

PART I: THE CREED – THE FAITH PROFESSED
DIVINE REVELATION AND OUR FAITH RESPONSE
(C 50-100, 142-184, USC Chs. 1 & 4)

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It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will, which was that people can draw near to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in his divine life.

(Divine Revelation #2)

The desire for God is written in the human heart because man is created by God and for God; God never ceases to draw man to himself.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 27)

This lesson is divided into two parts:

Part One: How God reveals himself to us through creation, Israel and in Jesus. How God's Revelation of himself is transmitted through Scripture and Tradition

Part Two: Faith: our response to Divine Revelation

PART ONE: DIVINE REVELATION

The Good News is that we come from the loving hands of a God who wishes to *reveal* himself to us and draw us into a *loving relationship* with him, into an intimate relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even though God is essentially mystery, a mystery so profound that we cannot comprehend, yet this God has not removed himself from us. In fact in him "we live, move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Not only that, but our loving God has placed within us a capacity to respond to his outreaches to us. In the scriptures, we have numerous examples of men and women responding to God's Revelation of himself.

How God reveals himself in creation (C 31-33, USC p. 3)

God's fingerprints are all over his creation. It is for us to open the eyes of our soul and see this presence of God in all that he has made. The author of Psalm 19 who lived about 1,000 years before Christ shares with us his sense of God's existence and presence in creation when he writes:

The heavens proclaim the glory of God and the firmament shows forth the work of his hands. Day unto day takes up the story and night unto night makes known the message. (Ps 19:1-2)

Throughout history, people with open minds have seen the universe as evidence of God's existence. The

order, harmony and beauty of the world point to an intelligent creator.

Pause: *Some people love the great outdoors and find it easy to see God in creation. Others just go about their lives and pay very little attention to creation. What about you? To what extent do you find God's fingerprints in creation?*

Contemplating the human person (C 33-35 USC p.4)

The *Catechism* (33) tells us that certain traits in the human person can also lead us to belief in God: openness to truth and beauty, desire for moral goodness, the way we treasure freedom, the voice of conscience, and our longings for the infinite and for happiness. All of these yearnings within the human spirit or soul can draw us to the reality that people call God. After rejecting God for many years and then allowing himself to be found by God, Augustine said: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (C 30). This yearning for God found in the history of people in all places and times leads us to believe that in the core of his being, man is fundamentally a *religious* being (C 28). We possess within us a religious impulse and drive toward God.

In the seventeenth century, the French philosopher Blaise Pascal said: "*There is light enough for those who want to see and darkness enough for those who are otherwise inclined.*" He also said faith in God is life's best wager. "If you win, you win everything." With atheism or unbelief, one risks losing everything.

While through "reason we can come to know God with certainty on the basis of his works" (C 50), it is only with *Divine Revelation* that we can come to know the inner life of God and develop a personal relationship with him. To this Divine Revelation we will now turn.

Pause: *What spoke to you most in the above section?*

God reveals his loving plan of salvation through "deeds" and "words" (C 51-67, USC p. 12)

By natural reason man can know God with certainty, on the basis of his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his own powers: the order of divine Revelation. (C 50)

As we look at the dynamics involved in human relationships, we see the truth of the above statement. Human beings reveal themselves to each other by deeds and words, both of which are linked. The truth of what we say is borne out by our deeds.

When Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God, they rejected his offer of friendship and alienated humanity from their Creator (Gen 3). But God did not stop loving us, his sons and daughters. Rather, he created a plan to restore our friendship with him. In Eucharistic Prayer IV we read: “again and again you offered friendship to man and taught him to hope for salvation.”

The *Catechism* (54-65) outlines for us God’s gradual Revelation of himself and his plan to save the world, beginning with covenants with Noah, Abraham, and the people of Israel.

The two most significant revelatory events in Israel’s history were the Exodus and the Sinai Covenant. In and through the *Exodus* event, God showed himself to be a liberator and savior, a God mighty in deeds on behalf of his people who were in bondage in Egypt. In the *Sinai Covenant*, God revealed his plan to have a covenant relationship with Israel. The Ten Commandments would show Israel how they should relate to God and each other. The *words* of the prophets would further reveal who God was for Israel and what he expected of them. The prophets also spoke of a New Covenant that God would enter into with Israel and all humanity. They spoke of a messiah who would bring salvation to God’s people.

Pause: *The two most important events in Israel’s history and relationship with God are the Exodus and the Sinai Covenant. Looking at your life and relationship with God, can you name one key event or experience?*

Jesus – the fullness of God’s public Revelation

In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days he has spoken through his Son.
(Heb 1:1-2)

Christ...is the Father’s one and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other Word than this one. (C 65)

In and through Jesus’ *deeds* (miracles, outreach to sinners and the marginalized, his passion, death and resurrection) and *words* (e.g., Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5-7), God spoke a perfect, complete and final word to humanity. During his time on earth, Jesus revealed to us that within the one God, there is a trinity of persons, that God is infinitely loving, forgiving,

generous and many, many other things which we can read about in the pages of Scripture.

With Jesus, public Revelation ended. By stating this, the Church is not saying that God went silent with the ascension of Jesus into heaven. While public Revelation ended with Jesus, our *understanding* of Revelation did not end. In his book, *The Essential Catholic Catechism*, Alan Schreck writes:

The truth that is found in Jesus Christ is something like a gold mine. We have discovered the mine (or rather, God has revealed the mine to us), yet we still have the task of digging out all the gold. This means that the Holy Spirit is enabling the Church over the course of centuries to “uncover” the truth revealed in Christ, and at times along the way to define the truth that she has come to understand.

So until the end of time, the Holy Spirit will be helping the Church to:

- *grow in her understanding* of what Jesus said and did;
- *state in new and fresh ways* her growing understanding of Divine Revelation (the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1992, is an example of the Church’s most recent understanding of herself and her beliefs).

Private Revelation. While the Catholic Church believes that public Revelation ended with Christ, she also believes that one form of the Holy Spirit’s ongoing activity in the Church occurs through what has been termed “private revelation,” e.g., apparitions of Mary to members of the faithful. The *Catechism* (67) states: “Throughout the ages, there have been so called ‘private’ revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ’s definitive Revelation but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful) knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church.”

The apparitions at Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe and many other shrines, have withstood the test of time because their content has consistently reinforced the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Pause: *What spoke to you most in the above section?*

Handing on the faith: transmission and protection of Divine Revelation (USC p. 23)

How is Divine Revelation, sometimes called the “deposit of faith,” transmitted from one generation to another and protected from erroneous interpretations? Our Protestant brothers and sisters would answer with one word, namely, Scripture. Martin Luther coined the phrase “*sola scriptura*” (Scripture alone). The Catholic Church teaches that Divine Revelation is transmitted through *Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition* and is protected from erroneous interpretations by the *Magisterium* (the teaching authority of the Church – the bishops in union with the Pope). All three work like three legs on a tripod.

Without Sacred Scripture we would have no written record of God’s dealings with Israel and his Revelation in Christ. **Without Sacred Tradition** we would not know how the scriptures were understood down through the ages and especially in those early centuries of Christianity. It would be like interpreting the American Constitution without any knowledge of the milieu in which it was born and how it was interpreted over the past two centuries. The bishops assembled at Vatican Council II stated:

Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are like a mirror in which the pilgrim church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything.
(Dei Verbum)

Without the Magisterium or the teaching authority of the Church to guide our interpretation of Scripture, we would have everyone acting as his/her own infallible interpreter. Because this is what happened after the Protestant Reformation, we have hundreds of Christian churches, each one interpreting Scripture in its own way.

They looked to church leadership. In the early decades and even centuries of the Church, the laity looked to Church leaders rather than to the Bible when it came to inquiring about the truth that Jesus revealed and commanded the Apostles to teach and pass on. We must remember:

- The first books of the New Testament were not written until twenty years after Jesus’ death.
- The twenty-seven books of the New Testament were not completed until at least the end of the first century.
- The Canon of Scripture was not decided until the fourth century.

The *written record* of Divine Revelation was not available to most people and it was never intended to contain all that Jesus said and did (Jn 20:25). For all

these reasons, we say that the faithful looked more to the Church than to Scripture for knowledge of the truth that Jesus came to bring. 1 Tim 3:15 states that “the *Church* of the living God helps us to uphold the truth.” In stating this, we are not saying that the Church is more important or above Scripture. She is not. Daily, the Church is called to listen to Sacred Scripture and be converted by it. Yet at the same time, it is her solemn duty to protect the scriptures from false and erroneous interpretations – something the great Apostle Paul was very aware of (Acts 20:28-30; 1 Tim 4:1-16). (Part Two will look more fully at how Divine Revelation is transmitted through Scripture and Tradition, and guarded and protected by the Church’s Magisterium.)

Pause: *What struck you most in the above section? Did you learn anything new?*

PART TWO: FAITH — OUR RESPONSE TO DIVINE REVELATION (C 142-184, USC p. 37)

Faith is, first of all, a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed. (C150)

People of deep faith see God in everything and in everyone. No burden is too heavy for them and no task is too difficult for them, because they are upheld by the power of God. (Desmond Forristal)

We exercise *natural* faith many times everyday. We believe the food we eat will not poison us. We trust that the buildings we enter will not fall down. *Supernatural* faith is the name Christians give to our response to the God who reveals himself to us. It is a gift of God usually given to us through other faith-filled people.

A faith relationship with God. The Bible is full of examples of people making a *faith response* to God’s Revelation of himself. When God revealed himself to Abraham and called him to leave his country, we are told Abraham went as God had told him (Gen 12:1-4). When God’s angel came to Mary and invited her to be the Mother of the Messiah, she responded: “Let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). As God makes himself known to us, we have the opportunity to say “yes” to God and enter into a personal faith relationship with him, or we can ignore his outreach to us. As we grow in faith, we are, with the grace of God, able to entrust our whole lives, body, mind and spirit to God trusting that no matter what happens to us, all will be okay because he will be with us. So when the *Catechism* states that faith is, first of all, our

“personal adherence to God,” it means that we respond to God by submitting and committing our lives to him, recognizing that he is the *Source* of our being, the One who daily *sustains* us in being and the One who is the *final goal* of our lives.

Faith engagement with the message of Divine Revelation. The *Catechism* (150) tells us that “faith also involves giving free assent to all that God has revealed.” In other words, we say ‘yes’ not only to God but also to the *truth or message* that he has revealed – the truth which we see above is given to us in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and protected for us through the Church’s *Magisterium*. Needless to say, coming to a point of total faith in God, total surrender to him and his ways, and total adherence to his revealed truth, is a lifelong journey demanding tremendous cooperation with God’s grace.

Pause: *Can you name one aspect of Jesus’ message that you find hard to embrace? Sometimes we hear people say “so-and-so has a very strong faith.” What do you think people mean by that? For you, what are characteristics of a strong faith?*

Other characteristics of faith (C 153-184)

The *Catechism* (150-175) names ten aspects of Christian faith. We will look briefly at most of them, often joining two of them together.

- **Faith is both personal** (“*I believe...*”) and **communal** (“*We believe...*”). We are called to give God a ‘personal yes’ like Abraham and Mary, and also called to give him a ‘communal yes’—a faith that is shared as a member of the Body of Christ. The latter is some-times called “ecclesial faith.”
- **Faith is both a gift of God (grace) and a free human act.** We only come to faith as a result of God’s initiative and nudging. Yet God will not force us to believe. We must freely choose God, just as spouses must freely choose each other.
- **Faith seeking understanding.** “Faith seeking understanding” is the classic definition of theology. The person of faith seeks to understand what he/she believes. Aided by grace, the Holy Spirit, gifted teachers, prayer, and personal study, we grow in our understanding of God and his truth. One of the exciting developments in our Church in recent years is that more and more Catholics are joining faith formation programs. As a result, they are growing in their understanding and appreciation of their Catholic faith, and also in their ability to see and respond to God in all aspects of their lives.

The *Catechism* also speaks about the necessity of faith for salvation, the importance of nourishing our faith with Scripture, works of charity and justice, and participation in the life of the Church. Finally, faith gives us a taste of the life that is to come.

Pause: *Some people have what is sometimes called “blind or non-questioning faith.” They accept what the Bible and the Church teach. Others find themselves questioning God and his ways and the Church and her teachings. What about you?*

Obstacles to faith (C 29, USC p. 16 & 14)

Despite God’s will to draw all people into a personal and communal relationship with him, sadly, many people do not develop a faith relationship with God. Why? The *Catechism* (29) names several things that can hinder us from having a faith relationship with God: “the presence of evil in our world, religious ignorance and indifference, preoccupation with the cares and riches of the world, the scandal of bad behavior of believers, currents of thoughts hostile to religion, the sinful attitude in man that makes him hide from God out of fear and flee his call.”

Helps. How can these obstacles be overcome? By perseverance in prayer, study, spiritual direction and fellowship with other faith-filled people.

Pause: *Atheism is on the rise. What are obstacles to faith today? What helps you to keep faith in God?*

Suggested action

This week make a special effort to be aware of God’s Revelation in your daily life and be open to sharing your faith with others.

Meditation

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

(Pedro Arrupe, S.J.)

Fr. Eamon Tobin ©
Ascension Catholic Church
Melbourne, FL
tobin2@live.com