IRISH CATHOLIC CATECHISM FOR ADULTS

IRISH EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

VERITAS
The Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults has taken as its source text the United States Catechism for Adults, which was developed by the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This edition for the Irish Church was developed by the Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference. It was approved by the plenary meeting of the Irish Episcopal Conference in December 2012 and subsequently received the recognitio of the Holy See in April 2014.

United States Catechism for Adults © 2006 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC 20017. All rights reserved.

The material in this publication is protected by copyright law. Except as may be permitted by law, no part of the material may be reproduced (including by storage in a retrieval system) or transmitted in any form or by any means, adapted, rented or lent without the written permission of the copyright owners. Applications for permissions should be addressed to the publisher.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Designed by Veritas Publications
The cover shows a crucifixion plaque from the seventh or eighth century found at St John’s, near Athlone; it possibly originates from an early Christian cemetery in Rinnagan, Co. Roscommon. The plaque is made from hammered bronze, and would originally have been attached to a book cover or a shrine.
Photo © National Museum of Ireland
Indexer: Eileen O’Neill
Printed in Ireland by WG Baird, Antrim
CONTENTS

Preface ................................................................................................................................. ix
Abbreviations ....................................................................................................................... xiii
Introduction .......................................................................................................................... xv

Part I. The Creed: The Faith Professed
Chapter 1. My Soul is Yearning for You, My God (Ps 42:2) ........................................... 3
Chapter 2. God Comes to Meet Us ..................................................................................... 13
Chapter 3. Proclaim the Gospel to All Creation (Mk 16:15) ........................................... 23
Chapter 4. Bring About the Obedience of Faith ................................................................. 37
Chapter 5. I Believe in God ............................................................................................... 55
Chapter 6. Man and Woman in the Beginning .................................................................. 73
Chapter 7. The Good News: God Has Sent His Son ......................................................... 85
Chapter 8. The Saving Death and Resurrection of Christ .................................................. 97
Chapter 9. Receive the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22) ................................................................. 111
Chapter 10. The Church: Reflecting the Light of Christ .................................................... 123
Chapter 11. The Four Marks of the Church ...................................................................... 137
Chapter 12. Mary: The Church's First and Most Perfect Member ................................... 155
Chapter 13. Our Eternal Destiny ....................................................................................... 165

Part II. The Sacraments: The Faith Celebrated
Chapter 14. The Celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ .......................................... 183
Chapter 15. Baptism: Becoming a Christian .................................................................... 201
Chapter 16. Confirmation: Consecrated for Mission ......................................................... 221
Chapter 17. The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Christian Life .................................................................233
Chapter 18. Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation: God is Rich in Mercy ..........................................................261
Chapter 19. Anointing the Sick and the Dying .................................................................279
Chapter 20. Holy Orders ...........................................................................................................291
Chapter 21. The Sacrament of Marriage .......................................................................................309
Chapter 22. Sacramentals and Popular Devotions ........................................................................327

Part III. Christian Morality: The Faith Lived

Chapter 23. Life in Christ – Part One .................................................................................................341
Chapter 24. Life in Christ – Part Two .................................................................................................357
Chapter 25. The First Commandment: Believe in the True God .................................................................375
Chapter 26. The Second Commandment: Reverence God’s Name .........................................................387
Chapter 27. The Third Commandment: Love the Lord’s Day .................................................................397
Chapter 28. The Fourth Commandment: Strengthen Your Family .................................................................411
Chapter 29. The Fifth Commandment: Promote the Culture of Life .........................................................423
Chapter 30. The Sixth Commandment: Marital Fidelity ........................................................................441
Chapter 31. The Seventh Commandment: Do Not Steal – Act Justly .........................................................455
Chapter 32. The Eighth Commandment: Tell the Truth ........................................................................469
Chapter 33. The Ninth Commandment: Practise Purity of Heart .........................................................481
Chapter 34. The Tenth Commandment: Embrace Poverty of Spirit ......................................................489
Christ, revealer and revelation of the Father, commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel which He promulgated in His own person in order that, through their preaching, they might communicate the gifts of God to mankind until His return in glory. The Church, faithful to the command of her Lord and in accordance with the tradition of the Apostles, has always held in high esteem catechetical formation as a means of keeping alive the proclamation and transmission of the Word of God. Accordingly, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, which is charged with the granting of the necessary approval of the Apostolic See for catechisms and other writings pertaining to catechetical instruction, has examined the *Catholic Catechism for Adults*, submitted by the Irish Episcopal Conference as required by Canon 775 § 2 of the *Code of Canon Law* and Article 3 § 4 of the Apostolic Letter *Fides per doctrinam*, hereby

APPROVES

and confirms the aforementioned Catechism in the version submitted to this Dicastery by His Eminence Seán Cardinal Brady, Archbishop of Armagh, President of the same Episcopal Conference, on March 24, 2014.

Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary.

*Given from the Seat of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization on April 25, 2014, Feast of St Mark the Evangelist.*

*Salvatore Fisichella  
President  
Octavio Ruiz Arenas  
Secretary*
PREFACE

If you are an older reader, ‘catechism’ will possibly mean a slim, soft green-covered schoolbook containing questions and answers about Christian doctrine, such as ‘Who made the world?’ If you are a middle-aged or younger reader, you might have heard from your parents and grandparents of the ‘penny catechism’ and associated it with a past age of childhood education. So it may be a surprise to find that this book is a catechism, and that it announces itself as being ‘for adults’.

A catechism is an authoritative statement of the teachings of the Catholic faith. It is the ‘go-to’ resource for any serious query about what Catholics believe, how Catholics pray and the different details of Catholic life. For the believer or sincere seeker, this Catechism will provide easily understood information, with clear explanations and apt examples. For both Catholics and others, we hope that this Catechism might inspire and console, stimulate and encourage, nourish and satisfy the heart and soul as well as the mind. It is our deepest wish that these chapters will support prayer and practice as much as discussion and enquiry.

This Catechism is intended for the spiritual formation of adult Catholics and for the religious information of other interested readers.

What’s the background to this Catechism?

On 11 October 1992, the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, St John Paul II offered the entire Church the Catechism of the Catholic Church as a ‘reference text’ for a catechesis renewed at the living sources of the faith. In the Apostolic Constitution, Fidei Depositum, at the beginning of this Catechism, it states that such a universal catechism ‘might be, as it were, a point of reference for the catechisms or compendiums that are prepared in various regions’.

Accordingly, the Irish Episcopal Conference decided that an Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults should be produced, and to this end in 2008 the Irish Conference wrote to the United States Conference of Bishops seeking permission to adapt the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults for use in Ireland. Approval for such an adaptation was received both from the United States Conference and from the Pontifical Council for the New
Evangelisation. Under the guidance of the Catechetics Commission/Council of the Irish Episcopal Conference, with practical help and guidance from the Office of the Catechism in the United States, this work of adaptation is now completed.

The publication of the Adult Catechism is taking place in the pontificate of Pope Francis, with his emphasis on evangelisation and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. In *Lumen Fidei*, we are reminded that ‘it is impossible to believe on our own. Faith is not simply an individual decision which takes place in the depths of the believer’s heart, nor a completely private relationship between the “I” of the believer and the divine “Thou”, between an autonomous subject and God. By its very nature, faith is open to the “We” of the Church; it always takes place within her communion’ (no. 39).

**For adults?**

The Adult Catechism responds to the proposal made by the Irish National Directory for Catechesis, *Share the Good News*, that adult faith development should be given priority in Ireland.

All of us need to rediscover the Good News, recognise how it shapes our lives, and see how each of us can effectively live our faith as a witness to Jesus Christ in the Ireland of today. Our study of the *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* will help us reflect on our lives, give an account of our hope, savour the truths of faith and experience the joy of faith. Then, in love, we can begin to share our precious faith with our neighbours.

The *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults*, therefore, is not primarily for schools. It may, of course, be used by teachers, but in the first instance it is not the present-day equivalent of the ‘Green Catechism’. It is for adults, and that fact is very important. It may also serve as a resource for those involved in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

What does ‘for adults’ mean? It might suggest that its language is difficult and complicated, and that the content is advanced and technical. However, effort has been made to keep the writing as accessible as possible, and to present the material simply and straightforwardly.

‘For adults’ means that the readers of this book will be, for the most part, Catholics who are baptised Church members, who have received some religious education, who know the story of Jesus Christ and his life, death,
Resurrection and Ascension, who have a basic understanding of the Scriptures, God’s revelation and its meaning, who are familiar up to a point with sacramental and religious life, and who want to deepen and strengthen their faith in order to recover an enthusiasm for their spiritual life.

There will be readers, of course, who are not sure about their religious beliefs, who are Christian in upbringing, though not necessarily by conviction. Nevertheless, such readers are curious, searching, questioning and open to what Christianity and Catholicism have to say. In a word, readers are expected to ‘come as they are’, and so this Catechism is written in such a way that it can be easily delved into.

The Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults tries to meet you where you are. It uses an adult methodology for personal learning, learning that reaches to our spirit, our individuality, our history, our particular situations and private aspirations. It tries to engage with our everyday life and personal existence.

Each chapter commences with a biography or short account of one of the saints or holy persons (many of whom are Irish) who tried to follow the Christian path in their own time and circumstance, a life story which may parallel aspects of our personal stories today. In many ways, even in the twenty-first century, we have much in common with those who went before us.

Each chapter then presents a section of God’s revelation through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit that relates to that story. It places the teaching alongside questions and doubts that arise from our daily life and our country’s culture and tries to resolve them.

Each chapter also includes short sections on particular points of doctrine, useful quotations from popes, bishops and Christian writers, prayers and Scripture passages that are relevant to the topic of the chapter, as well as summaries of the important points in the teaching, and questions for further discussion.

The Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults presents life and faith together, sets the teachings of Jesus in an encounter with daily life, invites us to judge what we ought to do about our faith, and gives us the encouragement and information we need to return to daily life in a more Christian way.

Thanks

We congratulate all the members of the Council for Catechetics for overseeing this project with enthusiasm. We offer our gratitude also to the
Episcopal Commissions/Councils for Doctrine, Education, Theology and Liturgy for their professional contributions. Special thanks to Veritas for the preparation and production of this text.

We pray that the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who inspired the saints, doctors and martyrs of the Church in Ireland in the past, may guide us in a new evangelisation. May we teach the faith in such a way that the members of the Church today will truly be Christ’s disciples of this new millennium.

✠ Seán Brady  
Archbishop of Armagh  
Primate of All Ireland

✠ Diarmuid Martin  
Archbishop of Dublin  
Primate of Ireland

✠ Dermot Clifford  
Archbishop of Cashel & Emly

✠ Michael Neary  
Archbishop of Tuam
## ABBREVIATIONS

### Church Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes Divinitus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Catechism of the Catholic Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCEO</td>
<td>Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>Code of Canon Law (Codex Iuris Canonici)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Saint John Paul II, Day of the Lord (Dies Domini)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, Enchiridion Symbolorum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Saint John Paul II, On the Eucharist (Ecclesia de Eucharistia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Pope Paul VI, On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EV</td>
<td>Saint John Paul II, The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Saint John Paul II, On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HV</td>
<td>Pope Paul VI, On the Regulation of Birth (Humanae Vitae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMI</td>
<td>Saint John Paul II, At the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (Novo Millennio Ineunte)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priestly Life and Ministry (Presbyterorum Ordinis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCIA</td>
<td>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVM</td>
<td>Saint John Paul II, On the Most Holy Rosary (Rosarium Virginis Marieae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGN</td>
<td>Irish Episcopal Conference, Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UR</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUS</td>
<td>Saint John Paul II, On Commitment to Ecumenism (Ut Unum Sint)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Books of the Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Testament</th>
<th>New Testament</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gn Genesis</td>
<td>Jon Jonah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex Exodus</td>
<td>Mic Micah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev Leviticus</td>
<td>Nah Nahum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num Numbers</td>
<td>Hab Habakkuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut Deuteronomy</td>
<td>Zeph Zephaniah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jos Joshua</td>
<td>Hg Haggai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jg Judges</td>
<td>Zec Zechariah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Ruth</td>
<td>Mal Malachi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Sm 1 Samuel</td>
<td>Acts Acts of the Apostles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Sm 2 Samuel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kgs 1 Kings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 2 Kings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chr 1 Chronicles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chr 2 Chronicles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezra Ezra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neh Nehemiah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tob Tobit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jdt Judith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Est Esther</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Mac 1 Maccabees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mac 2 Maccabees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps Psalms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov Proverbs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccl (Qo) Ecclesiastes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Song of Songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wis Wisdom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccles (Sir) Sirach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Isaiah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer Jeremiah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam Lamentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar Baruch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ez Ezekiel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dn Daniel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos Hosea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jl Joel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am Amos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ob Obadiah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Matthew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mk Mark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lk Luke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jn John</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts Acts of the Apostles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rm Romans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 1 Corinthians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Cor 2 Corinthians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gal Galatians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eph Ephesians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Philippians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Colossians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Th 1 Thessalonians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Th 2 Thessalonians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Tim 1 Timothy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Tim 2 Timothy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti Titus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phm Philemon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heb Hebrews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jas James</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Pt 1 Peter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pt 2 Peter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Jn 1 John</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jn 2 John</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Jn 3 John</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jude Jude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rv Revelation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

[The Catechism of the Catholic Church] is meant to encourage and assist in the writing of new local catechisms, which must take into account various situations and cultures, while carefully preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to Catholic doctrine.

– Saint John Paul II, The Deposit of Faith (Fidei Depositum), IV, no. 4

On 11 October 1992, St John Paul II published his apostolic constitution The Deposit of Faith, promulgating the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). He chose the publication date to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

Saint John Paul II envisioned the Catechism as a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local catechisms. The bishops of the United States subsequently discussed in depth what they might do to follow the pope’s call to prepare a local catechism. It would need to take into account the local situation and culture, while at the same time preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to Catholic teaching found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In June 2000, the bishops determined that a national adult catechism would be an effective way to achieve this goal.

The Irish Bishops examined the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults when it was published in 2006. They decided that a similar catechism would be suitable for Ireland and asked permission from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to produce a version for the Irish Church. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops graciously granted permission, and this publication is the result.

Before describing the content and approach of this adult catechism, several preliminary matters need to be presented. First, it should be noted that historically the term catechism has acquired a variety of meanings. It comes from a Greek word that means ‘to echo’. Before the invention of the printing press in 1450, in the Church and elsewhere, learning was mainly an oral experience. A Church teaching would be recited, and the listener would be instructed to ‘echo’ it, or repeat it, until it was learned. This way
of learning has been around since before the Church. Jewish teachers from both before and after the time of Jesus taught the Scriptures by again and again asking the learner to repeat verses.

The invention of the printing press made it possible to adapt the ‘speak and echo’ method of catechesis into a question-and-answer approach that could be fixed in print. The Church adopted this approach. It is especially evident in the influential catechisms of St Peter Canisius (1521–97) and St Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621).

THE ROMAN CATECHISM, 1566

A third development in catechisms occurred when the bishops at the Council of Trent in 1563 undertook the production of a printed catechism that would be a comprehensive, systematic presentation of Catholic teachings. Saint Pius V completed this work and published it as the Roman Catechism in 1566. It sought to present Catholic truths from the viewpoint of their inherent coherence and value for instructing the faithful. It became the enduring sourcebook for local catechisms up to its last edition in 1978.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, for Irish Catholics the word ‘catechism’ meant the Maynooth Catechism. It was inspired largely by an earlier catechism published by Archbishop James Butler of Cashel in 1775 called the Butler Catechism. The Maynooth Catechism in the Butler tradition, fruit of the 1875 plenary synod of the Irish Bishops, was the first Irish joint effort to provide a national catechism acceptable to all. This Maynooth–Butler catechism of 1882 was an influential text supplying 42 per cent of the questions and answers in the Baltimore Catechism (1885) and adopted in its entirety in Australia. The Maynooth Catechism, or ‘Green Catechism’ as it came to be popularly known, gave unity to the teaching and understanding of the faith of Irish Catholics right up to the dawn of the Second Vatican Council in 1962.

At that time, St John XXIII articulated a vision for the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council that charged them to guard and present more effectively the deposit of Christian doctrine in order to make it more accessible to the Christian faithful and all people of goodwill in the contemporary world.
THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 1992

Eventually, it became clear that the development of a new universal catechism would be beneficial, especially since there had been significant growth in issues and insights in the Church and in society since 1566. In 1985, a synod of bishops was convened in Rome to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. Many of the synod fathers expressed the desire for a universal catechism that would be a reference book for the catechisms that would be prepared in various regions. The proposal was accepted, and the outcome was the Catechism of the Catholic Church, published in 1992. A new edition, which contained some modifications, was released in 1997.

This Catechism of the Catholic Church is arranged in four parts: ‘The Profession of Faith’; ‘The Celebration of the Christian Mystery’; ‘Life in Christ’; and ‘Christian Prayer’. Its content is faithful to Apostolic Tradition, Scripture and the Magisterium. It incorporates the heritage of the Doctors, Fathers and saints of the Church. At the same time, it illuminates, with the light of faith, contemporary situations, problems and questions.

The Catechism begins with God’s Revelation, to which we are called to respond in faith, worship, moral witness and a life of prayer. The entire text is guided by the fact that Christian life is rooted in the creative and providential outpouring of the Holy Trinity. The Catechism centres itself on the saving life, teachings, death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary. This text is a work by and of the Church.

The goal of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is to help facilitate the lifelong conversion of the whole person to the Father’s call to holiness and eternal life. At its heart is the celebration of the Christian mysteries, especially the Eucharist and the life of prayer. Users of the Catechism are called to witness Christ, the Church and God’s Kingdom of salvation, love, justice, mercy and peace in the world.

While the Catechism is addressed to a number of audiences – bishops, priests, teachers, writers – it is meant for all the faithful who wish to deepen their knowledge of the Catholic faith. Further, it is offered to every person who wants to know what the Catholic Church teaches.
THE IRISH CATHOLIC CATECHISM FOR ADULTS

The *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* is a reworking of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, including much of its doctrinal and devotional material, while inserting it in the Irish local, cultural, social and religious context. The United States text is itself an adaptation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, providing an appropriate text for adult faith formation, religious education and private study. So it is fitting that, as the Irish Church in the nineteenth century gave the *Maynooth Catechism* as a model for the *Baltimore Catechism*, the American Church, in our time, returns the favour.

This text follows the *Catechism’s* arrangement of content: ‘The Creed’; ‘The Sacraments’; ‘Moral Life’; and ‘Prayer’. It emphasises the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Sacraments, moral principles and the heritage of the Doctors and saints of the Church. It is an organic and systematic expression of the Apostolic Tradition, expressed in an inspired way in Sacred Scripture and authoritatively interpreted by the Magisterium of the Church.

The Structure of Each Chapter of This Book

1. Story or Lesson of Faith
2. Teaching: Its Foundation and Application
3. Sidebars
4. Relationship of Catholic Teaching to the Culture
5. Questions for Discussion
6. Doctrinal Statements
7. Meditation and Prayer
1. Stories or Lessons of Faith

One of the deeply held beliefs of the Irish people through the ages has been the connection with our dear departed. This human value reflects the revealed truth in the article of the Creed: the ‘Communion of Saints’. The Church is an assembly throughout space and time of all the people of God, living and dead. (cf. CCC, no. 946)

The communion of saints means that ‘none of us lives for himself and none of us dies for himself’ (Rm 14:7). This is true of the living and those who have died. The life and death of Jesus Christ is for our salvation and sanctification. Similarly, the lives and deaths of the holy ones who preceded us work to our benefit as well. The saints intercede for us with Christ, to the Father, in the Spirit, by their eternal concern for those whom they love. They provide an example and a headline for us, surely, but more than that, their actions and merits, through Christ and the sacraments, links both the living and risen people, earth
and heaven, time and eternity, indeed, the past, the present and the future, in a holy and beneficially effective exchange of grace, so that ‘… what each one does or suffers in and for Christ bears fruit for all’. (CCC, no. 961)

The preface and most of the chapters start with stories of Catholics, many from Ireland. As far as possible, this Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults relates the Church’s teachings to the culture of Ireland, both to affirm positive elements in our culture and to challenge the negative. One way of doing this is found in the stories that begin each chapter. Most of these narratives are biographical sketches of Irish saints or other outstanding Catholics who represent the variety of witnesses to the Catholic way of life. These stories give us glimpses of how Catholics participated in Ireland’s history and culture. Those chosen for these examples are Catholics whose lives or actions illustrate a particular Church teaching. From the earliest days of the Church, when St Athanasius wrote the life of St Anthony of the Desert, it was clear that telling stories about saints and holy people encourages others to want to be like them and is an effective way of teaching Catholic doctrine.

2. Teaching: Its Foundation and Application

In each chapter, the introductory story is followed by a presentation of a particular teaching. This foundational teaching provides expositions on aspects of the Creed, the Sacraments, the Commandments and prayer. A few comments about each of these sections are now given.

A. Creed: The Faith Professed

When we pray or recite the Creed, we can be reminded that Catholicism is a revealed religion. God is the author of our faith. All that we are expected to believe is summed up in the revelation of Jesus Christ. God has spoken all that is necessary for our Salvation in Jesus, the Word made flesh. God also gives us the gift of faith that enables us to respond, accept and live out the implications of Divine Revelation. In this first section of the book, the roles of Apostolic Tradition, Scripture and Magisterium are clearly outlined.
FATHERS AND DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

The title ‘Father of the Church’ has been given to those whose sanctity and teaching served to help others understand, defend and pass on the Faith. Those who have achieved this distinction lived from the earliest days of the Church up to the last Father in the West (present-day Western Europe), St Isidore of Seville (sixth century), and the last Father in the East (present-day southeastern Europe and Asia Minor), St John Damascene (seventh century).

The golden age of the Fathers in the fourth and fifth centuries included such figures as St Basil, St John Chrysostom, St Athanasius and St Gregory Nazianzen in the Eastern Church, and St Jerome, St Ambrose and St Augustine in the Western Church.

The title ‘Doctor of the Church’ has been applied to persons from any era in the Church’s history whose sanctity and writings have had a profound influence on theological and spiritual thought. Doctors of the Church include such figures as St Thomas Aquinas, St Catherine of Siena, St Anthony of Padua, St Teresa of Ávila, St John of the Cross, St Robert Bellarmine and St Thérèse of Lisieux.

B. Sacraments: The Faith Celebrated
The second section of this text deals with the celebration of the Christian mystery in the liturgy and the Sacraments. Through the Sacraments the Holy Spirit makes available to us the mysteries of God’s revelation in Christ. The saving gifts of Christ’s ministry are encountered in the liturgy and are available to us. This is evident in the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist), the Sacraments of Healing (Penance and the Anointing of the Sick) and the Sacraments at the Service of Communion (Marriage and Holy Orders). Through the Sacraments, God shares his holiness with us so that we, in turn, can make the world holier.
C. Christian Morality: The Faith Lived

The third section of this text offers an extensive exposition of the foundations of the Christian moral life. Themes of covenant, grace, happiness, sin, forgiveness, virtues, the action of the Holy Spirit, the call to love God and neighbour, the dignity of the person and the Church’s social teachings are part of the foundational elements for morality. Subsequently, when the Ten Commandments are presented, it is easier to see how the Covenant with God comes first and how the Commandments are ways in which we live out this Covenant. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presents to us a summary of the New Covenant in the Beatitudes. Hence, the Commandments are more than moral laws; our commitment to living them flows from our response to the Covenant we have with God, as members of the Church strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

D. Prayer: The Faith Prayed

The last section of this text bears an essential relationship to the second section on the liturgy, which is the prayer life of the Church herself. This section deals with vocal prayer, meditation and contemplation, and the types of prayer – adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise. A special chapter is devoted to a commentary on the Our Father, which is the Lord’s Prayer. It seemed suitable here to acknowledge the special link between doctrine and prayer so that a Church teaching is not seen as an abstract idea, and so that prayer not be without a solid doctrinal foundation.

3. Sidebars

The doctrinal section in each chapter is followed by a sidebar composed of three questions with answers taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This is one of several ways in which the reader is drawn to explore the extensive resources of the universal *Catechism*. Throughout the text, other sidebars on various topics appear where appropriate.
4. Relationship of Catholic Teaching to the Culture
The next section in each chapter returns to the theme of relating Church teaching for an Irish society. There are many issues to address, such as human dignity, fairness, respect, solidarity and justice. Each chapter contains a reflection on how its teaching can apply to our culture. Sometimes there are positive elements; at other times, challenges are to be met. Issues such as disbelief, relativism, subjectivism and differences about morality highlight conflicts between Church teachings and the present culture. The purpose of this section in each chapter is to point to the way in which the Church proclaims salvation to the culture, based on confidence in the validity and relevance of Catholic teaching.

It might also be helpful to note that in keeping with cultural practice, the text uses horizontally inclusive language, that is, describing human persons according to both male and female genders. The only exceptions to this practice are when the *Catechism* or some other source is quoted directly. References to God in this text maintain traditional usage.

5. Questions for Discussion
Following the section of each chapter that addresses aspects of faith as applied to Irish culture are questions that allow the readers to explore personal and communal ways of internalising the teaching of the Church.

6. Doctrinal Statements
Following both a story of faith and a concise review of the Church’s teaching and its relation to the culture, each chapter contains a review of points of doctrine covered in the chapter.

7. Meditation and Prayer
As far as possible, this book is meant to draw the reader into a prayerful attitude before God. Every chapter concludes with a meditation drawn from a saint or spiritual writer. A catechism needs to be more than a summary of teachings. God has called all of us to prayer and holiness. Doctrines are
distillations of prayer and thought made possible by the Holy Spirit’s guidance of the Church. Prayer is the gate that leads us to a deeper understanding of the Word of God and to the hidden treasures of doctrinal teachings. A formal prayer is presented at this point in each chapter. It is usually drawn from the Church’s liturgy or from traditional prayers of the Church so that the reader may become more familiar with the prayer life of the universal Church. There is also a collection of some traditional Catholic prayers in the appendix.

Glossary

Finally, an alphabetised glossary of many terms appears at the end of this book. The definitions are brief. It is recommended that readers also consult the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which has an extensive glossary. While studying the *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults*, readers can consult these glossaries for definitions of words that are not familiar to them.

CONCLUSION

It is our hope that this *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* will be an aid and a guide for deepening faith. It may serve as a resource for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and for the ongoing catechesis of adults. It will also be of interest to those who wish to become acquainted with Catholicism. Finally, it can serve as an invitation for all the faithful to continue growing in the understanding of Jesus Christ and his saving love for all people.
PART I

THE CREED:
THE FAITH PROFESSED
1 MY SOUL IS YEARNING FOR YOU, MY GOD (Ps 42:2)

THE HUMAN QUEST FOR GOD
– CCC, NOS. 27–43

IRISH MISSIONARY MONKS

Our ancestors, the Celts, were a wandering people. They originated in central Europe, and through the centuries migrated east, to Galatia in Turkey, and west, to France (ancient Gaul) and Spain (Galicia). Eventually they arrived on these islands around the second century before Christ and settled in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Though they spread over a vast expanse of territory, the Celts never formed a strong and united political state. The Angles and Saxons (Germanic tribes) conquered England in the sixth century AD but, while the rulers changed, the native population remained Celtic. Celts survive to this day in the six most western parts of Europe: Brittany in France, Galicia in Spain, Cornwall in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The Celtic people of Ireland, Scotland and Wales welcomed the coming of Christianity. The ancient Celtic religion had much in common with Christianity, including a familiarity with the spirit world, an appreciation for creation and nature, and an awareness of the after-life and immortality. The Celts placed a high value on learning and literature, on personal sacrifice and asceticism (spiritual training) and on humble heroism. It is no accident, then, that the early Irish and British Celtic Christian monks, following the example of the Apostles and the history of their ancestors, took to the sea and the road to spread the Christian Gospel back to a Europe in disarray after the collapse of the Roman Empire.
From Sedulius in the fifth century to Malachy of Armagh, friend of St Bernard of Clairvaux, and the Franciscan Duns Scotus in the twelfth, Irish and Celtic monks and priests criss-crossed Europe and beyond, bringing with them their missionary zeal, their apostolic fervour and their scholarly reputation. As they fanned out throughout the continent, Ireland became known as the ‘land of saints and scholars’. Historians since agree that the influence of Ireland on Europe’s Christian Middle Ages was important and impressive.

What is particularly noteworthy about many of these men and women is their intense humanity and their sheer energy. Probably the most energetic was St Columbanus. He first travelled to the continent from Ireland in 575 when England and Germany were still pagan, and France and Italy were in chaos. He and his disciples and followers were responsible for the foundation of over one hundred European monasteries during the next century. He himself established the great monasteries of Luxeuil in France and Bobbio in Italy, where his name and memory is still green.

Another was St Brendan the Sailor who lived in the sixth century. His travels quickly became legendary, as his attempts to preach the Gospel to the mysterious islands of the Atlantic brought him to the edge of the known world and beyond. The story of his travels thrilled Europe for many centuries, and provided evidence that Irish monks did land on Iceland and could indeed have reached the coast of North America years before the Norsemen and Christopher Columbus.

One who never left the island of Ireland, but whose name was carried afar, was Brigid of Kildare. Irish missionaries brought her devotion with them. Though little is known of her life, it is clear that her influence on the early Celtic Church was immense. She was called ‘Mary of the Gael’, and it has even been claimed that the English word ‘bride’ is derived from her name.

The Celtic saints’ stories of endeavour, zeal, enthusiasm and energy are stimulating and encouraging. They were inspirational leaders and extraordinary teachers. They tapped into the depths of human desire, pursued it to heroic lengths, but directed it to the preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven and spreading the Word of God. In so doing, they just might have laid one of the foundations for modern European civilisation.
But nothing could have been further from their minds. They were seeking God himself. One monk wrote:

To go to Rome, much labour, little profit!
The King you seek there, 
unless you bring him with you, 
you will not find.

And they knew, unlike tourists and travellers today, that they would probably never return home. They accepted the sacrifice of exile for Christ. As the greatest of them all, St Columcille of Iona, said:

There is a grey eye  
That will look back upon Erin. 
It shall never see again 
The men of Erin nor her women.

THE UNIVERSAL DESIRE FOR GOD

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

– CCC, no. 27

People have always asked fundamental questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? Why do I need to struggle to achieve my goals? Why is it so hard to love and be loved? What is the meaning of sickness, death and evil? What will happen after death?

These questions relate to human existence. They also move one to ask questions about the divine because they pertain to God’s existence. When asked with ever-deeper reflection, they uncover an inner sense of longing for God. They challenge our minds, but the mind’s answers are not always sufficient. We must also become aware of the mysterious yearning of the human heart.
God has planted in every human heart the hunger and longing for the infinite, for nothing less than God. Saint Augustine, a theologian from the fifth century, said it best: ‘Our heart is restless until it rests in you’ (St Augustine, *The Confessions*, bk. 1, chap. 1, 1; cf. CCC, no. 30).

How is our quest for God awakened? God first pursues us; this spurs us to search for him for whom we were made. The *Catechism* presents three paths through which every person can come to God: creation, the human person and Revelation. In the next chapter, Revelation will be presented as the greatest and most essential path to God. He is discovered also through creation and through the mystery of our inner life.

**THROUGH CREATION**

*The heavens declare the glory of God.*

– Ps 19:2

*Ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind’s understanding of created things.*

– Rm 1:20

Saint Augustine asks us to look at the beauty of the world and let it open us to God. ‘Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea … question the beauty of the sky … All respond, “See, we are beautiful”. Their beauty is a profession. These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One who is not subject to change?’ (St Augustine, Sermon 241, no. 2; cf. CCC, no. 32).

Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have seen the universe as evidence of God’s existence. The order, harmony and beauty of the world point to an intelligent Creator. The purposefulness of creation from the inanimate to human life similarly points to a wise Creator. The fact that all visible things come to be and eventually pass out of earthly existence points to an eternal Creator who has no beginning and no end and who sustains all that he has created (cf. CCC, no. 32).
THROUGH THE HUMAN PERSON

*I thank you who wonderfully made me.*

– Ps 139:14

Every human person seeks to know the truth and to experience goodness. Moral goodness appeals to us. We treasure our freedom and strive to maintain it. We hear the voice of our conscience and want to live by it. We long for absolute happiness.

These experiences make us aware of our souls and our spiritual nature. The more we become aware of these truths, the more we are drawn to the reality of God who is the Supreme Good. These are the seeds of eternity within us that have their origins only in God. Saint Augustine confirmed this insight when he prayed, ‘That I may know myself, that I may know you.’

Since this is true, why have so many not found God?

Many reasons account for the lack of familiarity with God. The presence of so much suffering and pain in the world disheartens some and moves them to rebel against the idea of a God who would let this happen. Some do not know who God is because no one has shared the Good News of his self-revelation with them. Ignorance of religion or indifference to it is another cause.

The scandalous behaviour of some believers frequently drives honest seekers away from religion. Sinful conduct weakens the ability of many to assume responsibility for their actions and causes them to hide from God (cf. Gn 3:8; Jn 3:19ff.). Others may resist acknowledging God because they do not wish to follow and obey God. Still others may allow their lives to become so cluttered, hectic, or busy that there is little room for God.

Throughout history, people have yearned for God. Despite obstacles and occasions of violent opposition to belief in God, millions of people have continued to search for God. The spiritual dynamism of the human heart, having its origin in God, endures in countless and inspiring ways. Often, just when the shadows of doubt and scepticism appear to have lain the great search to rest, our yearning for God surges again to witness to the light of God’s inherent attractiveness in human life.
SEEKERS IN THE DESERT

Religious culture in Ireland used to be one of ‘dwelling’. Irish people in the past seemed content and satisfied with their religious home. Now, some Irish people feel quite lost. The familiar landmarks no longer comfort and direct them. They describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ but not ‘religious’, and confess to be ‘seekers’ for a religious home. They travel in a cultural

FROM THE CATECHISM

1. How have people expressed their quest for God throughout history?
In many ways, throughout history down to the present day, men have given their expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behaviour: in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations and so forth. These forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a religious being (cf. Acts 17:26-28). (CCC, no. 28)

2. What do we mean by ‘proofs’ for God’s existence?
Created in God’s image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of ‘converging and convincing arguments’, which allow us to attain certainty about the truth. These ‘ways’ of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world and the human person. (CCC, no. 31)

3. Can we know God?
The Church teaches that the one true God, our Creator and Lord, can be known with certainty from his works, by the natural light of human reason (cf. First Vatican Council, can. 2 §1: H. Denzinger and A. Schonmetzer, Enchiridion Symbolorum [DS] 3026). (CCC, no. 47)

SEEKERS IN THE DESERT

Religious culture in Ireland used to be one of ‘dwelling’. Irish people in the past seemed content and satisfied with their religious home. Now, some Irish people feel quite lost. The familiar landmarks no longer comfort and direct them. They describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ but not ‘religious’, and confess to be ‘seekers’ for a religious home. They travel in a cultural
landscape that in some important ways provides support for belief in God, while at the same time discourages and corrodes the faith in practice. In common with the rest of European culture, the religious and human landscape of Ireland seems like a desert. As Pope Benedict XVI said on the occasion of his inauguration:

And there are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God’s darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.

Nevertheless, there are shoots of green and signs of new life. Some younger people who had once drifted away from faith, today are seeking a connection with a Catholic Church community. Among the many causes of this, two stand out: the experience of having children who need a proper upbringing, and the experience of one’s own longing for direction, meaning and hope.

Catholicism in Ireland continues to attract members each year. The new intercultural society, the return of Irish emigrants, the change in family situations, urbanisation and the flux that Irish society is in, has meant that more adults are seeking the sacraments and to join the Catholic Church. Through the RCIA, the pastoral process for initiating new members, the Church leads them to knowledge of the truths of faith, to the celebration of the Seven Sacraments, to commitment to the moral life – including the forming of a social conscience – and to the practice of prayer.

The Church does more than welcome new members; she forms disciples. Seekers can begin to find in the Church fulfilment of their heart’s desires. They are invited to undertake a spiritual journey that is focused on Jesus Christ and his Kingdom of salvation, love, justice and mercy. Jesus reminds us that this Kingdom is already in our midst, and as his disciples we are called to assist him in bringing it to its fullness.

This is the Church’s invitation to seekers who want to discover a satisfying answer to their spiritual hungers. Her invitation is rich: to seekers, old and new, and to those who might label themselves as alienated or
indifferent, the Church offers Jesus Christ and his love, the fulfilment of hope. The Church offers a way of belonging that teaches truths that free one from sin and its power. The Church initiates members into an intimate relationship with God – indeed, into a participation in the divine life – where one will find genuine joy and fulfilment. This is all possible because of Jesus Christ and his love.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are you looking for in life? What are your goals and ideals? How does God and the Church play a part in what you are seeking? How is your life a journey toward God?

2. As a seeker, how do you look for truth? When you hear of truth or behold beauty or experience goodness, what do you think? If you seek for God, what has made this possible? What have you found in your search thus far?

3. As a Catholic, how are you searching for God? Why does seeking God keep your relationship with him dynamic? How does the Church help you in your search for God? How does your family affect your faith?

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

• God has planted in every human heart the hunger and longing for the infinite – for nothing less than himself.

• Only in God will we find the truth, peace and happiness for which we never stop searching. Created in God’s image, we are called to know and love the Lord.

• God can be known with certainty from his works in creation and from the spiritual nature of the human person by the light of natural reason, although there are many difficulties in coming to this knowledge because of humanity’s historical and sinful condition.

• By our openness to goodness and truth, our experience, our sense of moral goodness, our listening to the voice of conscience and our desire for happiness, we can discern our spiritual soul and can come to see that this could only have its origin in God.
• We can speak of God even if our limited language cannot exhaust the mystery of who he is.
• While we can come to know something about God by our natural power of reason, there is a deeper knowledge of God that comes to us through Divine Revelation.

MEDITATION

Where did I find you, that I came to know you? You were not within my memory before I learned of you. Where, then, did I find you before I came to know you, if not within yourself, far above me? …

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! … Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. [O eternal truth, true love and beloved eternity. You are my God. To you I sigh day and night.] … You were with me but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you; now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me and I burn for your peace.

– St Augustine, *The Confessions*, bk. 10, chap. 26, 27, 37

PRAYER

Like the deer that yearns
for running streams,
so my soul is yearning
for you, my God.

My soul is thirsting for God,
the living God;
when can I enter and appear
before the face of God?
My tears have become my bread,
by day, by night,
as they say to me all the day long:
‘Where is your God?’

These things will I remember
as I pour out my soul:
For I would go to the place
of your wondrous tent,
all the way to the house of God,
amid cries of gladness and thanksgiving,
the throng keeping joyful festival.

Why are you cast down, my soul;
why groan within me?
Hope in God; I will praise him yet again,
my saving presence and my God.

– Ps 42:2-6

God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.
– St Augustine
Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There an angel of the Lord appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As Moses looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So he decided, ‘I must go over to look at this remarkable sight to see why the bush is not burned’.

When the Lord saw him coming over to look at the sight more closely, God called out to him from the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’

Moses answered, ‘Here I am.’

God said, ‘Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. The cry of the Israelites has reached me and I have truly noted that the Egyptians are oppressing them. Come now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’

But Moses said, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?’

God answered, ‘I will be with you; and this shall be your proof that it is I who have sent you: when you bring my people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this very mountain.’

‘But,’ Moses said to God, ‘when I go to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your fathers 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 … This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations.’

But Moses said to the Lord, ‘If you please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past, nor recently, nor now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and tongue.’

The Lord said to him, ‘Who gives one man the gift of speech and no such gift to another? Is it not I, the Lord? Go then! It is I who will assist you in speaking and will teach you what you are to say.’

Yet Moses persisted, ‘If you please, Lord, send someone else.’

Then the Lord relented, ‘Have you not your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know that he is an eloquent speaker. He shall speak to the people for you. He shall be your spokesman. I will assist both you and him and teach the two of you both what you are to do.’ (Adapted from Exodus 3:1-15; 4:10-16)

The Old Testament is filled with numerous occasions where God reveals himself, such as he does to Moses in this passage from Exodus. The event of God’s self-disclosure to Moses at the burning bush is an excellent introduction to the mystery of God’s revelatory acts, a truth of our faith that is the focus of this chapter.

GOD REVEALS HIS LOVING PLAN TO SAVE US

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.

– First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith (Dei Filius), no. 1870

Through the use of reason, we can learn much about God from both creation and conscience, but Revelation enables us to learn about God’s
inner life and his loving plan to save us from sin and share in his divine life. No amount of unaided thinking could penetrate such a mystery. God freely chose to share this hidden mystery with us. God’s sharing was an act of friendship for us, revealing himself as one reveals his or her heart to a friend. Love does such things.

God’s Revelation unfolded gradually throughout history. ‘Wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation, he manifested himself to our first parents from the very beginning. After the fall, he buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption’ (Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* [*Dei Verbum*; DV], no. 3; cf. Gn 3:15).

God continued over the succeeding centuries to provide providential care for those he created in his image and likeness. He called Abraham to make of him a great nation, a chosen people through whom salvation would come to the world. In the encounter of God with Moses, God reveals himself as

### FROM THE CATECHISM

1. **How does God freely reveal himself?**
   This he does by revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men. God has fully revealed this plan by sending us his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. (CCC, no. 50)

2. **What response to Revelation did God plan for men and women?**
   By revealing himself, God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity. (CCC, no. 52)

3. **If Revelation is complete, what is the next step?**
   Even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries. (CCC, no. 66)
‘I am who am’. These words reveal something about God, who, nevertheless, still remains mysterious. God is revealed as the source of all that is, but who he is will be revealed still further as he continues his loving work for his people. The prophets, in reflecting on God’s actions, will make clearer the nature of God. But the clearest Revelation will come in Jesus Christ.

‘At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son’ (Heb 1:1-2). This Son was Jesus Christ, the fullness of Revelation. Wonderful indeed is this mystery of our faith in Jesus Christ, as we say in professing it, ‘He was made visible in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed to the gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory’ (1 Tm 3:16).

Revelation is the self-disclosure of the living God. God shows himself by both great deeds, as narrated for us in Scripture, and by the words that illumine the meaning of these deeds (see DV, no. 2). In Revelation, the tremendous gulf between God and the human race is bridged. More profoundly, God desires to have an intimate relationship with all people. The process of Revelation, which took centuries to unfold, reached its magnificent fulfilment in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Revelation is the act by which God speaks to and forms a covenant people.¹ The covenant between God and humanity was first established with Noah after the great Flood, when God in his mercy promised that never again would there be a catastrophe that threatens the existence of all of humanity. God entered into a covenant later with Abraham and then with the people of Israel at the time of their exodus from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. He affirmed that they will always be his people.

This is the grand drama of the dialogue between God and his people that takes place in the lived history of the people encompassed by his love. It includes the people’s inspired interpretation of historical events that reflects an ever-greater understanding of God’s will and presence as they advanced on their pilgrimage through the centuries.

It requires faith to respond to God’s revealing word and to perceive the divine action in history. There are those who do not have faith or who

¹A covenant was originally a treaty in which an overlord and a vassal accepted certain responsibilities toward each other. In the Old Testament, this idea of covenant became the primary analogy for the relationship between God and his people.
consciously reject living in faith. They cannot or will not perceive God’s presence or action in the world and sometimes scoff at or ridicule those who do. But for many people, God makes faith possible and, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, faith helps those people to grow in an appreciation of how God has worked in history to love and save us.

God’s Revelation disturbed and changed the patriarchs, prophets, Apostles and others. When Moses encountered God in the burning bush, Moses trembled and took off his shoes, for he stood on holy ground (cf. Ex 3:1-6). Isaiah beheld the glory of God, and when the vision disappeared he saw himself in a brand-new light, ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips’ (Is 6:5). Faced with the revelation of divine power in Jesus, Peter begged, ‘Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man’ (Lk 5:8). Revelation calls for a response of faith and conversion, not just in times past, but today as well.

Because the Christian covenant is definitive, there will be no new public Revelation until the final glorious manifestation of Jesus Christ at the end days (DV, no. 4). All that is needed for salvation has already been revealed. What are called private revelations, that is, messages such as those given by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Lourdes and Fatima, add nothing to what was publicly revealed up and through Christ but can help inspire a more profound commitment to what has been revealed through public Revelation.

THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE

The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time.

— Pope Paul VI, On Evangelisation in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi), no. 20

Religion does not exist in a vacuum. It operates in a given culture at a particular moment in time. The understanding of a living God who has revealed a loving plan to save us takes place in real time. There is much in our culture that is good and favourable to faith and morality. The freedom to practise our faith is a treasured principle in our society.
But there are troubling developments. Most history today is taught from a secular viewpoint. Such a prevailing attitude often makes it hard for believers to realise there is a starting point in God’s Revelation for understanding human history. The culture in which we live is, in many ways, individualistic, secular and materialistic. This poses a challenge to Christians and other believers who are asked to respond in faith to God who has revealed himself. It often requires great patience and much virtue to live a faith-filled life, to hand on Gospel values to children and others, and to interact with people – often the young – whose lives are affected by counter-Christian cultural currents.

In many ways, attitudes and actions in Europe are fostering a ‘culture of disbelief’. The principle of complete separation of State and Church is being more and more widely espoused. The actual separation of Church and State represents political and civic maturity but society has reached the stage in which people of faith are under pressure to act publicly as though religion does not matter. This has caused many believers to think their faith is strictly a private matter and that it should have no influence on society and politics. This is an exaggerated deference to pluralism and tolerance. The truth should be shared or given witness to, but of course with respect and love.

The Church’s response is to bring the Gospel into our culture in order to build on what is positive in it and to change what is not. This is one aspect of evangelisation, the proclamation of the Gospel to all peoples. It assumes that we first must be evangelised ourselves, calling each other to an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. It means embracing truth, beauty and goodness wherever it can be found in our society, while at the same time removing falsehood and injustice from our land.

We must remember that all is not darkness. There are rays of light in our culture shed by Jesus, the Light of the World. There are seeds of the Word in our society sown by Jesus, the tireless Sower of love and truth. We do not work alone. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide.

Cultural change is slow, but it can take place through perseverance and God’s grace. Evangelisers need a broad vision as well as wisdom, courage, fortitude and perseverance. Evangelising a culture relies on deep insight into the mysteries of our faith and a keen vision for understanding the basis of our culture.

Culture is not just an abstraction; it is the sum of the beliefs, attitudes and practices of individuals and communities. Evangelising a culture means
dealing with people. It involves more than persuading people of the truth of Christ and the Church. Sharing the Gospel with others means offering them its transforming power, not just for their minds, but also for their hearts. In our daily prayer, we need to lift up our fellow citizens and their needs to God’s loving concern for them.

The Catholic Church provides us with numerous ways to witness and teach the truth and love of Jesus Christ. Church history shows that the renewal of faith is frequently accompanied by a return to the truths of the faith and witnessing to those truths. Such a renewal of faith will gradually influence our culture.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When friends and family members converse with one another, what do they reveal about themselves? What does God reveal of himself to us in treating us as friends and family members? How does God’s Revelation give meaning to our lives?

2. What is meant when we say that we have a ‘revealed’ religion? What are positive features in our culture? How can culture be converted and transformed by the Gospel?

3. What would help you to spend more time reading and praying over God’s revealed word in Scripture? Why can we say that growth in our faith will strengthen us to affect public policy with our beliefs?

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

- Revelation is the self-disclosure of the living God and his plan to save us. Revelation shows us that God desires to have an intimate and loving relationship with everyone.

- The process of Revelation took centuries to unfold. God gradually communicated the divine mystery by words and deeds.

- From the beginning, God established a personal relationship with our first parents. After the Fall, he encouraged them with the hope of Salvation by promising them Redemption.
• God’s Revelation resulted in a relationship with people that is called a 
covenant in Scripture. Scripture tells us that God entered into a covenant 
with Noah and all living beings (cf. Gn 9:16).
• Revelation is an act by which God speaks to and forms a covenant people 
beginning with Abraham. He then chose Moses through whom the 
divine law was given to the covenant people.
• Through the prophets God prepared the covenant people to look 
forward to the coming of the Messiah who would bring the salvation 
destined for all people.
• Revelation reached its fullness in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The Son is the 
Father’s definitive Word. No new public revelation will occur before the 
final, glorious manifestation of Jesus Christ.
• God’s Revelation is transmitted to us by Apostolic Tradition and 
Scripture. This is the topic of our next chapter.

MEDITATION

Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation of God:

Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father’s one, perfect, and 
unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no 
other word than this one. Saint John of the Cross, among others, 
commented strikingly on Hebrews 1:1-2: ‘In giving us his Son, his 
only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at 
once in this sole Word – and he has no more to say … because what 
he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at 
one by giving us the All Who is His Son. Any person questioning 
God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only 
of foolish behaviour but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes 
entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other 
novelty.’

– CCC, no. 65, citing St John of the Cross, 
The Ascent of Mount Carmel, 2, 22, 3-5
PRAYER

Forever is your word, O Lord,
standing firm in the heavens.
From age to age is your truth;
like the earth, it stands firm.
Your word is a lamp for my feet,
and a light for my path.

– Ps 119:89-90; 105

Do your utmost to support your faith with goodness.

– 2 Pt 1:5

Religion, for Christians, is not a ‘blind search for God’. It is a relationship, a response of faith to God revealed to us in human history and in our times too. God reaches out to us in all our ups and downs, calling each person into ongoing and deepening conversion.

– SGN, 26
Saint John XXIII (pope from 1958 to 1963 and declared Saint by Pope Francis on 27 April 2014) believed that the Church needed a pastoral renewal that would enable the Church to minister more effectively to contemporary society. In his time he sensed that new ways were needed to communicate Christian doctrine to reveal the inherent attractiveness of the Gospel, while protecting its integrity. He said in his address to the bishops at the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, ‘Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously’. When he spoke about the Church as being the source of unity for all peoples, he based his teaching on Jesus Christ, the one and only Saviour who prayed at the Last Supper, ‘you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us’ (Jn 17:21). In his opening address to the bishops on 11 October 1962, St John XXIII explained his vision for the Second Vatican Council, the twenty-first Ecumenical Council. He proposed five points for achieving this goal:

1. Be filled with hope and faith. Do not be prophets of gloom. ‘Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations, which by men’s own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward God’s superior and inscrutable design.’

An Ecumenical Council is a gathering of bishops from around the world called together by the pope or approved by him. The Second Vatican Council was held from 1962 to 1965.
2. **Discover ways of teaching the faith more effectively.** ‘The greatest concern of the ecumenical council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously.’

3. **Deepen the understanding of doctrine.** Authentic doctrine ‘should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine and deposit of the faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.’

4. **Use the medicine of mercy.** ‘Errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnation.’

5. **Seek unity within the Church, with Christians separated from Catholicism, with those of non-Christian religions and with all men and women of goodwill.** ‘Such is the aim of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which ... prepares, as it were, and consolidates the path toward that unity of mankind where truth reigns, charity is the law and whose extent is eternity.’ (St John XXIII, *Rejoice, O Mother Church [Gaudet Mater Ecclesia]*, opening address at the Second Vatican Council [11 October 1962])

Saint John Paul II noted that the Second Vatican Council owes much to the immediate past. He wrote the following:

The Second Vatican Council was a providential event. It is often considered as a new era in the life of the Church. This is true, but at the same time it is difficult to overlook the fact that the Council drew much from the experience of the immediate past, especially from the intellectual legacy left by Pius XII. In the history of the Church the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ are always closely interwoven. Thus it was for the Second Vatican Council and for
the activity of the popes connected with the Council, starting with John XXIII, continuing with Paul VI and John Paul I, up to the present pope. (St John Paul II, On the Coming of the Third Millennium [Tertio Millennio Adveniente], no. 18)

TRANSMITTING GOD’S REVELATION

Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal.

– CCC, no. 80, citing DV, no. 9

Saint John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council itself illustrate how the Church constantly draws upon Tradition and Sacred Scripture. This chapter examines these foundations of Church teaching because it is through Tradition and Scripture that the Church knows God’s Revelation and transmits it from one generation to another.

SACRED TRADITION

Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God become man, is the fullness of Revelation by his teaching, witness, death and Resurrection. On the road to Emmaus, the risen Jesus showed the two disciples how the teachings of the prophets were fulfilled in him and proclaimed by his own lips. Just before his Ascension, Christ commissioned the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all whose hearts would be open to receive them. The revealed Word of God in the Gospel would be for everyone a source of saving truth and moral discipline.

He commanded the Apostles to proclaim and witness his Kingdom of love, justice, mercy and healing, foretold by the prophets and fulfilled in his
The Church accepts and venerates the Bible as inspired. The Bible is composed of the forty-six books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Together these books make up the Scriptures. The unity of the Old and New Testaments flows from the revealed unity of God’s loving plan to save us. The books of the Old Testament include the Pentateuch, historical books, the books of the Prophets, and the Wisdom books. The New Testament contains the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, letters from St Paul and other Apostles, and concludes with the Book of Revelation.

The canon of the Bible, which is a term that refers to the books the Bible contains, was fixed within the first centuries of the Church. These books that make up both the Old and New Testaments were identified by the Church as having been divinely inspired. At times, people challenged the divinely inspired character of some of the books in the Bible. In 1546, the Council of Trent declared that all the books in both the Old and New Testament were inspired in their entirety. This declaration was subsequently confirmed by both the First Vatican Council (1869–70) and the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). Those books whose divinely inspired character was challenged appear in non-Catholic Bibles identified as either the ‘Deuterocanonical Books’ or the ‘Apocrypha’.

Paschal Mystery. Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit to enable them to fulfil this great commission, to give them needed courage and to help them in their evangelising work.

Graced by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles did what Jesus commanded them. They did this orally, in writing, by the heroic sanctity of their lives, and by ensuring that there would be successors for this mission. The first communication of the Gospel was by preaching and witness. The Apostles
proclaimed Jesus, his Kingdom and the graces of salvation. They called for the obedience of faith (hearing and obeying God’s Word), the reception of Baptism, the formation of a community of believers, gathering for the Eucharist and generosity to the poor.

The Apostles chose men to be bishops to succeed them and handed on to them ‘what they received from Jesus’ teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit’ (CCC, no. 83). The pope and bishops in union with him are successors of the Apostles and inherit the responsibility of authoritative teaching from them. We call this teaching office the *Magisterium*. ‘The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone’ (CCC, no. 85, citing DV, no. 10).

All the faithful share in understanding and handing on revealed truth. ‘The whole body of the faithful … cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful”, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals’ (CCC, no. 92, citing Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* [Lumen Gentium; LG], no. 12). Another way of understanding this truth is the principle that the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Church, draws the whole body of the faithful to believe what truly belongs to the faith. ‘By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*magisterium*), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Th 2:13), the faith once for all delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3)’ (LG, no. 12).

Tradition is the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church. The oral preaching of the Apostles and the written message of salvation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Bible) are conserved and handed on as the Deposit of Faith through the Apostolic Succession in the Church. Both the living Tradition and the written Scriptures have their common source in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This is particularly important to understand and believe when one is faced with the postmodern attitude that Tradition cannot be trusted, and that what the Church teaches as Tradition is really just a reflection of particular judgements and biases.
Knowing that what Tradition teaches has its ultimate foundation in Jesus Christ helps a person of faith to respond to Tradition with trust. The theological, liturgical, disciplinary and devotional traditions of the local churches both contain and can be distinguished from this Apostolic Tradition (cf. CCC, Glossary, ‘Tradition’).
Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture is inspired by God and is the Word of God. Therefore, God is the author of Sacred Scripture, which means he inspired the human authors, acting in and through them. Thus, God ensured that the authors taught, without error, those truths necessary for our salvation. *Inspiration* is the word used for the divine assistance given to the human authors of the books of Sacred Scripture. This means that guided by the Holy Spirit, the human authors made full use of their talents and abilities while, at the same time, writing what God intended. There are many in modern society who find incredible the belief that Scripture contains the inspired Word of God and so reject the Bible as a collection of stories and myths. There are others who profess belief in the Triune God and are even identified as ‘Scripture scholars’ who work to ‘demythologise’ the Scriptures, that is, they remove or explain away the miraculous as well as references to God’s revealing words and actions. It is important to understand in the face of such challenges to Scripture that it is not simply the work of human authors as some critics allege, but truly the Word and work of God.

Interpretation of Scripture

When interpreting Scripture, we should be attentive to what God wanted to reveal through the authors for our salvation. We need to see Scripture as a unified whole with Jesus Christ at the centre. We must also read Scripture within the living Tradition of the whole Church, so that we may come to grasp a true interpretation of the Scriptures. The task of giving an authoritative interpretation of the Word of God has been entrusted to the Magisterium. Last, we need to remember and recognise that there is a coherence of the truths of faith within Scripture (cf. CCC, nos. 112–114).

The Church recognises two senses of Scripture, the literal and the spiritual. In probing the literal meaning of the texts, it is necessary to determine their literary form, such as history, hymns, wisdom sayings, poetry, parable or other forms of figurative language. The *literal sense* is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis [the process scholars use to determine the meaning of the text], following the rules of sound interpretation: “All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based
on the literal”’ (CCC, no. 116, citing St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 1, 10).

The spiritual senses of Sacred Scripture derive from the unity of God’s plan of salvation. The text of Scripture discloses God’s plan. The realities and events of which it speaks can also be signs of the divine plan. There are three spiritual senses of Scripture:

1. The *allegorical sense*. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognising their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ’s victory over sin and also of Christian Baptism;

2. The *moral sense*. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St Paul says, they were written ‘to be a lesson for us’ (1 Cor 10:11);

3. The *anagogical sense* … We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem. (CCC, no. 117)

The Church’s Scripture scholars are expected to work according to these principles to develop a better understanding of Scripture for God’s people. Interpretation of Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgement of the Magisterium, which exercises the divine commission to hold fast to and to interpret authoritatively God’s Word.

**OTHER BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS**

Our response to God’s call to holiness involves regular, prayerful study of Scripture. ‘Such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve … the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul and a pure and lasting font of spiritual life’ (CCC, no. 131, citing DV, no. 21).

Catholic biblical scholars have made distinguished contributions to scriptural studies. Their outstanding service to the Church has assisted believers to grow in their faith by an authentic understanding of Scripture. Two of the various challenges they face come from interpretations posed,
on the one hand, by those who interpret the Bible only in a literal fashion, and, on the other hand, by those who deny the supernatural aspects of the Gospels.

**BIBLICAL LITERALISM**

Some Christians of many denominations – often called Fundamentalists – have adopted the supremacy of Scripture as their sole foundation. They also approach Scripture from a viewpoint of private interpretation. This they do in the strictest literal sense without appreciation of the various literary forms.
that the biblical authors used within the specific cultural circumstances in which they were writing.

The Church’s response to Fundamentalism is that Revelation is transmitted by Apostolic Tradition and Scripture together. The Church and Apostolic Tradition existed before the written New Testament. Her Apostles preached the Gospel orally before writing it down. The Apostles appointed bishops to succeed them with the authority to continue their teaching. Scripture alone is insufficient. Authoritative teaching is also needed. That is given to us by the Church’s teaching office. Catholics, then, accept Scripture and Tradition as one ‘sacred deposit of the Word of God’ (CCC, no. 97, citing DV, no. 10). Although this sets us apart from those who believe only in the Bible as their source of revelation, Catholics accept and honour both Scripture and Tradition ‘with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence’ (CCC, no. 82, citing DV, no. 9).

In response to biblical literalism, the Church holds that ‘the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures’ (DV, no. 11). At the same time, the Church recognises that the interpreter of Scripture needs to attend to the literary forms – such as poetry, symbol, parable, history, song or prayer – in which the Bible is written. The interpreter ‘must look for that meaning which the sacred writer … given the circumstance of his time and culture, intended to express and did in fact express, through the medium of a contemporary literary form’ (DV, no. 12).

**HISTORICAL REDUCTIONISM**

Another challenge comes from scholars and others who deny the supernatural aspects of the Gospels, such as the Incarnation, Virgin Birth, miracles and the Resurrection. We call this reductionism because it reduces all Scripture to the natural order and eliminates the reality of divine intervention.

The Church’s Pontifical Biblical Commission has dealt with approaches of this kind in its publications *Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels* and *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. The Pontifical Biblical Commission lists five unacceptable assumptions found in forms of scriptural interpretation:
1. the denial of a supernatural order
2. the denial of God’s intervention in the world through revelation
3. the denial of the possibility and existence of miracles
4. the incompatibility of faith with historical truth
5. an almost *a priori* denial of the historical value of the nature of the documents of revelation. (Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Historical Truth of the Gospels* [1964], no. 5)

The Church approaches Scripture as God’s revealed Word. Its authors wrote under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is more than a human work; it is God’s words put into human words. It will always be a fountain of faith for those who read it in a spirit of prayer.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read again St John XXIII’s thoughts about sharing and spreading the faith in a more effective way. How would they help you share your faith with others? What is both consoling and challenging about the way God has chosen to transmit his Revelation?
2. Why might you say it makes perfect sense for Jesus to commission followers to carry on his saving vision? How do leaders of the Catholic Church continue the vision of Jesus in our times?
3. How does the Church help you to understand the Bible? How do the bishops in communion with the pope ensure that the full and living Gospel will always be preserved in the Church?

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

- Jesus Christ, the fullness of Revelation, entrusted his mission to the Apostles. They transmitted Christ’s Gospel through their witness, preaching and writing – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – meant for all peoples until Christ comes in glory.
- Divine Revelation is transmitted through Apostolic Tradition and Sacred Scripture, which flow from the same divine wellspring and work together in unity toward the same goal.
• ‘The Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes’ (DV, no. 8, §1). This is what is meant by the term Tradition.
• Because of the divine gift of faith, God’s People as a whole never ceases to receive and reflect on the gift of Divine Revelation.
• The teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium – that is, the pope and the bishops in communion with him – has the task of authoritatively interpreting the Word of God, contained in Sacred Scripture and transmitted by Sacred Tradition.
• Sacred Scripture is inspired by God and truly contains the Word of God. This action of God is referred to as Inspiration.
• God is the author of Sacred Scripture, inspiring the human authors, acting in and through them. Thus God ensured that the authors taught divine and saving truth without error.
• The Catholic Church accepts and venerates as inspired the forty-six books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The unity of the Old and New Testaments flows from the revealed unity of God’s loving plan to save us.
• Our response to God’s Revelation is faith, by which we surrender our whole selves to him.

MEDITATION

Go Gladly to the Sacred Text Itself: From the Second Vatican Council on the Bible

[We] forcefully and specifically exhort all the Christian faithful … to learn the ‘surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine scriptures. ‘Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ’ (St Jerome). Therefore, let them go gladly to the sacred text itself, whether in the sacred liturgy, which is full of the divine words, or in devout reading, or in such suitable exercises and various other helps which, with the approval and guidance of the pastors of the Church, are happily spreading everywhere in our day. Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man …
Just as from constant attendance at the Eucharistic mystery the life of the Church draws increase, so a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increased veneration of the Word of God.

– DV, no. 25–26

PRAYER

Let your scriptures be my chaste delight …
O Lord, perfect me and reveal those pages to me!
See, your voice is my joy. Give me what I love …
May the inner secrets of your words be laid open to me when I knock.
This I beg by our Lord Jesus Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). These are the treasures I seek in your books.

– St Augustine, The Confessions, bk. 11, chap. 2, nos. 2–4

Stand firm, then, brothers, and keep the traditions that we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

– 2 Th 2:15

Scripture and Tradition are central to the life of the Church and to catechesis. The apostles entrusted to the whole Church the message of salvation, the ‘sacred deposit’ of faith which is contained in Scripture and Tradition.

– SGN, 47