

# Life in Christ



A Catholic Catechism  
for Adults

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*A Catholic Catechism for Adults*

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# Introduction

Centuries ago, St. Augustine wrote: “Our hearts are restless, until they rest in you, O Lord.” How many of us have felt that same restlessness in our own lives? We look in various places for answers, but we never find real and lasting happiness.

For those of us who believe, however, we do find rest in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the “anointed one.” For us, Jesus is both the messenger and the message of God, whom Jesus taught us to call our Father. Jesus is the Word of God, who alone can satisfy the hungers of the human heart. Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit to comfort and strengthen us on our journey and he established his Church, the Pilgrim People of God, to help us on our way.

This catechism is an attempt to help the reader learn how to attain “life in Christ”—a life filled with peace and joy. Following the path indicated here, one can find complete fulfillment in knowing, loving and serving Jesus, the Son of God, who became truly human, lived and died among us, was raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven where he now sits at the right hand of the Father.

The best way to learn about Jesus is to begin by prayerfully reading the Bible (also called the Scriptures). If we want to encounter Jesus today, we must read the Bible and pray as we do so. That is why *Life in Christ* contains so many excerpts and references to the Bible. We also encourage the reader to have a copy of the Bible available as you study this catechism and to read and refer to it often.

The teachings of the Catholic Church are not only based on the Bible but also on the 2,000 year tradition of Church teaching. This catechism is therefore designed to help readers become familiar with some of the statements of the saints, popes and Church councils, and especially the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

You are invited to experience *Life in Christ*, a catechism that has led millions of people to the Catholic faith. May you join them and us in discovering the love of Jesus and his community of followers.



# Introduction to the New Edition

Interest in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* surprised many people. It should not have. For 2,000 years, people of good will everywhere have sought to understand the meaning and the teachings of Jesus Christ. So the new official catechism of the universal Church, the first since the Council of Trent, was welcomed throughout the world.

The Church's new catechism is meant to give direction to those attempting to teach others the Catholic faith, and so it should be read by every priest, religious, catechist and religious educator. The catechism, however, was not designed for the average person. That is where *Life in Christ* comes in. Since 1958, *Life in Christ* has been used by more than 2,000,000 adults as their basic introduction to Catholicism. Originally written by Frs. Gerard Weber and James Killgallon and later revised by Msgr. Leonard Ziegmann, *Life in Christ* has now been completely revised and updated in accordance with the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* by Frs. Michael Place and Sammie Maletta, with Fr. Weber himself approving the revision.

This new edition contains over 25% new material, including many direct references to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* itself. (The paragraph numbers in the catechism from which direct quotes are taken are given immediately following each quote, e.g., CCC 1234.)

At the end of each section, there is an updated section called "Practice" that explains various Catholic practices related to the topic being discussed. Also included for the first time in *Life in Christ* is a special section containing many of the most familiar Catholic prayers. At the end of the book is an index of specific topics. Sources of quotes from Church documents are included with the text, with a list of these references given before the index.





**Part I**  
**THE GIFT OF LIFE**



# Section I

## Happiness

*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.  
When he had accomplished purification from sins,  
he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty  
on high— Heb 1:1-3.*

SOME TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO there lived one whose influence on the world is unique in history. He did not live in one of the great centers of civilization but in a remote corner of the world. He was not born with the material advantages that wealth and social position can give; he was born in a stable. He did not have a long career nor one which carried him into many countries; his life span was only thirty-three years; his activity was confined to an area of a few hundred miles. His life did not end on a note of triumph; he suffered the shameful death of crucifixion.

Yet today, twenty centuries later, this man is worshiped by hundreds of millions in every country of the world as the Savior of the human race. Through the centuries since his death millions have gladly renounced all that the human heart holds dear—home, family, riches and friends—to carry his name to other corners of the earth. He is loved throughout the world as no other person has been loved. His cross, once a symbol of a criminal death, is now displayed triumphantly atop churches throughout the world, a symbol of hope and love. His teachings have humanized and ennobled people and nations.

What is it that makes Jesus Christ unique among all people in

history and accounts for the influence he has had and still has on the world?

The answer is, of course, that Jesus Christ was not merely a great teacher and religious leader; he is the Son of God. He is the Redeemer promised by God, who brought salvation to the human race, who ransomed all people by his death on the cross.

Jesus Christ is a true human being. He is the mediator between God and people of every age and time. No one can come to the Father except through him. Jesus Christ is also God. His teachings, therefore, are the word of God revealed to us.

Jesus Christ is *“the way, and the truth, and the life”*—*Jn 14:6*. It is by union with Jesus that people receive the life of grace. It is through the acceptance of Jesus’ teachings that we find salvation. It is by submission to Jesus’ rule that we find freedom as children of God.

Jesus said to his disciples, *“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age”*—*Mt 28:20*. Although he ascended into heaven, and we can no longer see and hear him as did his contemporaries, Jesus in his great love for us remains with us in his Church. He continues to give life and truth and guidance to those who are joined to him.

## **1. What does Jesus Christ promise to those who love him?**

Jesus Christ promises eternal happiness to those who love him. *“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly”*—*Jn 10:10*.

## **2. Does Jesus Christ promise us happiness in this life?**

Jesus Christ promises us happiness in this life. When Jesus became human he not only revealed himself as the image of the invisible God, he also restored to humanity that which had been lost to sin, the full beauty and majesty of our dignity as creatures made in God’s image. True happiness is the result when we live up to the dignity of the human person.

**3. In what words did Christ tell us how to attain happiness in this life?**

In the Sermon on the Mount, which contained what are known as the Beatitudes, Jesus said:

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are they who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the land.*

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the clean of heart,  
for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of  
righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”—Mt 5:3-10.*

In the above passage Jesus promises us happiness. In fact the word “blessed” means “happy.” The Beatitudes are at the core of Christ’s teaching. They fulfill the promise made to the Jewish people by pointing beyond earthly happiness to the eternal happiness of heaven. The reward promised in each of the Beatitudes is primarily heaven.

The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate purpose of human acts; God calls us to his own beatitude. This vocation is addressed to each individual

personally, but also to the Church as a whole, the new people made up of those who have accepted the promise and live from it in faith—CCC 1719.

If we live according to this plan of Christ we shall have a foretaste of the happiness of heaven in this life. Christ tells us that we will be happy by doing for his sake the very things which we may think will make us unhappy. Christ tells us that we must not set our hearts on money, whereas many people appear to want even more money than they already have. Christ tells us that we must forgive our enemies and love them, whereas many people seem to want to “get even with” or at least avoid those who hurt them. Christ tells us that we must avoid all sin, that we must be willing to take a lower place, that we must suffer for him, etc. These are conditions which might seem to make us unhappy, but the Lord’s words tell us otherwise.

#### **4. How is it possible for us to live according to these high standards set by Christ?**

Christ has not only told us how to live; he has shown us by his example. What is more, he gives us all the help we need to follow his example. If we love Christ and try to follow his example, we shall receive the strength he promised when he said:

*“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in [them] will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing”—Jn 15:5.*

## Practice

■ In recent years the Church has revived the ancient Order of Christian Initiation (sometimes referred to as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults or R.C.I.A.) by which individuals can become full members of the Catholic Church. Attendance at Sunday worship is an integral part of the initiation process. Weekly attendance at Sunday Mass not only familiarizes the candidates (that is, those who will become catechumens and those Christians who will be received into the Catholic Church) with the order of service and the various practices and gestures of the Mass, but it also introduces them to the parish community. In the context of prayer the candidates are welcomed to the Church as they learn Church teaching and tradition. Usually at the close of the Liturgy of the Word the candidates are invited to leave the assembled body of worshipers to more carefully dwell upon the Word. Even if the candidates do not participate in this formal dismissal and remain for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, they may not receive Holy Communion until they are admitted to full communion with the Church.





## Section 2

# God, Our Father

*“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him. . . . Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves”—Jn 14:6-7, 9-11.*

THROUGHOUT HISTORY religions of different cultures and times have expressed their understanding of God as “Father.” Moses told the Jewish people that God was not only their Creator but also their Father. The Israelites saw God’s fatherly love present most particularly to the poor, orphaned and widowed. Likewise, Jesus called God “Father,” but he did so in an entirely new way. Jesus announced that God is not only our Father as Creator but that God is also Father eternally in relation to the Son, just as the Son is always in relation to the Father.

This is Christ’s great message: God is not a remote power who rules the universe from afar. He is our loving Father, who sent his only Son into the world in order that he might share his life with us.

God wants to unite us to himself. Therefore we must know him. We must know him not merely by observing the world about us, the work of his hands, but by hearing what he has told us of himself.

### 1. How can we speak of God?

When we speak of God we are necessarily forced to use human language. We can never have more than partial knowledge of

God's omnipotence and, since human knowledge of God is limited, so too is our language about him. For example, we cannot name God except in relation to creatures because of our limited human means of thinking and knowing. But because God transcends all creatures, we must continually purify our language of anything limited, too imaginative or imperfect, so as to avoid distorting our image of God by expressions that fall short of God's mystery.

## 2. Why is God called “the Father”?

God is the Father of all human persons because God has created all people. *God created [humans] in his image; /in the divine image he created [them]; /male and female he created them—Gn 1:27.*

## 3. What does it mean to call God “Father”?

When we call God “Father” we are using the language of faith. To call God “Father” does not mean to limit God to the male sex. God is neither male nor female, God transcends such categories. In fact, God has also been likened to a mother. In the Book of Isaiah God assures Israel: *As a mother comforts her son, /so will I comfort you—Is 66:13.* Likewise, David encourages Israel to hope in God *like a weaned child on its mother's lap—Ps 131:2.*

The language of faith attempts to express meaning, and in this case we should understand that when we call God “Father” it is to help us appreciate the parental love God shows to us in several ways:

a) God provides for the needs of his children:

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds! Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your life-*

*span? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations of the world seek for these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these other things will be given you besides”—Lk 12:22-31.*

b) God loves us so much that he sent his Son to save us:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him—Jn 3:16-17.*

c) God has shared his life with all people:

*See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself [or herself] pure, as he is pure—1 Jn 3:1-3.*

#### **4. How do we know that God exists?**

We know that God exists from our observation of the world around us and by the use of our rational faculties as human persons.

a) Observation. Everywhere in nature we find beauty and order. To try and explain this beauty and order as a result

of chance is foolish. The incredible beauty of the world and its intricate order are obvious signs of an intelligence at work. The magnificence of a sunset coloring up an evening sky is at once beautiful to behold and yet fascinating to comprehend—the various gases of our atmosphere combined with heat, moisture and altitude all harmoniously working together for a few moments of glory. The awesome grandeur of the Grand Canyon, Niagra Falls or the Rocky Mountains leaves us speechless, while the details of their coming into being boggles our minds. Because of our observation of beauty and order in nature, we conclude that only a living, intelligent being could have created the universe.

- b) Reason. The human person has the ability to reason. This special attribute also allows us to know of God's existence. Our desire for truth, our sense of moral righteousness, the call of our own consciences lead us to reason that there is more to our existence and to life in general than meets the eye. Through this openness we perceive signs of our spiritual souls.

Thus through both observation and reason we are able to discern that we are part of an existence far greater than ourselves. Humans throughout history have identified the existence of a source, a force, a being that knows no time, is not defined by our limits, and is both the cause and final goal of all life. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, we have consistently called this being God.

## **5. Has God told us of his existence?**

God has told us of his existence in the Bible, the Sacred Scriptures. Through the author of the Book of Genesis, for example, we learn that God revealed himself to humankind from the very beginning. In the story of Adam and Eve, God invited our first parents to know him as a loving Father.

In the story of Noah, God made a covenant never to destroy

the human race, and in the story of Abraham, God made the Hebrews his “chosen people.”

When God spoke to Moses in the Book of Exodus, commanding him to lead his people out of Egypt and into the promised land, he even told Moses his name: “Yahweh” or “I Am”:

*“But,” said Moses to God, “when I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘the God of your [ancestors] has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?” God replied, “I am who am.” Then he added, “This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you”—Ex 3:13-15.*

God has also revealed his existence through his only Son, Jesus Christ:

*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—Heb 1:1-2.*

## **6. What has God revealed about himself?**

God is a spirit. He is the one limitless, almighty, all-knowing spirit. He does not need anything or anyone outside of himself. He depends on nothing and on no one, but all things depend on him. Yet God cares for and sustains all the things which he has created. And he calls people to become his adopted children.

Although in many ways God is incomprehensible to human beings, from the various authors of the Bible, whom God inspired, we do learn the following:

a) God is love:

*We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in [them]—1 Jn 4:16.*

b) God is all good. He created the world in order to show forth his glory and to share his happiness with the beings he created:

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!” they cried one to another.  
“All the earth is filled with his glory!” —Is 6:3.*

c) God shares his divine life with us:

*He has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire—2 Pt 1:4.*

d) God loves all people and wills that we be saved:

*With age-old love I have loved you;  
so I have kept my mercy toward you—Jer 31:3.*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him—Jn 3:16-17.*

*. . . who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth—1 Tm 2:4.*

e) God is all-merciful, and he shows his mercy most clearly in his readiness to forgive any sinner who repents:

*Merciful and gracious is the LORD, /slow to anger, abounding in kindness. . . . /As the heavens tower over the earth, /so God’s love towers over the faithful. . . . /But the LORD’s kindness is forever, /toward the faithful from age to age—Ps 103:8, 11, 17.*

*“I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance”—Lk 15:7.*

f) God is all knowing:

*No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account—Heb 4:13.*

*He plumbs the depths and penetrates the heart;  
their innermost being he understands.  
The Most High possesses all knowledge,  
and sees from of old the things that are to come:  
He makes known the past and the future,  
and reveals the deepest secrets—Sir 42:18-20.*

g) God is just:

*A faithful God, without deceit,  
how just and upright he is!—Dt 32:4.*

*Eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality  
through perseverance in good works, but wrath and fury to those  
who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness—Rom 2:7-8.*

h) God is infinite, there is no limit to his life:

*Great is the LORD and worthy of his praise—Ps 145:3.*

*Your throne stands firm from of old;  
you are from everlasting, LORD—Ps 93:2.*

i) God is unchangeable:

*All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down  
from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or  
shadow caused by change—Jas 1:17.*

j) God is eternal, he had no beginning and will have no end:

*Before the mountains were born, /and the earth and the world  
brought forth, /from eternity to eternity you are God. /A thousand  
years in your eyes /are merely a yesterday—Ps 90:2, 4.*

*“. . . before Abraham came to be, I AM”—Jn 8:58.*

*The LORD shall reign forever and ever—Ex 15:18.*

k) God is all-powerful:

*O LORD, great are you and glorious, /wonderful in power and  
unsurpassable. /Let your every creature serve you;*



*/for you spoke, and they were made, /You sent forth your spirit,  
and they were created; /no one can resist your word  
—Jdt 16:13-14.*

1) God is everywhere:

*Where can I hide from your spirit?*

*from your presence, where can I flee?*

*If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;*

*if I lie down in Sheol, you are there too.*

*If I fly with the wings of dawn,*

*and alight beyond the sea,*

*Even there your hand will guide me,*

*your right hand will hold me fast.*

*If I say, "Surely the darkness shall hide me,*

*and night shall be my light"—*

*Darkness is not dark for you,*

*and night shines as the day.*

*Darkness and light are but one—Ps 139:7-12.*

## Practice

■ Now that we have learned why God can properly be called our Father, we can pray the Lord's prayer with more understanding and meaning. The beauty of the "Our Father" is that it not only describes but also expresses our relationship with God.

■ Two other prayers which Catholics use regularly are the "Hail Mary" and the "Act of Contrition." These traditional prayers have a beauty and simplicity that can help in developing a solid prayer life. However, Catholics are not limited to such traditional forms of prayer; rather we are also encouraged to study and meditate on Sacred Scripture as well as offering our personal prayer from within our hearts.

# Section 3

## The Gift of Divine Life

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him—Jn 3:16-17.*

WHEN JESUS SAYS, “I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” —Jn 10:10, he is speaking of divine life, that gift of God which allows us to share in the very life of Christ.

By the power of the Holy Spirit we begin the process of rebirth by an inner conversion. We reject our sinful ways and embrace God’s life by accepting his gift of grace. Joined to the death of Jesus we die to our former ways, thereby gaining a share in his resurrected glory. We are reborn to a new life as adopted children of God and become members of his Body, the Church.

Throughout this rebirth and because of it, we are justified—that is, our sins are forgiven and we are renewed in holiness. Justification enables us to actualize our true human freedom by cooperating with God’s grace in building up the Body of Christ. The gift of divine life restores us to our original role in God’s plan for creation.

### 1. What does God want for us?

God wants what we want—for us to be happy. This natural desire for happiness was placed in the human heart at the time of creation. God placed it there in order that we might be drawn toward him, who is the only one that can truly satisfy our desire. In other words, God calls each of us to God’s own happiness. This ultimate happiness is sometimes described as being God’s “beatitude.” It is our entering into or sharing in God’s glory, in God’s divine life.

## **2. Does the divine life make us divine?**

The divine life makes us divine in the sense that we share God's life. It does not make us divine in the sense that we become God or "part of God." Such an idea would be absurd. Even in heaven, seeing and loving God face to face, we shall never lose our identities, our individuality, our complete dependence on God.

## **3. Why is this ultimate happiness called supernatural?**

It is called supernatural because we cannot merit or earn it; it is a gift from God. This kind of happiness it is not anything we can understand or imagine. It is *super*-natural, that is, above the natural.

## **4. How does a sinner gain such happiness?**

It is the Holy Spirit who makes it possible for a sinner to realize this ultimate gift. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit sinners are "justified." Justification is the result of God's offer of mercy which takes away sin and sanctifies the entire person. The sinner, through God's invitation, is made holy and becomes an adopted child of God.

## **5. What does "adopted child" of God mean?**

As creatures we are made in the image and likeness of God. Through the divine life of grace, however, we are transformed from within and take on an inner likeness to God.

## **6. What is this grace of the Holy Spirit?**

"Grace" is a simple word that describes a beautiful but complex reality. First of all grace is a gift—a favor—that is freely given by God. Grace is something that we never earn or deserve. Second, grace is a participation in God's very life. It is our sharing in the

intimacy of the Trinity. Third, grace is the source of our becoming holy or sanctified. Through the divine life of grace we are empowered to live as God lives, that is, to know God as he knows himself and to love him as he loves himself.

**7. Does that mean we have no choice about being holy?**

God's offer of his love requires our free response for it to be effective, for us to be sanctified.

**8. How do Christians experience the mystery of grace?**

While grace which justifies and sanctifies is present everywhere and at all times, it is true that God's life of love is experienced in a unique way in the sacramental life of the Church and in special gifts (or charisms) which are gifts of the Spirit for the good of the Church and the salvation of the world.

**9. Are we able to know whether we "have grace"?**

Grace is supernatural. It is not something we can know or experience like other aspects of our life. While we can never be absolutely certain of grace, by observing our own good actions and those of others we can learn to trust in the presence of God's grace.

## Practice

■ Grace is part of everyday life. At home, school, or at work—alone or with others—God seeks to break through our mundane senses and reveal his will to us. These moments of insight and special strength can be understood as grace. The better we become at recognizing these moments for what they truly are, the better will we be able to take advantage of God's gift of grace.

■ One special way of developing a better awareness of grace is to meditate. Prayer can be expressed in words, but it also can be the gathering of our hearts and minds in silence, allowing our pretenses to fall, and experiencing God's presence. Such unstructured prayer is not always easy, but in the long run it is worth the effort.

# Section 4

## The Gift of Revelation

*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—Heb 1: 1-2.*

THE HUMAN PERSON can know certain aspects of God's existence through observation of nature and by the use of natural reason. However, the mystery of God's plan, which no human can independently comprehend, is made manifest in God's gift of divine revelation. This mystery of God's plan is most clearly and fully seen in the incarnation, life and resurrection of his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Because God has revealed himself to us we are better able to know and love him. Consequently, we are better able to respond to his loving invitation to live in Christ.

The gradual method that God chose to reveal himself was through the thoughts, feelings and experiences of his people. The rich deposit of God's self-revelation is found in two independent but related sources—the Sacred Scriptures (the Bible) and Tradition.

### 1. What is revelation?

Human reason, by itself, cannot learn all we need to know about God. So God himself has chosen to reveal himself to us. He did so gradually by inspiring holy writers and teachers through the centuries. These men and women reflected on the events around them and wrote down the revelation God wanted us to know. However, these inspired authors were free to compose in their own style, using their own words.

## 2. Must we accept revelation?

We must accept God's revelation because God is truthful and cannot deceive or be deceived.

## 3. Where can a person find the contents of revelation?

One part of revelation is called the Sacred Scriptures (or the Bible). This is a collection of sacred books written by human beings under the inspiration of God himself. Thus God is the true author.

The Bible is divided into two main sections. The first part is called the Old Testament and contains the inspired writings written before the time of Jesus. These forty-six books contain God's revelation to the Jews.

The second and shorter portion of the Bible is the New Testament. It contains the record of the life of Jesus and the writings of some of the early followers of Jesus. When Jesus died there was no written New Testament. People could learn about Jesus only by listening to his followers teaching his message. Eventually the followers began to write down what they remembered about Jesus. Keep in mind the twenty-seven books of the New Testament have at least eight different authors. The first books were not written immediately after the death of Jesus. At least one was not written until almost sixty years had passed. St. John reminds us:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of [his] disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name—Jn 20:30-31.*

The other part of revelation is called "Tradition." It is the body of truths about God handed down within the Church. The truths of Tradition can be found in the doctrines of the Church, the decrees of the popes and councils and in the compositions of

the early teachers of the Church, the “fathers” and “doctors” of the Church.

#### **4. Who are the fathers and doctors of the Church?**

The fathers of the Church are certain leaders of the early centuries of Christianity who were characterized by orthodoxy of doctrine and holiness of life.

St. Hilary, St. Athanasius and St. Augustine are examples of the fathers of the Church. St. Gregory the Great, who died in 604 A.D., is generally considered to be the last of the fathers of the Western Church. St. John Damascene, who died about the middle of the eighth century, is the last father of the Eastern Church.

The doctors of the Church are theologians and teachers of later centuries who possess the same qualities of orthodoxy and holiness. St. Thomas Aquinas, who lived in the thirteenth century, is considered by many the greatest of the doctors of the Church. St. Teresa of Avila of the sixteenth century is a doctor of the Church who is an example of the many women who have served the Church as teachers and theologians.

#### **5. Since the Bible was written over a period of many years by different authors in different countries, who collected them into one book?**

Over the years, there were many books presented to the Church, all claiming to be divinely inspired. But were they? Who could decide? Only a council of Church leaders could answer such a question. A local council in Carthage in 397 A.D. compiled a list, accepting 73 books of the Bible and rejecting others. They sent the list to Pope Siricius, who in turn approved it. Thus we have an authentic list (or canon) of divinely inspired books.

#### **6. Should the average person read the Bible?**

The Church has always used the Scriptures in its sacred liturgy



or public worship. It encourages all members to read a portion daily in their private devotions. Unfortunately, this has not always been as widespread a custom as the Church has desired. The Bible is not easy reading.

### **7. What are literary forms?**

The reason some people have difficulty in understanding the Bible is that it is composed in many different literary forms.

The term “literary forms” refers to the different types or styles of literature which can be distinguished from one another. There are many types of literary styles used in the Scriptures. Thus, the Bible is not a book of simple prose statements of fact. Some sections of the Scriptures are written in poetic form while other parts are prophecy. To properly understand each section the reader must be aware of the type of literature being used as well as the rules of interpreting that type of literature.

### **8. How does a person read the Sacred Scriptures?**

Because the Bible has many different literary forms, we need assistance in determining the meaning of any particular passage. The Second Vatican Council has given us guidance in this regard. First, one needs to be attentive to the overall content and unity of the Scriptures. One part or section cannot be read apart from the whole. Second, the Bible must be read in the context of the entire Tradition of the Church. And finally, the reader must keep in mind what is known as the “analogy of faith.” In other words, the integrity found within the truths of faith and the entire plan of salvation must be respected when reading the Scriptures.

### **9. What is the difference between a Protestant Bible and a Catholic Bible?**

Actually, very little. Some of the older editions of the so-called Protestant Bible omit some of the books from both the Old

Testament and the New Testament. The books which Protestant Bibles sometimes omit today include 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Sirach, Wisdom, Baruch, plus parts of Daniel and Esther. Most recent Protestant editions, however, now contain all 73 books.

## **Practice**

- The Church has been entrusted with the task of safeguarding God's revelation by offering authentic interpretation of both the Bible and Tradition from generation to generation. Roman Catholics are encouraged to familiarize themselves to both sources of revelation.
- It is a good practice to read the Scriptures daily. Many parishes have Bible Study classes in which you may want to participate.
- Your parish staff can also recommend various writings of the Church fathers and doctors which you might want to read. You should also familiarize yourself with the documents of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) as well as other Church documents.
- There are many excellent Catholic newspapers and magazines that regularly explore the Bible and Tradition. Consider subscribing to one or more of them.



# Section 5

## The Gift of the Sacred Scriptures

*In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God—Jn 1:1.*

THE BIBLE TELLS OUR STORY as the people of God. We hear of our human origins when we read the story of Adam and Eve. We learn of Israel's struggle to become God's chosen people through their obedience and faithfulness. The dramas of individuals like Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Ruth and David teach us how God calls everyone to a life of holiness and service. The warnings of the prophets remind us of the consequences we bring upon ourselves when we stray from God's righteous path. The Gospels fill us with excitement and hope as the life of Jesus Christ—God's living Word—is made manifest to all people. We gain wisdom as we study the implications of the Letters (or Epistles) and the story of the early Church's journey toward unity and holiness found in the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation.

As a Church we find our strength and nourishment in the content of the Scriptures. It is our belief as Roman Catholics that each book of the Bible, even though written at different times and by different people, people of different languages and cultures, is really God's revelation expressed in human language.

### **1. What is the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures)?**

The Old Testament (or the Hebrew Scriptures) is a collection of the sacred books of the Hebrew people. It tells the story of their relationship with God. It is usually presented as forty-six books, which vary in length and literary form. There are twenty-one books of History, eighteen books of Prophecy and seven books of

Wisdom literature.

These books are to be understood in the light of the literary style and the mentality of the times in which they were written, although recent archeological studies have in many cases indicated their geographical and historical roots. The books of the Old Testament were written by many authors over a long period of time. The traditions of the Hebrew people recounted in the first five books of the Bible certainly go back to the time of Moses (1400-1200 B.C.), while the story of the Maccabees, told in the last two books of the Old Testament, was written about 100 B.C.

## 2. Why is this collection of books called the Old Testament?

These books are called a “testament” because they are an account of the covenant (agreement) entered into by God with his chosen people through Moses on Mount Sinai. For Christians, this testament or covenant is called “old” to distinguish it from the new one which God entered into with all people through Jesus on Mount Calvary. The prophet Jeremiah foretold the transition from the old to the new covenant five hundred years before the birth of Christ:

*The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their [ancestors] the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the LORD. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more—Jer 31:31-34.*

More recently, some or all of these books of the Bible have been referred to as the “Hebrew Scriptures” to emphasize that

they are the story of the Hebrew (Jewish) people.

### **3. What kind of history is recorded in the Old Testament?**

The Old Testament is a theological history of God's dealings with his chosen people. Consequently, it is an interpretative history and does not intend to give a thorough account of all the secular events of the time.

- a) The Old Testament is the history of God's kingdom on earth. The Hebrews (or Jews) were God's people. He was their king, who exercised his authority through the prophets, judges and kings. God separated the Jews from all other people and promised them large families, good harvests, peace and his continual presence and protection if they were faithful to him. He threatened them with war, famine, plague and exile if they were unfaithful. The Jews frequently turned from God. In each case God chastised them, forgave them and accepted them again as his chosen people.
- b) The Old Testament tells the story of only one people, the Hebrews. Other people are mentioned only incidentally. It does not give a complete history of even the Jewish people but treats of only those events which have direct bearing on the plan of God. There are gaps of hundreds of years in the narrative, and only people who have a direct impact on the plan of salvation figure prominently in it.
- c) The Old Testament anticipates the coming of the Messiah. It tells of the historical events leading up to his coming. It records the prophecies which Jesus Christ was to fulfill.

#### **4. What is the importance of the Hebrew people in God's plan of salvation?**

The Hebrews were the people through whom the one true God was revealed during the centuries before Christ. God's ancient revelation was given to the Jews. It was they who preserved it and handed it down. When the Son of God became a man, he was born a Jew.

The Jews, therefore, are the spiritual ancestors of all Christians. Christianity is the Jewish religion brought to its fulfillment and opened up to the whole world. It should be noted, however, that the Jews remain God's chosen people, since God's covenant with them has never been revoked.

(The Hebrews were not called "Jews" until later in their history. For the purpose of clarity, however, "Jews" or "Jewish people" is used interchangeably with "Hebrews" throughout this book.)

#### **5. Who was Abraham?**

Abraham, who is believed to have lived around 1850 B.C., was called by God to be the founder of the Hebrew people. God entered into a covenant with Abraham and through that covenant God made Abraham's descendents his "chosen people." It was to this people that God revealed himself.

#### **6. Who was Moses?**

Moses was the great leader and law-giver whom God chose to lead the Hebrews out of captivity in Egypt into the land he had promised them. It was to Moses that God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai when he renewed his covenant with the Jews.

## 7. What is a prophet?

A prophet is a person sent by God to reveal to the people the will of God. The prophets of the Old Testament strove continually to keep the Hebrew people faithful to God; they reminded the Jews of God's promises to them, of his past benefits and of their future glory if they remained faithful to him. Some of the prophets also foretold future events such as the destruction of the kingdom of Israel. Many of the prophets spoke of the coming of the Messiah and of his kingdom:

*The word of the LORD came to me thus:  
Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born I dedicated you,  
a prophet to the nations I appointed you.  
"Ah, Lord GOD!" I said,  
"I know not how to speak; I am too young."  
But the LORD answered me,  
Say not, "I am too young."  
To whomever I send you, you shall go;  
whatever I command you, you shall speak—Jer 1:4-7.*

## 8. What things were foretold by prophets concerning Christ and his kingdom?

Many individual traits of the person, character, kingdom and rule of the Messiah were foretold by the prophets. These facts were revealed over a long period of time and were never gathered into one place in any book of the Old Testament. Many of the prophecies were obscure. Most likely the prophets themselves did not understand exactly how their prophecies would be fulfilled. In fact, various prophecies seemed to contradict one another. One group showed a victorious king ruling in justice over a peaceful people, while another group foretold the humiliation, the rejection, the suffering and the violent death of the Messiah. Many of the prophecies were not clearly understood until after



Christ came and fulfilled them by his life and actions—even those which had seemed to be contradictory. For example:

*But you, Bethlehem—Ephrathah,  
too small to be among the clans of Judah,  
From you shall come forth to me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel—Mi 5:1.*

*After they had crucified him, they divided his garments by casting  
lots—Mt 27:35.*

*They stare at me and gloat;  
they divide my garments among them;  
and for my clothing they cast lots—Ps 22:18-19.*

## **9. What is the New Testament?**

The New Testament is a collection of writings composed at various times by different authors after the death of Jesus. They were not assembled together until the end of the second century, and it was not until the end of the fourth century that the Church concluded definitively which books belonged to the New Testament. There are three types of writings in the New Testament: Gospels, Letters (or Epistles), and the apocalyptic writings of John.

## **10. How were the Gospels composed?**

There were three stages in the formation of the Gospels. First, there was the actual life and teachings of Jesus. The foundation of the Gospels is in that historical reality. Second, there is the oral communication by which the apostles and disciples of Jesus passed on what they had seen and experienced. Third, there are the written Gospels. These final texts brought together the oral tradition and already existing written texts. Each of the authors (or Evangelists) was faithful to the truth of revelation, but each sought to communicate this truth in a manner that addressed different situations of the early Church. Because the final version

of each Gospel was a form of preaching and not meant to be the presentation of literal history, there is some divergence of style and sequence among the Gospels. Christians believe that these differences are merely literary and that the truth of the revelation of God through Jesus Christ was protected from error by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## Practice

- St. Jerome said, “To be ignorant of Scripture is to be ignorant of Jesus.”
- The liturgical celebration of the Church has been divided into three cycles (A, B and C), which rotate every three years. Cycle A focuses on readings from the Gospel of Matthew, Cycle B on Mark, and Cycle C on Luke. Readings from the Gospel of John are interspersed throughout the three liturgical cycles. This insures that all the major parts of the four Gospels and a variety of other readings from the Old and New Testaments are read publicly every three years.
- A variety of approved translations of the Bible are now available to Catholics. These include the New American Bible (NAB), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB).



# Section 6

## The Creation of the World

*In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.*

*He was in the beginning with God.  
All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be—Jn 1:1-3.*

ALTHOUGH WE OFTEN REFER to God the Father as Creator, the Scriptures teach that we cannot separate the creative action of the Son and the Spirit from that of the Father.

As difficult as it is for us to fathom the mystery of the creative work of the Holy Trinity, the original plan of creation was beautifully simple. God gave his children the gift of divine life at the instant he created them and placed them in the world in order that he might prepare them for heaven. We were to be born in possession of the divine life and were to keep it always. There was to be no disorder, no sickness, no death—provided we remained faithful to God and did not rebel against him by sinning. But, as told in the story of creation, those who began our race failed God and us, their descendants. They sinned and thereby lost humankind's most precious possession, the divine life, which makes us children of God.

The story of God's creation of the world and of our first parents, Adam and Eve, of their elevation to the divine life and their rebellion against God is told in the first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis.

*In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.*

*Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the*

darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” Thus evening came, and morning followed—the first day.

Then God said, “Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other.” And so it happened: God made the dome, and it separated the water above the dome from the water below it. God called the dome “the sky.” Evening came, and morning followed—the second day.

Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear.” And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land “the earth,” and the basin of the water he called “the sea.” God saw how good it was. Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it.” And so it happened: the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed—the third day.

Then God said: “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years, and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth.” And so it happened: God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night; and he made the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.

Then God said, “Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky.” And so it happened: God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of swimming creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw how good it was, and God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the

*seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth.” Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day.*

*Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds.” And so it happened: God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. God saw how good it was. Then God said: “Let us make [humans] in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”*

*God created [humans] in his image;  
in the divine image he created [them];  
male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.” God also said: “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food.” And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.*

*Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation—  
Gn 1:1-31, 2:1-3.*

The story of creation as it is given in the Bible was based on the oral traditions of the ancient Hebrew people. It was written with these people in mind. It is, of course, inspired by God. It is not, however, a scientific account. We must not expect in it answers to scientific questions. It is up to human learning and

research, for example, to determine the age of the earth and the question of evolution. The Bible was not intended to answer such questions.

### **1. What does this biblical account of creation teach?**

This account teaches certain important religious truths:

- a) There is only one God.
- b) God is the Creator of everything.
- c) God created everything effortlessly, merely by his word.
- d) All things created by God are good.
- e) All that exists depends on God.
- f) The world was created for the glory of God.
- g) Humanity is the summit of God's work in the visible world.

### **2. Does the biblical account of creation teach us that the world was made in six days?**

The six days are a purely literary device, i.e., a manner of speaking that made it easier for the audience to understand and remember.

Thus God is described as creating "places" on the first three days and the inhabitants of these "places" on the second three days. For example, the "work" of the first and the fourth day is described as the separation of light and darkness first and creation of the heavenly bodies which regulate light and darkness later. The "work" of the second and the fifth days is described as the separation of the waters first (the Hebrews thought that there were waters above the sky and under the earth) and then the creation of the fish which live in the waters and the birds which live in the air separating the waters.

The “work” of the third and the sixth days is described as the creation of the earth and plant life first and of animals and humans next.

### **3. Why did the author of Genesis use literary devices?**

If the author had known what science now knows about the origin of the world and had stated this information in scientific terms, the people would have been bewildered and would not have understood the religious message.

Instead the author sought to convey to the reader certain important truths by the use of literary devices. The inspired author was attempting to express “. . . the truths of creation—its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of [humanity], and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation”—CCC 289.

### **4. Does this biblical account rule out evolution?**

This account of creation reveals that God is the Creator of all things. The manner in which creation took place is not revealed in the Bible. Modern science teaches us the evolution of plant and animal life. As long as this teaching does not exclude God as the Creator and the director of the process of evolution, it does not contradict revelation.

### **5. How did God create the world?**

We can't possibly know how God created the world but we believe that creation occurred according to God's wisdom. From God's free will all of creation has its origin and therefore shares in his goodness and wisdom. We further believe that God needed no help or used any pre-existing thing in his creative act. God freely created everything out of nothing.

Creation means more than making something out of nothing. When God creates something he also keeps it in existence. If



he did not, it would return to nothing.

**6. Was it necessary that God create?**

God is absolutely free. He need not have created anything. God has no need of anything outside of himself.

**7. Why, then, did God create the world?**

God created the world to show forth his glory and to share his goodness with the beings he created. God's glory is the manifestation and communication of his goodness to all of creation.

God accomplishes this by sharing his existence with the whole of creation, which mirrors him in various degrees of clarity.

God has created images of himself in the spiritual world, angels; and in the visible world, humans. In his infinite goodness God has willed to give to angels and humans as an utterly free and undeserved gift a share in his nature, the divine life.

**8. What are angels?**

Angels are spiritual beings created by God. They, like human beings, are created in the image of God. Angels are more clearly in God's image than humans because they are completely spiritual, having no need of bodies or anything material.

**9. How do angels differ from God?**

Angels are creatures, i.e., they were created by God. They depend absolutely upon God's sustaining hand for their existence and activity. Although of a higher nature than humans, they, too, are limited beings.

**10. What is the story of the elevation and fall of the angels?**

The moment he created angels God gave them divine life.

Since they are beings with free will they, too, had to prove their fidelity to God. A vast multitude of the angels rebelled against God and fixed their powerful wills forever on evil. These evil spirits live now in hell and are called “devils.”

The angels who remained faithful to God enjoy the vision of God in heaven.

### **11. Do angels play any part in our lives?**

Our guardian angels protect and help us. The devils tempt us and try to lead us into sin. Satan, the leader of the devils, tempted and led our first parents into sin.

## **Practice**

■ Everything in the world was created to give glory to God. We, the greatest of his earthly creatures, must praise him with our minds, our hearts, our whole beings. The worship of God is our first, our most important, and our most exalted function.

■ The celebration of the Eucharist (the Mass) is central to the belief and practice of the Catholic faith. No other form of worship can better express God’s love for us and our response to that love than when the community of believers gathers around the Lord’s table. Because the Eucharist is so essential to our belief as Catholics, the Church obliges all to regularly participate at Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation.

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