

Supplemental Information for
Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism
The Profession of Faith: What We Believe
To group leaders of
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs
September/October, 2009

Session 2: “God’s Revelation: Scripture and Tradition”

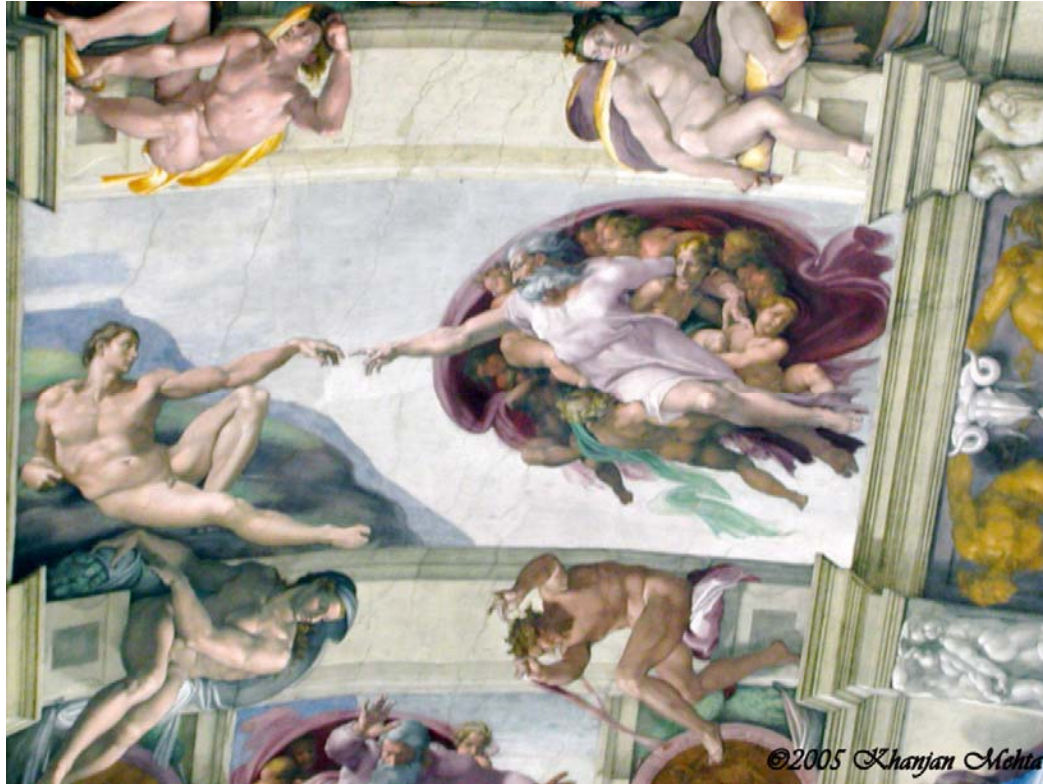
Preliminary notes for year two: [Repeated again in case this is the first Supplement you are accessing]

Welcome back to Why Catholic? Several items should be called to your attention regarding the revised book on “What We Believe.” First, I would strongly encourage you as a group leader to read the introductory material. Second, there are a few changes in formatting such as “Reflection 1 & 2” replaces the “Exploring the Catechism” sections but the impact is the same. Also please note the suggestion, and I think it is an excellent one, to have available the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA)* together with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* available. By now, group members have invested in the CCC and I would encourage investment in USCCA also. The revised text cites both often and the USCCA offers many times a fuller explanation of key points. Certainly as a group leader you will want the USCCA as part of your “environment.” Also you should note that the text does not have bold letters indicating material almost directly from the CCC, but if you read carefully and compare you’ll find the CCC there. Note also that some chapters have key ideas/concepts boxed with a heading “Spotlight on...” These are worth pointing out to your group and reviewing. Expected time frame is still 1.5 hours and you’ll note a large number of references to the USCCA. One group last year told me nearly at the end that they “discovered” the really extensive subject index at the back of the CCC, and it turned out to be a good resource when slightly off the topic but relevant questions arose. Let’s prayerfully ask for the Spirit’s presence this year as we try to develop a deeper understanding of our faith.

Suggested Environment

Note again that there is a recommendation for the USCCA to be a part of each table arrangement. You may want to drape a strip of green fabric over the table on which your environment is set to highlight we are in “ordinary time” and hence the green vestments a priest and a deacon are to wear. Since we are focusing on God’s revelation, may I suggest that you wrap the Bible with a colorful ribbon for several purposes, one I’ll discuss later. It is, after all, God’s gift to us, his loving revelation. You might even consider finding and printing a picture of God the Father as this one by Michelangelo found in the Sistine Chapel. [You can use this link](#) to get to that picture. Or just simply do a Google search for a picture you would like to print

and have as part of your environment display, perhaps one that appeals to your image of God. Now I admit that Michelangelo's God the Father is a bit of a stern picture of God but Michelangelo's has many other images of God also on that beautiful ceiling like this one of God the Creator [accessible at this link](#):



Lifting Our Hearts

A very good prayer that you might even suggest would be worthwhile to pray whenever a person picks up God's Word to read it. It certainly raises the issue of hearing and reflecting and letting His Word shape our lives.

Sharing Our Good News

I had suggested in the closing of Session One that more of a personal rather than group action was probably much more a direction that would follow the reflection on a desire for God. Perhaps just asking for any further reflection on that topic would be a good beginning or even framing a question such as: "Did anyone have one of those experiences this last week that seems to suggest our lives are open to something bigger that we are, something transcendent?" I have to tell you all that coming back from far northern Wisconsin last week where the weather was cold with frost warnings two mornings and where the trees are weeks ahead of us in color—I couldn't help but remark that God's out early with his paint brush in the woods up here.

Reflection One “Revelation”

The story of Emile and Sarah is meant to set up an awareness of that very human experience we all have of gradually getting to know someone through word and action. Those who are married experience this “revelation” of self as it occurs over time. Often spouses will admit that even after years of marriage they are surprised by some comment or action from their partner with words like, “well, I never knew....” So too God’s revelation to us occurs in word and deed over time.

I would strongly suggest pausing after that third paragraph since it is a punctuation point on the first session and really introduces a beautiful thought in those last words of “God coming to meet us” in his revelation.

The *USCCA* (pp. 13-14) has a wonderful short definition of revelation as the “self-disclosure of the living God” and I would insert the words “and loving” with “living.” In the fourth line of that paragraph are three very important words: “very personal act.” There is such a difference between a Christian’s view of a personal, loving God and the entire history of impersonal, uncaring, and terrifying Gods that populate religious anthropology. That same section of the *USCCA* at the end of this paragraph concludes with a beautiful quote that sees God’s revelation as an act of friendship based on a love that underlies the whole of creation.

Be aware, however, that at times this very image of a loving God is challenged by our experience of evil in the world and suffering, sometimes in a very personal way when we experience personal loss or illness. That may be what someone brings out in the group’s discussion.

The next paragraph touches on our Judeo-Christian heritage and introduces the idea of God’s revelation as part of a “covenant” relationship. Remember that a covenant is very solemn relationship between parties with God always a part of the relationship if it is a true covenant. The most famous in the Old Testament is that of the Sinai covenant where the Israelites received through Moses God’s laws and promise “Keep my laws and I will be your God and you will be my people” to paraphrase briefly.

So God entered into a historical relationship with the chosen people and the next paragraph has a sentence that should be underlined. It is the second line reading “in Jesus, God’s revelation was complete.” Suggest you read slowly and ponder the *CCC 66* and grasp the idea of God’s revelation “unfolding” over time. With this idea it will help to see how the Spirit working in the church, through the history of the church councils and the leadership of the Magisterium and the successor to St. Peter continue to unfold the meaning of the life of Christ for all ages.

The idea of unfolding fits well with the idea of mystery which always draws us deeper into understanding but never can be fully understood in this life. This important concept helps to see the transition of the successors of the apostles today proclaiming this “Kingdom of God” with those all important values of “love, justice, mercy, and healing.” You might want to point out that, even when the Church itself hasn’t been perfect, those four values have had a tremendous effect on changing the entire culture of the western world. Those values, as the box in grey suggests, have “transforming power” and we as members of the Catholic Church

can be so proud of the leaven that the Church has been over the centuries, changing not only hearts and minds but culture itself.

Reflection One “Tradition”

The story of Mo in paragraph one sets up the idea of passing on a treasure, a tradition, maybe a pearl of great price, if you will, to our successors. You may want to even highlight the real significance of that quote at the end of the first paragraph. You see Paul was not one of those original twelve apostles. So the question quite naturally comes up, how did or in what sense is Paul handing on a tradition he received from Christ. It is clear that the original twelve were with Jesus as he taught, were called personally, and received the Spirit together in the upper room. So they could collectively have a set of traditions about his life and what he taught. St. Paul, however, received directly from Jesus himself in his famous encounter with the Lord on the road all the revelations and teaching that Jesus shared with the twelve. Some theologians speculate that the blindness Paul experienced came from this overwhelming vision of who Jesus was and what he stood for to the extent that it literally took his sight/breath away temporarily. And so Paul unfolded over his life time the meaning of the Christ; and scripture scholars will note how some of his teachings changed from his early letters to his later ones—most specifically, to cite one example, his belief in the immanent coming or return of Jesus.

The quote near the beginning of the second paragraph is directly from *CCC*, 83 and both that and the *USCCA*, p. 25 citation should be read. It is so important here to grasp the sense of the bishops and pope as the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church in true succession from those original apostles. As the second to the last paragraph in this section highlights, the oral preaching of the apostles evolved into what we Catholics call Tradition that is centered in scripture and in the life of Christ. This Tradition can be seen as that unfolding of the meaning of Christ’s life for each generation as we humans continue to develop a more profound understanding of what God is revealing in the Person of Christ. There is admittedly a tension that will always exist to some extent between what is unchanging and what is a more profound understanding, perhaps a clearer understanding of what this Person means to humanity. The bottom line is that our Church’s awareness of Tradition stems from its collective experience of transmitting a Tradition from those original apostles through their successors today. And this leads very naturally into our next section where we find Paul remarking on the Tradition he has passed on to his fellow Christians.

Scripture: Pondering the Word

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

13 But we ought to give thanks to God for you always, brothers loved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in truth.

14 To this end he has (also) called you through our gospel to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours.

16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace,

17 encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word.

Note in particular how St. Paul urges his listeners to remember what has been taught them either by “oral statement” or by “letter.” This dual instruction forms the basis for our acknowledgement of Scripture and Tradition as together forming a basis for revelation.

Sharing Questions

I would suggest that you directly ask the question: “Does this make sense that there is a need for a permanent body over time to assure both that the changeless elements of the Jesus story would be told as well as unfolding His meaning to each new generation?” It’s a matter of balance between something I remember being written many years ago by my bishop in Green Bay who attended Vatican II. Bishop Wycislo said it was such a pleasure to see the Church as ancient but ever new.

Reflection Two: “Scripture”

The two scenarios in the first two paragraphs are meant to highlight how scripture can speak to us and how through the centuries, God’s Word has spoken to mankind. At times it can be at a most personal level. It would be good to see if others have had similar experiences of feeling that a particular passage was meant just for them that day; or that a particular word seemed to leap off the page into their consciousness with some almost overpowering impact. I would encourage underlining the words “Scripture speaks to us as if it were meant for us personally...” in the third paragraph.

As God’s inspired Word written through the influence of His Spirit on an author, it is important to stress the idea on the top of page 13 of our book: “...God did not dictate the words of scripture...” This is very different from what Muslims believe about the Koran. They hold that the Angel Gabriel dictated from God to Mohammed the very words that were then written down. They thus have a very difficult time with the second and third paragraphs on page 13 which highlight the key role knowing the historical background, the literary form, and especially the community to which the scripture is intended plays in understanding what the message is. Two quick examples: St. Paul seems to somewhat approve of slavery or accept it

and there is no doubt that the role of women has evolved from what it was in Biblical times. Thus it clearly seems appropriate to see the Church as both the Guardian and interpreter of scripture over time. After all, it was the Church that after more than several centuries finalized the Canon of the Sacred Scriptures we call the Bible. If you want evidence for a need for this role, simply point out the thousands of Christian churches with their slightly different variations on what God's Word means—from the most fundamental to those for whom it is merely one in many moral guides that have been written over time.

I would suggest you encourage the group to read *CCC, 125* which really highlights the key role the Gospels play in our faith. Then, too, the content of the grey box to the left has a very important idea buried in it—"preaching and witness." We tend to forget that the Gospels were preached and lived for 30 to 40 years before the first one was written down and that centuries passed before the Bible was accepted in the form we know today. So it's fair to point out that we have centuries of evidence that the best preaching of God's revelation was through living it. And of course those early martyrs in the Church witnessed it to their deaths.

Reflection Two: "Scripture and Tradition"

You will want to read *CCC, 80*, highlighting the one common source of revelation with these two distinct modes of transmission: Tradition and Sacred Scripture. You may have heard the phrase "sola scriptura" which was the watch word of the Reformation. This idea argues that only in scripture and through scripture does revelation occur. Some of our Protestant friends seem to feel comfortable accepting what has been defined in Tradition like the Bible itself, the Nicene Creed, the Trinity, to mention a few; but have an almost contradictory stance when they walk away from the reality of a Tradition inspired by the Holy Spirit living in God's Church.

It is also important to highlight the words "... measured for its consistency with the collective wisdom of the Church" in the middle of that last paragraph. The Church to whom our Lord gave St. Peter the keys and the power to bind and loose through its teaching authority treasures and preserves this heritage of faith through its apostolic successors—the bishops in union with the pope. This is just so logically necessary to preserve the truth over time and help each generation understand the message God has revealed to the people of God.

You might get some question on the sentence "All faithful share in understanding and handing on revealed truth..." You may want to point out the glossary in the back of *CCC* and look up the term "sensus fidei." Finally, I'm attaching an addendum to this communication to add a further few thoughts for those who are interested and including some links to other material.

Sharing Our Faith

All of the questions in this section are worth discussing but I might suggest opening a more basic question: "Do you have a sense that when you read and think about Scripture that you are very profoundly praying?" I say that because we become so used to ritual prayer and prayer formulas [like the Our Father and Hail Mary] that we tend to forget that prayer is at

heart conversation with God and what better place to start than by reading and listening to what God is saying in his revealed words to us. There is a very ancient form of prayer with Scripture known as [Lectio Divina](#). [For those interested, here is a great link](#), instructive and worth reading and even sharing if you so desire. I had mentioned early above the idea of wrapping the Bible with a ribbon, signifying revelation as God's gift to us. Well, in a sense, when we pray using Holy Scripture, we are quite literally unwrapping that generous gift of our God to us, opening His Book to listen to His Words, untying a ribbon in search of meaning, direction, and sustenance for life.

Living the Good News

There are some great suggestions listed. I especially like the first bullet point as a follow up to my comments above Lectio Divina which can be practiced as a personal action. There are also Bible study groups that meet at CTK and you might encourage individuals in your group to look into them. In fact, a nice "group" commitment over time would be for several members of the group to join one of the study groups, or even start one on their own. There is a small library of tapes and video discs by good Scripture scholars that can be used to explore in more depth some of the Scriptures, both Old Testament and New Testament.

Lifting our Hearts

Again, you will find me encouraging each group to open up the closing to spontaneous prayer for all the variety of intentions that we always do carry in our hearts so suggest going around the room/group to ask each person present to pray for a specific intention. Be a good example and start using our CTK format: EG; For the Spirit's presence with us this year to open our hearts to understanding and growth, let us pray to the Lord. Group response: Lord, hear our prayer.

Addendum Note1:

Attached you will find two pages from a very key Vatican II document, one of the first undertaken by the Council, the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*. I have copied only several key paragraphs from it; those are a wonderful back drop for this session of Why Catholic and provided a link to the entire document. Also I would like to include the following quote from a book by the Most Reverend Aloysius J. Wycislo, former and now deceased Bishop of Green Bay. His book is entitled "*Vatican II Revisited*." He is discussing the significance of the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* not just for you and I but as living witnesses to the lived content of God's Word. He quotes one of the experts at the Vatican Council, Father Barnabas Mary Ahern as saying the following:

"It is hardly needful to say what this means for the apostolate of the laity. Previously our laity have been called the 'hands of the Church,' reaching into areas where otherwise the Church's teaching would have no influence. The schema shows

the profound reason why the laity are so necessary and how it is possible for them to perform so great a task. They, like everyone else in the Church, are living voices of tradition. In their lives other men hear God speaking and God's Son responding. For the world at large, that world of men who know nothing of Pope or bishop or priest, the voice of God will be heard chiefly through its resonant echo in the lives of our Catholic laity." (p. 80)

What a neat note to end...through our lives we can be living examples of God's Word for all those around us.

Addendum Note2: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to allaabs@comcast.net

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

Chapter Two

HANDING ON DIVINE REVELATION

7. In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, (1) and to impart to them heavenly gifts. This Gospel had been promised in former times through the prophets, and Christ Himself had fulfilled it and promulgated it with His lips. This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those Apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing. (2)

But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place." (3) This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2).

8. And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (see 2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (see Jude 1:3) (4) Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes.

This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. (5) For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.

The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (see Col. 3:16).

9. Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence. (6)

[For more from this document use this link.](#)