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CHAPTER 1

Faith in God

For we walk by faith,
not by sight.
2 CORINTHIANS 5:7



What Do You Think?

In the space provided, write "A" if you agree with the statement, "D" if you disagree with it, or "N" if you have no opinion about it. Discuss your responses.

1. Secular humanists usually have strong faith in God.
2. It is impossible for the human mind to discover God's existence on its own.
3. Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's revelation in human history.
4. When you recite a creed, you are professing your faith.
5. Catholics accept Scripture *alone* as the only source of God's revelation.

A familiar story tells of a teen out for a walk to get close to nature. While traipsing along a narrow path, he was not watching where he was going. Suddenly he slipped over the edge of a cliff, but luckily he grabbed a branch growing from the side of the cliff. Holding on for dear life but with waning strength, he began desperately calling for help. His plaintive pleas sounded something like this:

Teen: Is anyone up there?

Voice: Yes, I'm here!

Teen: Who are you?

Voice: I'm the Lord.

Teen: Lord, help me!

Voice: Do you trust me?

Teen: I trust you completely, Lord.

Voice: Good. Let go of the branch.

Teen: What?

Voice: I said, "Let go of the branch."

Teen: [After a minute pause] Is anyone else up there?

This young man greatly wanted to be saved, but he lacked one essential ingredient: faith. He was left grasping for dear life to a cragged branch. But over time, either his strength would give out or the branch would break and the teen would be lost.

What difference does having faith in God make in a person's life?



KEY TERMS

secularism

atheism

agnosticism

secular humanism

hedonism

revelation

salvation history

This story is a wonderful parable about people who are seeking happiness and grasping for salvation. Yet so often some people are looking in all the wrong places. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* comments: "True happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement—however beneficial it may be—such as science, technology, and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love" (CCC, 1723).

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1-3, 26-43)

Our Search for Happiness—Our Search for God

Some people do exclude God in their search for happiness. We live in an age filled with **secularism**. Secularism is a view of the world that focuses exclusively on the natural world and holds that the only means of knowing truth is through the natural sciences. We live in a time when many people live without any expressed need for God. Some modern forms of secularism in today's society include:

- ❑ **Atheism**, which denies that God exists.
- ❑ **Agnosticism**, which claims that no one can know for sure whether there is a God or not.
- ❑ **Secular humanism**, which makes humans the measuring rod of all existence, not God the Creator. Secular humanists glorify the human person and human achievement to the point that they exclude any religious faith or dependence on a supreme being.

Examine a magazine or a daily newspaper for evidence of any of the forms of secularism discussed here. Give examples of what you find.

Atheism:

Agnosticism:

Humanism:

Hedonism:

Discuss

Share with someone an example of what you find. In what ways is it an accurate portrayal of people today?

- ❑ **Hedonism**, which makes pleasure the sole or chief good in life. The acquisition of sex, money, possessions, alcohol and other drugs, power and prestige, and the abject fear of getting old are various manifestations of hedonism.

The Desire for God

The human heart and the human mind direct us to God, who continually seeks us. God implanted in us a kind of honing device that directs us to discover and develop a personal relationship with him. In the words of Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430),

“You have created us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you” (*Confessions*).

We have an unquenchable thirst for happiness. We seek love and understanding. We seek possessions, pleasure, prestige, or whatever—none of these makes us *fully* happy. We always seem to need more. We can look to others for love and understanding, but somehow we search for more—for love and understanding other people cannot seem to give us. We believe that only God, who made us, can fill the insatiable hunger of our hearts for happiness, love, and understanding. Our inquisitive minds are also on a search, seeking truth. We want to know answers to questions, and especially the big questions: What is the *meaning* of life? Why am I here? Where am I going? Where does the world come from? What is worth living—and dying—for? What happens at death? These, and questions like them, are the really important questions. And God is the answer to all of them!

Coming to Know God

The hearts and minds of billions of human beings have “let go and let God” into their lives. Every culture known to us has believed in some supreme being to whom humans owe respect and allegiance. People in every culture and in every age have been and are convinced

that God exists and that it is worth believing in him.

We believe that “by natural reason man can know God with certainty, on the basis of his works” (CCC, 50). Here are two of the “proofs” or arguments people have used to explain their decision to believe in God:

- ❑ **The existence of countless religions** shows that humans have a religious nature. The existence of the various sacrifices and rituals, prayers and meditations, beliefs and religious laws testify to the universal human quest for and belief in God.
- ❑ **The beauty, immensity, and symmetry of the world** point to a God who made all things and keeps them in existence. God is the master musician of the universe. You can hear his music in truth, beauty, and goodness.

The great medieval theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) listed five proofs for the existence of God. In brief, his proofs claim that we can come to know with certainty that God exists by looking at the movement, becoming, contingency, and order and beauty in the world. For example, Saint Thomas points out that everything that exists is caused by something or someone else. Logically, if you reason back far enough, there has to be a source that was the very first cause of everything. This first cause must have always existed. Philosophy calls this first cause “God.”

The world-famed statistician George Gallup (1901–1984) said God could be proved statistically by considering the human body. To claim that all the intricate functions of the human body are the result of chance is a statistical monstrosity!

What do you think?



- The human search for and openness to truth and beauty show that we have a spiritual nature.** We recognize moral goodness. We possess freedom and a conscience. We deeply long for perfect happiness, love, and understanding. And remarkably, we can love, even to the point of giving our lives for another. The material universe cannot explain these realities. These spiritual activities—loving, thinking, choosing, understanding—can *only* have their origin in a spiritual being of infinite goodness.
- Personal experience points to the presence of a “power” in our midst.** Reflect on your own experiences of awe and wonder in the face of a beautiful sunset or a newborn infant. Don’t they speak to you of a power in the midst of the ordinary?

(CCC, 50–133)

Divine Revelation

Through the use of natural reason, we can come to know with certainty the existence of a divine being. However, left to ourselves, we cannot get a clear picture of what God is really like, who God really is. We need God to show, or reveal, himself to us. We need God to walk and talk with us.

Christians believe that God has walked and talked with us. We believe that God has revealed himself to us. The word *reveal* literally means “to unveil” or “to

God in Your Life

Put a ✓ next to any item that has been an experience of God’s presence for you.

- While silently observing an awesome scene in nature, like a sunset over a lake
- In discovering a new idea or insight I never had before
- When someone expresses his or her love for me or when I express my love for someone
- In moments of prayer, Bible reading, or quiet reflection
- When someone forgives me
- When I stand for what is right, despite pressure to do otherwise
- When I hold a newborn baby
- In the quiet moments of meditation after receiving Holy Communion

(Describe your own experience.)

Journal Writing: For you, what is the most convincing “proof” of God’s existence?

uncover.” Christians believe that God has “unveiled” himself and “his plan of loving goodness” for us. We believe that God is gracious and loving and revealed himself by gradually communicating his own mystery in deeds and words.

We believe in divine **revelation**. "Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man" (CCC, 50). Christians believe that out of infinite love, God "unveiled" himself in human history and has spoken to us, lives among us, and invites us to live in **covenant** with him. The covenant is the wholehearted commitment between God and humans. It is God's promise to be faithful to us forever and our promise to be faithful to God.

Christians also believe that the fullest expression of God's love and communication to us is the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews sums up our faith this way:

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, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word.

Hebrews 1:1-3

The Stages of Revelation

God, from the very beginning, invited us to live in covenant, or intimate communion, with him. We call the story of God's invitation and the human response to that invitation salvation history. Salvation history begins with God's generous creation of the world and our first parents, whom the creation story names Adam and Eve. After their sin, which we call original



Are belief in God and human reason compatible? (CCC, 36-38, 47)

Saint Paul teaches that we can discover God's existence by reflecting on the things God has made. Paul wrote: "Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made" (Romans 1:20). The Church also teaches that human reason can know with certainty the existence of God from creation (CCC, 36).

Saint Paul and the Church do not say that each and every person can and does come to a knowledge of God's existence through reason. Rather, they teach that we are capable of doing so.

sin, God remained faithful. He did not abandon humanity. God continued to invite humanity to live in friendship and communion with him. God promised to save us from our sin and redeem us, giving us hope of eternal life. God revealed this mystery, or plan of his goodness and faithful love and of salvation, through a series of covenants.

..... Noah

Sin shattered God's original plan and divided the unity of humanity into many separated and even hostile peoples. By means of a covenant with Noah, God reached out to a divided humanity that would remain in force as long as the world lasts. Its purpose was to eventually "gather into one the dispersed children of God" (John 11:52) through Jesus Christ the Lord.

..... Abraham

The revelation of God's plan to gather "the dispersed children of God" into one people continues through the covenant with the patriarch Abraham. "I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7). Abraham is the father of the Jewish people and "our father in faith." The descendants of Abraham were "called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church" (CCC, 60; see Romans 11:17-18, 24).

... Moses and the People of Israel ...

After the era of the patriarchs, God taught and guided the People of God through Moses. God revealed the laws of the Covenant to Moses and the Israelites so that "they would recognize him and serve him as the one living and true God, the provident Father and just judge, and so that they would look for

the promised Savior" (CCC, 62; see *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 3).

..... Prophets

Through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets, God continued to unveil the mystery of his plan for us. The prophets spoke of the Messiah, who would come and establish a new and everlasting covenant in the hearts of all humans.

..... Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the "mediator and fullness" of God's revelation. He is the final Word of God, God's own Son. He lived among us, teaching us in words we could understand and actions we could observe. He is the fullness of God's revelation and his great love for us. In Christ God has established his covenant forever. To meet Jesus Christ is to meet the Father and the Spirit. By means of his passion, death, and resurrection-ascension, Jesus completed the Father's plan of salvation.

READING THE BIBLE

The first book of the Bible, *Genesis*, contains many of the Bible's best-known stories and highlights some key covenants God made with humans. Read these passages and answer the questions.

Noah and the Ark

Read *Genesis 6:5-9:17*.

Using today's calendar, on what day of which month did the ark rest on the mountains of Ararat?

What was God's covenant with Noah?

What was the sign of this covenant?

Abraham

Read *Genesis 12:1-9, 17:1-27*.

Where did Abraham live when God asked him to move?

Where did he go?

What was God's covenant with Abraham?

What was the sign of this covenant?

The Passing On of Divine Revelation

God speaks to us today of his saving plan through Sacred Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the Church. Scripture and Tradition are a single sacred deposit of faith. They are two streams of the one fountain of divine revelation and are intimately united to each other.

Sacred

..... Scripture

The Bible, composed of the seventy-three books in both the Old and the New Testaments, is the inspired written Word of God. In **Sacred Scripture**, God speaks to us “in a human way.”

Written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Sacred Scripture teaches the truth about God’s revelation to us. This means that God is the author of Sacred Scripture. The Holy Spirit worked in and through the human authors.

The Old Testament passes God’s revelation on to us through the Hebrews, or Israelites. The inspired writings of the Old Testament record a rich story of how God rescued the Israelites out of Egypt, led them to the Promised Land, and formed them into a nation and a religious community. They tell the story of how this people grew to know and worship the one true God, despite their many failings to abide by God’s covenant. They especially testify to God’s magnificent love and faithfulness to his promise to save all humanity through a messiah—whom we believe is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God become one of us.

Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the
power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was
buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right
hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge
the living and the dead.
* I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

The New Testament passes on to us the revelation of God made known through Jesus Christ. The writings of the New Testament center on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the faith of the early Christian community formed in his name. The New Testament Gospels are the very heart of the Bible. They provide the prime witness to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Sacred Tradition

Sacred Tradition is the living transmission of divine revelation through the community of God's people, the Church. Tradition hands on the Word of God, which the Lord and Spirit first gave to the apostles. The apostles "entrusted" this deposit of faith to the whole Church. The successors of the apostles (the bishops and pope), helped by the Holy Spirit, faithfully preserve, explain, and spread it throughout the world. This sacred teaching authority of the Church is called the **Magisterium**. The word *magisterium* comes from the Latin word *magister*, meaning "teacher."

We find this living Tradition in the Church's teaching, life, and worship. "What was handed on by the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the People of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes"

(Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 8).

(CCC, 142–175, 1814–1816)

Faith: Responding to God

We come to recognize and respond to God's revelation because of the gift of **faith**. Scripture defines faith as "the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is a "gift from God." Faith calls us to a total life commitment to

Using a copy of the Nicene Creed, note one statement of our Catholic faith that it adds to the Apostles' Creed about each of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

God the Father:

God the Son:

God the Holy Spirit:

our loving God and to a resounding "yes" to the truths he has shared with us in Christ our Lord. This response is possible only by grace and the help of the Holy Spirit.

Qualities of Faith

- **Faith is a grace.** Like revelation, faith is God's free gift to us. The Holy Spirit imparts the gift of faith to us, empowering us to submit our intellects and wills to the

self-revelation of God. Because of faith we can believe God's revealed truths because God himself has revealed them to us.

- ❑ **Faith is a free, human act.** No one is forced to embrace faith against his or her will. God invites us to freely respond to cooperate with his free gift of grace.
- ❑ **Faith is certain.** Faith is "founded on the word of God." But faith also invites us to grow in and understand God's word to us.
- ❑ **Faith is the beginning of eternal life.** Faith is necessary for salvation. When we cooperate with faith, we are on the path to eternal life—we choose to live our life in communion with God.
- ❑ **Faith is a virtue, a power, and a good habit.** Faith attracts and binds us to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in a relationship of love. It strengthens us to live with conviction, commitment, and trust in God's love for us.

The Creeds of the Church

We do not believe alone. Faith is more than the personal act of an individual believer.

We are called to believe as part of the community of the followers of Jesus Christ, the Church. As a gift from God, faith comes through the Church. "It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in Christ by Baptism" (CCC, 168).

Believing, professing, and living our faith is an act of the Church, the community of God's people. While faith gives life to and supports and nourishes the individual Christian, we are called to live and profess our faith as a member of the People of God. "Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers" (CCC, 166).



Each believer
is thus a link
in the great chain
of believers.

*Catechism of the
Catholic Church, 166*

The Church professes its belief in the **creed**. A creed is a statement of belief. The word *creed* derives from the Latin word *credere*, which means "to believe." Since its very beginning, the Church has summarized its faith in creeds, or summary statements of

beliefs. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are the two main creeds of the Church.

The Apostles' Creed dates to at least A.D. 390. Its name shows that the beliefs it summarizes are founded in the beliefs passed on to us by the apostles. A legend holds that each of the twelve articles of belief named in the Apostles' Creed is written by one of the apostles. What historians can show is that the Apostles' Creed is based on an early baptismal creed used in Rome in the second century A.D. Its substance is definitely rooted in apostolic faith.

The Nicene Creed comes from two important councils of the Church—the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 and the First Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. This is the creed, or profession of faith, we profess together at Mass.

The substance of both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed includes three fundamental beliefs of great importance to Christians:

- ❑ The almighty and eternal God created all that exists.
- ❑ Jesus Christ is the Son of God-made-flesh. Born of the Virgin Mary, he died for our salvation and rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. He will come at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.
- ❑ The Risen Lord sent the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, to give life to the Church. Through this one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, Christ dispenses the grace we need to reach eternal life.

When we pray "I believe . . .," we are making a personal act of faith. When we pray "We believe . . .," we are professing our faith as a community of faith. Whenever we profess our faith, we are professing it as a member of the Church, the People of God. We believe as a community of faith.

Professing our faith in a creed helps bind us to our sisters and brothers in the faith. Following the lead of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, this book will discuss the twelve major articles of the Apostles' Creed.

REVIEW

IMPORTANT TERMS TO KNOW

covenant—God's promise to be faithful to us forever and our promise to be faithful to God

creed—a formal summary statement of beliefs

faith—a theological virtue and gift of the Holy Spirit that enables us to respond to God and to believe the truths God has revealed because of his own authority

Magisterium—the teaching authority and responsibility of the Church to interpret authentically the faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition

revelation—God's free gift of making himself known and giving himself to us by gradually communicating his own mystery in deeds and words

Sacred Scripture—the written inspired Word of God, consisting of the forty-six books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament

Sacred Tradition—the living transmission accomplished in the Holy Spirit by the Church. "The Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes" (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 8).

secularism—a view of the world that focuses exclusively on the natural world and holds that the only means of knowing truth is through the natural sciences

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) observed, “For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand.” In this chapter we learned that:

1. God is the source of true happiness. Some people, like secularists, atheists, humanists, and hedonists, do not put their faith in God but seek happiness in other “gods.”
2. Through the use of reason, we can know with certainty that God exists. It is reasonable to believe and trust in God.
3. We believe that God has revealed himself to us. God has revealed himself to us in stages. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Son of God-made-flesh, is God’s fullest and most complete revelation.
4. Faith is God’s free gift to us. It invites us and enables us to respond freely to God’s revelation.
5. The creeds of the Church express our faith. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed are the two main creeds of the Church.
6. Divine revelation is handed on to us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Sacred Scripture is the inspired Word of God written down by the People of God. It contains the Old Testament and the New Testament. Sacred Tradition is the living transmission of the Word of God through the doctrine, life, and worship of the Church.

EXPLORING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

1. Listening to God’s Word

The Psalms are the prayer book of the Old Testament. Throughout the ages, they have remained a fruitful resource for prayer that ranges the gamut of human emotions. Read Psalms 8, 29, 65, and 104. List at least five ways God speaks to the psalmist.

2. Understanding the Teachings of the Catholic Church

In the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, we read: “The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” (11). With a few of your classmates research the meaning of the phrase “under the inspiration of the

Holy Spirit.” Share your findings with the whole group.

3. Reflecting on Our Catholic Faith

Read and reflect on the words of Saint Anselm of Canterbury. What do they say to you about your own search to become a person of faith? Write your thoughts in your journal.

4. Living Our Catholic Faith

“Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers” (CCC, 166). What can you say or do to be a “link” in the great chain of believers? Brainstorm your ideas with your group. Choose one of your ideas and live it out.