

The Mystery of Redemption and Christian Discipleship

SECOND EDITION



Author: Rev. Peter V. Armenio
Publisher: Rev. James Socias



MIDWEST THEOLOGICAL FORUM

Downers Grove, Illinois

TABLE OF CONTENTS

viii	Abbreviations used for the Books of the Bible	35	Chapter 2: Preparing for the Messiah
viii	General Abbreviations	36	Introduction
ix	Foreword	36	God's Promise of Redemption
221	Art and Photo Credits	38	<i>Sidebar:</i> The Meaning of "Redemption"
225	Index	39	The Proliferation of Sin
		39	Cain and Abel
		40	The Flood
		40	The Tower of Babel
1	Chapter 1: In the Beginning	41	The Covenants Prepare God's People for Redemption
2	Introduction	41	God's Covenant with Noah
3	What Catholics Believe about the Bible	43	God's Covenant with Abraham
4	The Bible Is Sacred Literature	44	<i>Sidebar:</i> How the Old Testament Covenants Foreshadow the Redemption
4	The Bible Reveals History from God's Point of View	45	God's Covenant with Moses
5	The Literal and Spiritual Senses of the Bible	48	Entrusted with God's Promises
6	<i>Sidebar:</i> How the Bible Was Written	49	<i>Sidebar:</i> St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross
7	Religious Truth, NOT Scientific Truth	50	The Promise to David
9	God Created the World	51	Promises Made Through the Prophets
10	<i>Sidebar:</i> Is It True?	52	Prophecy of Redemption: the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah
11	Creation as the Work of the Blessed Trinity	55	<i>Sidebar:</i> Christ, the Suffering Servant
12	<i>Sidebar:</i> Creation and Evolution	54	Conclusion
13	Image and Likeness	55	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>
15	God Made Them Male and Female	57	<i>Vocabulary</i>
16	<i>Sidebar:</i> Charity and Chastity	60	<i>Study Questions</i>
17	The Original State of Man	61	<i>Practical Exercises</i>
18	The Creation of Angels	61	<i>From the Catechism</i>
18	<i>Sidebar:</i> Prayer to One's Guardian Angel		
19	Satan and the Fallen Angels	63	Chapter 3: The Promise of Redemption Is Fulfilled in Christ
20	Original Sin	64	Introduction
21	The Consequences of Original Sin	65	The Annunciation
22	Original Sin Affects All of Humanity	66	<i>Sidebar:</i> "Full of Grace" Exempted from Original Sin
23	<i>Sidebar:</i> St. Elizabeth Ann Seton	68	St. Joseph's Dream
24	Sin and Our Need for Redemption	69	"Prepare the Way of the Lord"
25	Conclusion	70	Why the Word Became Flesh
26	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>	71	The Word Became Flesh to Reconcile Us to God
27	<i>Vocabulary</i>	72	The Word Became Flesh to Manifest God's Love
29	<i>Study Questions</i>	72	The Word Became Flesh to Offer a Model of Holiness
30	<i>Practical Exercises</i>		
31	<i>From the Catechism</i>		

TABLE OF CONTENTS

73	<i>Sidebar: Holiness: Meditating on the Passion</i>	108	The “New Passover”
74	The Word Became Flesh to Allow Us a Share in Divine Life	109	“Love One Another”
75	<i>Sidebar: St. Charles Borromeo</i>	110	Memorial and Anticipation
76	The Word Became Flesh to Defeat the Devil	111	Conclusion
77	Christ’s Entire Life Was a Mystery of Redemption	112	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>
78	Christ’s Poverty Is a Lesson in Detachment	113	<i>Vocabulary</i>
79	Christ’s Hidden Life Teaches Us Obedience	115	<i>Study Questions</i>
80	Christ’s Preached Word Is Redemptive	116	<i>Practical Exercises</i>
81	In His Divine Mercy, Christ “Bore Our Infirmities”	116	<i>From the Catechism</i>
82	We Are Justified in Christ	119	Chapter 5:
82	<i>Sidebar: Justified by Faith and Works</i>		Redemption Through the Paschal Mystery
83	Christ’s Entire Life Reveals the Father	120	Introduction
84	Conclusion	121	<i>Sidebar: The Death of Christ: Who Is Guilty?</i>
85	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>	122	The Passion of Christ: Love in Action
86	<i>Vocabulary</i>	123	The Agony in the Garden
88	<i>Study Questions</i>	124	The Suffering Servant: Christ Is Tried and Tortured
89	<i>Practical Exercises</i>	126	<i>Kenosis Revisited: “...Even Death on a Cross”</i>
89	<i>From the Catechism</i>	127	The Significance of Christ’s Resurrection
93	Chapter 4:	128	The Resurrection Was a True and Historical Event
	The Light of the World: Redemption Revealed	129	The Resurrection of Christ Was a Transcendent Event
94	Introduction	130	The Resurrection Confirms that Christ Is God
95	The Baptism of Christ	131	The Resurrection Affirms that Christ Fulfills His Own Promises as well as Those of the Old Testament
96	Temptation in the Wilderness	133	Christ’s Resurrection Is a Promise of Our Own Resurrection
98	The Miracle at Cana	133	Our Participation in the Mystery of Redemption
99	The Proclamation of the Kingdom	134	The Sacraments as Sources of Sanctifying Grace
100	The Kingdom of God Announced Through His Works	135	<i>Sidebar: The Seven Sacraments</i>
102	The Kingdom of God Announced Through Parables	136	The Redemptive Meaning of the Ascension
103	<i>Sidebar: The Parable as a Light to Conscience</i>	137	<i>Sidebar: St. Joan of Arc</i>
104	<i>Sidebar: Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven</i>	138	With the Ascension, Christ’s Humanity Enters Heaven
104	The “Light” of the Transfiguration	138	The Ascension Inaugurates Christ’s Messianic Kingdom
104	Divinity Revealed	138	Christ Ascended so He Could Send Us the Holy Spirit
104	Fulfillment of the Law and Prophets	139	We Hope to Follow Christ
105	Preparation for His Passion and Death		
105	Foretaste of Christ’s Glory and of Ours		
106	<i>Sidebar: St. Francis de Sales</i>		
107	The Institution of the Eucharist		

TABLE OF CONTENTS

140	Conclusion	180	<i>Study Questions</i>
141	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>	181	<i>Practical Exercises</i>
143	<i>Vocabulary</i>	182	<i>From the Catechism</i>
145	<i>Study Questions</i>		
146	<i>Practical Exercises</i>	185	Chapter 7:
147	<i>From the Catechism</i>		Prayer in the Life of a Believer
151	Chapter 6:	186	Introduction
	Our Response to the Gift	186	Prayer Is a Dialogue with God
	of Redemption	188	<i>Sidebar: Sainly Prayers</i>
152	Introduction	188	Scripture as a Source of Prayer
153	God's Desire for Us: Happiness and Holiness	189	Scripture in the Liturgy of the Word
153	God Created Us for Happiness	190	Scripture in the Liturgy of the Hours
154	God Calls Us to Holiness	191	<i>Sidebar: Reflections on the Hail Mary from the Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
155	Redemption, Grace, and Free Will	192	<i>Lectio Divina</i>
156	<i>Sidebar: Objective and Subjective Redemption</i>	193	Expressions of Prayer
156	Practicing the Theological Virtues	193	Vocal Prayer
156	Theological Virtues	193	Meditative Prayer
157	Natural and Supernatural Virtues	194	Contemplative Prayer
158	<i>Sidebar: Aids and Marks of Christian Virtues: The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit</i>	194	Forms of Prayer
159	The Imitation of Christ	196	Difficulties in Prayer
160	Living Out God's Call to Holiness	197	Temptations in Prayer
161	Conversion and Conscience	198	The Model of Perfect Prayer
161	Leading a Moral Life	202	Conclusion
163	Holiness in and Through the Church	203	<i>Sidebar: St. Benedict of Nursia</i>
164	Working Toward the Kingdom	204	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>
164	Love of Neighbor and Service to the Needy	206	<i>Vocabulary</i>
165	Evangelization: Witnesses for Christ	207	<i>Study Questions</i>
166	Stewardship	208	<i>Practical Exercises</i>
167	<i>Sidebar: The Decalogue, the Ten Commandments of God</i>	209	<i>From the Catechism</i>
167	<i>Sidebar: The Beatitudes: Road Map to Eternal Happiness</i>	213	Appendix:
168	<i>Sidebar: The Precepts of the Church</i>		Challenges to Faith in the Redemption
169	The Last Things	215	1. Why Would God the Father Allow His Son, Jesus, to Suffer and Die the Way He Did (CCC 599-609)?
170	<i>Parousia</i> and Judgment	216	2. Why Are Followers of Jesus Christ Sometimes So Willing to Make Sacrifices and to Accept Pain and Suffering, Especially in Witness to Christ and Their Faith?
171	<i>Sidebar: St. Rose Philippine Duchesne</i>	218	3. Isn't Making Sacrifices and Enduring Suffering a Sign of Weakness (CCC 1808, 1831)?
172	Hell	219	4. In the End, Isn't It Really Only the Final Result That Matters?
173	Purgatory		
173	Heaven		
174	Conclusion		
175	<i>Supplementary Reading</i>		
177	<i>Vocabulary</i>		

The Mystery of Redemption

CHAPTER 1

In the Beginning

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”¹ Holy Scripture begins with these solemn words. The profession of faith takes them up when it confesses that God the Father almighty is “Creator of heaven and earth” (*Apostles’ Creed*), “of all that is, seen and unseen” (*Nicene Creed*). We shall speak first of the Creator, then of creation and finally of the fall into sin from which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to raise us up again. (CCC 279)

INTRODUCTION



The opening chapters of the Book of Genesis tell the story of creation and of God’s special relationship with humanity. They relate how God created man and woman out of great love and intended every human person to share in his intimate friendship. Among all of God’s living creatures, the human person alone was created to know and love God so as to share in his own divine life.

Although not intended as a historical or scientific account, these early chapters in Genesis convey many profound truths about God and humanity. In the creation narrative, man and woman are made in God’s image and likeness,² thereby enjoying an exalted dignity and a special relationship with the Creator. In fact, the creation of Adam and Eve is the pinnacle of God’s physical creation. In this sense, the entire world was created to serve humanity.

God entrusted his creation to the care of Adam and Eve. They lived in a paradise God had created for them, and they had dominion over all things. However, God gave one commandment to our first parents: They were not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.³ Adam and Eve failed to heed this instruction, and their disobedience of this one command disrupted the harmony of God’s creation and inflicted sin on humanity—a sin with consequences for our first parents and their descendants.

This first sin, which we call Original Sin, introduced evil, suffering, and death into the world. From that moment, every descendant of Adam and Eve—every human person, with the notable exceptions of Mary and Christ—would suffer from the effects of Original Sin and would need a Redeemer in order to be reconciled with God.

Though Adam and Eve had disobeyed, God did not abandon them; instead, he introduced a new and marvelous plan of redemption to restore the friendship they had lost. This first chapter will examine the creation of our first parents and their fall so as to provide a backdrop for understanding the necessity and importance of Christ’s work of redemption.

First, however, it is important that we understand something about the Bible, or Sacred Scripture, the revealed Word of God, the collection of inspired writings that include Genesis and record the unfolding story of our salvation in Christ.

WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE

For Catholics, there can be no doubt about the importance of the Bible. From the very beginning of the Church's history, Sacred Scripture has always been recognized and revered as the Word of God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* strikingly formulates the importance of Sacred Scripture for faithful believers: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord: both nourish and govern the whole Christian life;"⁴ albeit Christ's "Real Presence" in the Eucharist, in which he is present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, is entirely unique and distinct from his presence in Sacred Scripture.⁵

The seventy-three books of the Bible—twenty-seven in the New Testament and forty-six in the Old—tell the story of how God's plan of salvation has unfolded throughout history. This is called *salvation history*. Salvation history, however, is different from other kinds of history. The Bible not only teaches the meaning of past events but also reveals how those events affect every person's life in every age.

The Bible is inspired and inerrant. It is *inspired* because God himself guided the sacred authors, who were enlightened by God the Holy Spirit to write what he wanted and nothing more. Thus, God the Holy Spirit is the principal Author of Scripture; the human writers were the instruments through which he chose to reveal himself to his people. Scripture is *inerrant* because it does not err. God can neither deceive nor be deceived. Because the Holy Spirit is the principal Author of Sacred Scripture, it is true and contains no errors.



The Expulsion from Paradise (detail) by Natoire.
This first sin, which we call Original Sin, introduced evil, suffering, and death into the world.



St. Paul Writing His Epistles by Valentin

The authors of Scripture did not write the same way as modern authors. To understand what they meant to say, we have to understand the way they saw the world.

The Bible Is Sacred Literature

The Bible is sacred literature because God is its Author. Because Sacred Scripture is written in human language, it is possible for humans to understand it. Understanding it correctly, however, sometimes requires some preparation and authoritative guidance:

While Scripture is first and foremost the inspired Word of God, it is important to remember that the sacred authors employed literary forms and techniques to convey the message that God wanted. Unless we understand how those forms and techniques work, we cannot understand the meaning the inspired authors wanted to convey to us.

There are many different kinds of literature in the Bible—stories, poems, dialogue, figurative language, and others—and the sacred authors used many different literary techniques. Because they lived at different times and had different personalities, the kinds of literature and the techniques used to convey them are employed in a variety of ways. Those differences make reading Scripture endlessly fascinating.

The Bible is also ancient literature. Even the most recent books of the New Testament were written almost two thousand years ago. The authors of Scripture did not write the same way as modern authors. To understand what they meant to say, we have to understand the way they saw the world.

The Bible Reveals History from God's Point of View

It is important to keep in mind that the Bible has a different purpose from other literature. The Bible uses many literary forms, but its context is religious. Although some sacred authors could tell great stories and write great poetry, it was not literature for literature's sake: All was in the service of the Bible's religious purpose.

People today usually think of religion in terms of personal experience. But that is not how the authors of the Bible—or other ancient peoples—saw it. The word “religion” comes from a Latin word meaning “binding.” To the ancients, religion was what held everything together. Their view of history, culture, politics, and everything else was essentially a religious view. Because of that view, the Bible writers did not write history the way we write history. We tend to view history a mere recounting of important events—wars, treaties, inventions, and so on. The main characters in our history are kings, presidents, and generals.

Although we pretend to write “objective” history—history that tells “just the facts”—all of our history is quite subjective. Even by deciding which facts are important to relate and which are not, we make editorial decisions that affect the objectivity of our narrative. There is no getting around that personal bias in ordinary history, because every history has to be written from a particular point of view, based on the facts as they are understood by the writer and his or her own perceptions and interpretations of those facts.

But there is one point of view that is completely unbiased. God sees everything exactly the way it is. He knows every fact and perceives everything perfectly. The writers of Scripture told history from God’s perspective.

To the sacred authors, the important thing about history was what it tells us about God’s relationship with his people. Many of the most important characters in Bible history seem to be ordinary people—definitely not representative of the princes and principalities of their day. Even Christ himself, the Son of God, looked like an ordinary carpenter’s son to most of the people around him.

But those ordinary people carried God’s message, and that made them more important than those figures of purely temporal significance who fill our history books. Because God sets history objectively, the Bible concentrates on the people who were really important for advancing God’s plan for the redemption of the world. In fact, all the history in the Bible is really “salvation history”—the history of how God’s plan to save us unfolded through the ages.

THE LITERAL AND SPIRITUAL SENSES OF THE BIBLE

In discerning the meaning of inspired Scripture it is traditional to distinguish two senses, the literal and the spiritual (cf. CCC 115-119). The literal sense is that which the authors intended to express. Historical and linguistic analysis, by shedding light upon the processes that gave rise to the biblical texts, helps to determine the literal sense being expressed in the text.

When reading the Old Testament, it is important to understand the *literal sense* first. In order to understand the literal sense, the various genres employed within a text must be taken into account—for example, history, law, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic, letter, epic, fable, or allegory. Difficulties also arise from our temporal and cultural distance from the sacred authors. Failure to account for these literary genres and contexts can lead us astray into false, *literalistic* interpretations. For example, in the Book of Genesis, creation is described as having occurred in six days. This chapter later notes that the sacred author may have been depicting creation in terms of forms and the beings that rule within those forms (for example, the sun ruling over the day). However, a *literalistic* reading maintains God created the world in six, twenty-four-hour days, which may not have been what the sacred author had intended and seems to contradict what is known from natural science.

The *spiritual sense* is the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit in light of the mystery of Christ. There should be no contradiction between the two senses of



Scenes from Genesis, Bulgarian Revival Period. Sacred Scripture is not intended by God or by the sacred authors to be either a scientific treatise or a mere historical record. It is much more.