heart."
-
-
-
-
-

HIGHLIGHTS for HOME

Focus on Faith

This chapter helps our young people to clarify two simple facts about the Bible.

The first is that "All scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). The second is that the truth of Scripture is the truth of faith, truths for our salvation. It is important for us to realize that the Bible does not teach every kind of truth in the world. We do not depend on the Bible for accuracy in the truths of history or science. The Bible teaches us "that truth which God wanted to put into the sacred writings," as the Second Vatican Council explained in its document on *Divine Revelation* (11).

The Holy Spirit, inspired the human authors in the content of their writing and in choosing the truth God wanted taught. It was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the human authors of the Bible made the right choices, choices that would transmit the truth God intended for all people.

Conversation Starters

... a few ideas to talk about together. . . .

- ◆ What do we mean when we say, "The Bible does not teach every kind of truth in the world"?
- ◆ For me, why is it important to know that the Bible is the Church's book?

Feature Focus

The *Catholic Teachings* feature on page 36 assures us that all the books in the canon of Scripture were inspired by the Holy Spirit and chosen by the Church to express its apostolic tradition and its faith.

Reflection

The photograph on pages 30 and 31 is a photo of the Northern Lights, enhanced by the addition of color. The Northern Lights, usually white in a dark sky, can now be seen in a new dimension. They remain the Northern Lights, but, through color, they engage our senses in a new way.

The authors of the Bible wrote human words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. How does the word of God color your life in a new way?

The writers of the Old Testament used the cycles of nature and the heavenly bodies—the rising of the sun and its setting, the order of the stars, the thunder and lightning of a sudden storm—to express their relationship with God. Think of the splendor of the Northern Lights as you pray:

*Your word, LORD, stands forever;
it is firm as the heavens.*

Psalm 119:89