

# Faith and Revelation

## Knowing God Through Sacred Scripture



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## FAITH AND REVELATION Knowing God Through Sacred Scripture

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Christ Carrying the Cross by Lotto.



# Faith and Revelation

## CHAPTER 1



## Knowing God Through Natural Revelation, Reason, and Faith

*God has created us with both the desire and the capacity to know him.*



# Faith and Revelation

## PART I – CHAPTER 1

# Knowing God Through Natural Revelation, Reason, and Faith



Every human person has a natural desire for God. This desire is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God. Only in God will we find the truth and happiness for which we never stop searching.

**The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being.**

**For if man exists, it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator.<sup>1</sup> (CCC 27)**

All of us want to know God. The human heart desires to know what is true, good, and beautiful; above all, it yearns for God. God himself put this desire in us when he created us, and no matter how much we rebel or how distant from God we feel or become, he still draws us toward himself. This is what makes us unique among all of material creation. Only human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and have the inborn capacity to know God and to be in communion with him.

Pope Benedict XVI explains how Plato recognized this universal “longing” of the human soul for God four hundred years before Christ.

**Nostalgia and longing impel [man] to pursue the quest; beauty prevents him from being content with just daily life. It causes him to suffer. In a Platonic sense, we could say that the arrow of nostalgia pierces man, wounds him and in this way gives him wings, lifts him upwards toward the transcendent.<sup>2</sup>**

We can forget or try to suppress our desire to know God, but it is always there, whether we recognize it or not. As St. Augustine proclaimed, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>3</sup> Only God can give us lasting joy and peace.

**The human person: With his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God’s existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the “seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material,”<sup>4</sup> can have its origin only in God. (CCC 33)**

Our natural desire for God reflects an aspect of the image of God in which all human beings were created—not only do we desire God, but God also desires us, and infinitely more so than we desire him. Our desire for God is *natural*; it is part of what it means to be human. God’s desire for us, however, is *supernatural*. God wants us to live in communion with him, and so he reaches out to us and enables us to find him.

God has created us with both the desire and the capacity to know him. We come to know God in two ways: through Revelation and through human reason. This book discusses how faith and reason work together to help us understand God’s Revelation to man in Sacred Scripture. Reasoning on the basis of faith and guided by the message of Christ as transmitted by his Church, we are given the means to understand the message of the Bible as God intended.



## KNOWING GOD THROUGH NATURAL REVELATION, REASON, AND FAITH



Creation of Adam, Byzantine Mosaic.

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God.

### IN THIS CHAPTER WE WILL DISCUSS:

- ❖ How the desire to find God is written on the human heart.
- ❖ How God draws each person to himself.
- ❖ How we can come to a certain level of knowledge of God through the use of human reason.
- ❖ The difference between knowledge gained through science and knowledge gained through reason.
- ❖ The limitations on knowing God from the use of reason alone.
- ❖ Why we need God to reveal himself in order to know him fully.



## FAITH AND REVELATION Knowing God Through Sacred Scripture

### KNOWING GOD THROUGH REASON

Human reason, even without God's Revelation, can lead us to realize that God exists. It can even tell us something about his divine nature.

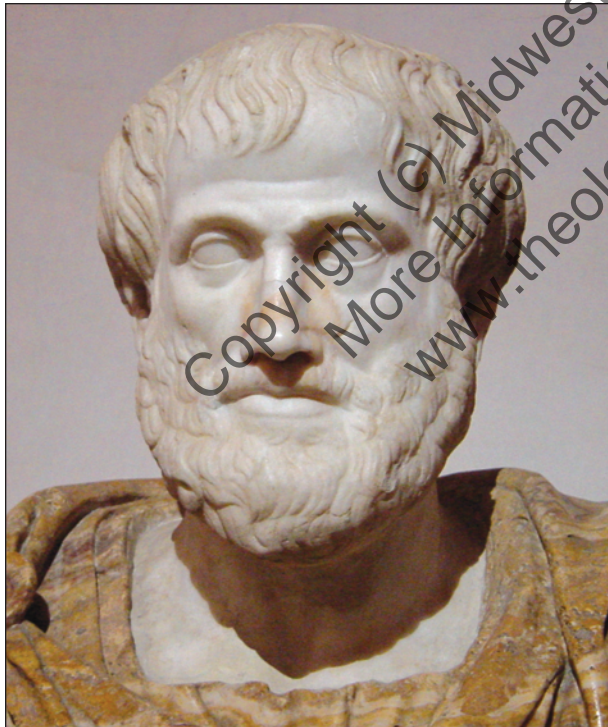
**Created in God's image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of "converging and convincing arguments," which allow us to attain certainty about the truth. (CCC 31)**

In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul wrote that creation itself shows us there is a God and that he is all-powerful. "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made."<sup>5</sup> Even those who have never heard the Gospel or read Scripture can arrive at this knowledge by the use of reason. They can also know something about what God demands of them morally.

**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (Rom 1: 18-19)**

However, even without the Revelation of Scripture and the Church to guide us, everyone can still come to know of God's existence. Throughout history and even before the time of Christ, many of the greatest thinkers of the world were able to reach this conclusion.

Pre-Christian philosophers like Plato and Aristotle argued from reason alone that there must be a god. Aristotle concluded that there must be one single First Cause of everything, and that this First Cause must be perfect and eternal. Although he lived in a *polytheistic* culture—that is, one that believed in many gods—Aristotle argued that there can only be one First Cause.



*Bust of Aristotle, Roman copy of Greek bronze 330 BC. Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a Greek philosopher, a student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great.*

He was the first to create a comprehensive system of Western philosophy, encompassing morality and aesthetics, logic and science, politics and metaphysics.

By reason, Aristotle had discovered the truth of God's existence... there can only be one First Cause.

By reason, Aristotle had discovered the truth of God's existence. He also knew that God must be eternal and perfect, and that there is only one true God. In the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas clarified and extended Aristotle's arguments (see sidebar, "St. Thomas Aquinas and the 'Five Ways'").

Each person, by nature and by vocation, is a *religious being*. We come from God, and we seek and desire God; thus, we will not live a true human life if we do not choose freely to live in this bond with God. Every person has been created to live in communion with God, and ultimate happiness can only be found in him.

One can arrive at the knowledge of the existence of God in two ways: by the light of reason and by the grace of faith. By using reason (natural knowledge), and by listening to the message of creation, and to the promptings of conscience, we can be certain that there is a God.

Sacred Scripture describes four characteristics of our knowledge of God. It is *mediate*, or received through created things or through other persons; *natural*, because it is reached through the light of the intellect; *universal*, in that it is accessible to all people; *certain*, since God's creation clearly leads us to the Creator; and *easy to attain*, because it requires only the natural use of reason.



## KNOWING GOD THROUGH NATURAL REVELATION, REASON, AND FAITH

## WISDOM 13:1-9

**F**or all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?



*Dream of Solomon* (detail) by Giordano. At Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon in a dream. Solomon asked for an "understanding mind" to govern God's people. Because God was pleased with Solomon's selfless request, God answered, "Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you." (1 Kgs 3: 12)