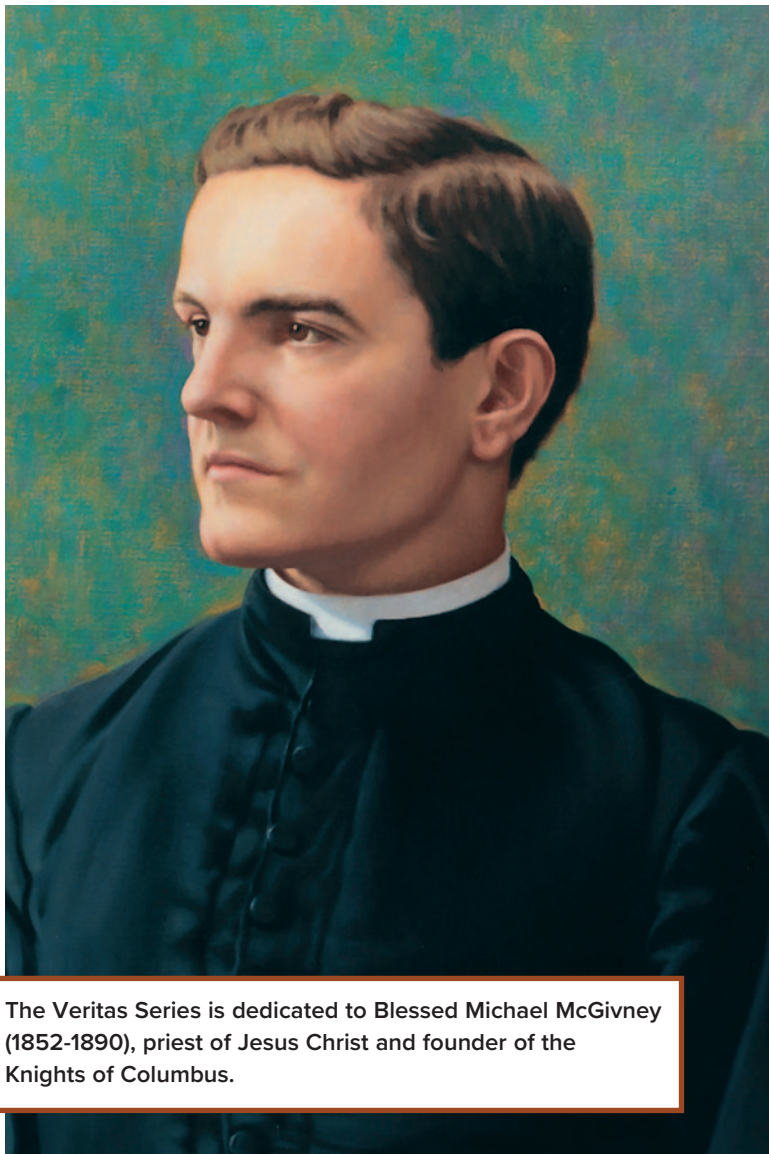




# About the Bible

Father Daniel W. Martin, C.M.



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*The Knights of Columbus presents*  
*The Veritas Series*  
*“Proclaiming the Faith in the Third Millennium”*

# About the Bible

*by*

*Father D.W. Martin, C.M.*

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This text was transcribed from lectures given about 1969 by Fr. D.W. Martin, C.M. Though some expressions are dated, Catholic Information Service has judged it helpful to reprint it without change because it is theologically solid and the questions it addresses are still current.

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# **ABOUT THE BIBLE**

## **I**

### **ITS MESSAGE**

I am sure that you want to read about the Bible so that you can read the Bible itself with profit. There are many reasons why you may have taken this up. Perhaps you have seen that the Bible contains most sublime ideals and holds the key to successful living. Perhaps, too, you are curious why this Bible, written centuries ago, still has such a hold as it does on people today. Or you may have taken up this reading in order to know just how completely divine is this book of all books.

Whatever your immediate reason for this study, you will find it most profitable because of your sincere and earnest desire to learn of God; for God is not far from you. Your desire to know Him in the routine actions of your daily life, in fulfilling your duties to your neighbor as well as to God – this desire is one that comes from God, and will lead to Him.

God deals with us as only God can. God has fashioned us out of nothing. God sustains us in every act of daily life.

Because God has also fashioned the world, God teaches us something of Himself through these things. But He also teaches man through His own personal word that we are going to speak about in the Bible. Even more, God teaches us from within man himself, by giving to the mind of man light to understand about the things of God.

For anyone to be God's pupil, he must be willing to live for God as best he knows how. To do this, you don't have to know everything about God; only God Himself knows everything about Himself. But what you do know calls for action. God expects you to find peace and happiness where alone it can be found: in God. With your good intention of doing what you can to make your life lead to God, you can confidently expect that God will not leave you alone; He will come to you.

The Bible has different names: *the Bible, the Scriptures, the Scripture, the Word of God*. The name "Bible" means *the Book*, that is, the book that stands alone among all other books written by man because of the excellence of this book and its profit for us; it was written by God as well as by man. The names "Holy Scripture" or "the Scriptures" describe the fact that this writing (this "scripture") excels any other writing among men. It is also called "the Word of God" because it is chiefly God's word that is expressed through the agency of human authors.

## FORM OF THE BIBLE

*The Book*, which is the Bible, is made up of many little books. They were written by many different authors, and over a period of at least 500 years, were put into the form in which we now have them. But they can rightly be grouped under one title, the Bible, because they have in view the one



end for which man lives, because all of them have the one chief and responsible author, God Himself.

In the form in which we now have them, these books were assembled during a period of at least 500 years. But the events they relate extend over a much longer period – from more than 1800 years before the coming of Christ to about 100 years after His birth. The first events in the call of Abraham took place at a time when writing with letters of an alphabet had not come into customary use; the last events took place when Imperial Rome had already gathered the ancient world around the Mediterranean Sea into one worldwide empire.

Because God comes to man in the circumstances in which he lives, we can learn much about the development of civilization in the Bible; but the Bible is not the history of civilization. Because God comes to man, His creature, He teaches man what he really ought to be as a creature of God. From the Bible, you will learn that the only worthy purpose of existence in our world is to bring all the powers of your life to bear on the reason for your existence as God's creature. A man is truly and perfectly a man when he lives his life generously among others with whom he is bound by ties of common creation, by likeness of being, by his final purpose in life. The Bible reflects the fact of our experience: that we can achieve our true happiness and security in life only in union with others.

This is man as God has made him – a being who is to live and succeed in the company and by the mutual efforts of other human beings. This is man as he is reflected in God's dealings with him in the Bible. For God deals with

him both as an individual and as bound to others with whom he lives and with whom he attains happiness.

But the Bible is not just the history of man as God first made him, or as he ought to be according to that first creation. These truths about man that are made known in the Bible are truths that man could have discovered by himself, through his God-given intellect. The fact that he didn't get all of them together, easily, quickly and surely is the result of the state in which he placed himself by turning away from God. The freedom of man from this state of confusion and the freedom of man so that he can live with God right here and now is the important subject that runs throughout the whole Bible. All else that is taught is taught in view of this one purpose – the salvation or eternal freedom of man from sin so as to live for God.

### THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH

The basic and most important truth taught throughout the Bible is that God is our Savior. It is as the God of our salvation that He first makes Himself known to man; it is also as the God of our salvation that He comes among us as one of us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, true God and true man. God has come to save us from ourselves and from our slavery to the passions and greed and pride that are at the root of our evils in this world. He saves us from ourselves so that we can be free to live with Him; so that through our life with others we can bring others also to find Him; in order, therefore, to bring peace and harmony right in the midst of those very conditions of life which are humanly the source of our unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

The Bible is the record of how God has taken a hand in our world. He has involved Himself in our daily lives, so as

to bring good out of the very things that we have spoiled. As our Savior, He Himself is personally engaged in making us see this fact: that we can truly find ourselves only in finding Him; that in finding Him, we have a treasure that is wholly satisfying and eternally ours. In the term that God Himself uses throughout the Bible, He has come into our world to reign in our lives as King. Our good and happiness is now His good. Our peace and welfare is His personal concern. Our final goal is not death, but eternal life in the resurrection of the body and the glory of our whole being eternally. All this God makes known to us living socially in common; in this common life, we will find our support. In our religious lives as well as in our natural human lives, we live and succeed through our mutual help and support of one another. It is only in this way that we can show truly that God is a King in the most perfect way.

### MAN SHARES WITH GOD

Making all this known to man was not the work of a moment, from our point of view. God had made man to His own image and likeness. This means that man shares with God the power to know himself and others. Man shares with God the freedom to embrace that which is good. Man can even know the infinite goodness Itself which is God; he has the power to make his whole being center on that goodness of God – to bring about his own human perfection and the perfection of those with whom he lives.

But man had so distorted this image of God as to seek happiness where there is only misery, peace where there is only disturbance, security where there is only danger. But God is not so weak that He would have to start over with a new human race. God is not so petty as simply to seek

revenge on the man who betrayed Him. Because man had made himself an ugly distortion of the image of God, God came into man's world as Savior to bring beauty out of ugliness. In this is seen the power of God; in this also is known the love of God who can never cease to pursue this fallen man so as to give him greater blessings than those he had thrown away. When God took a hand in our world, He still respected that image of Himself in man that man had distorted. Man doesn't change overnight from an infant into an adult. He doesn't learn all things suddenly in a flash of light. This is not the way God made us. In coming to man as his Savior, God dealt with man as God Himself had made him – a being who learns step by step, a being who learns from others and from the world about him, a being who can do only as much as he knows how to do.

To bring to the world the knowledge of the astonishing love and goodness of God was a long process. Two thousand years passed before the full work of God as Savior was established in our world as a living thing. The central point of this work was the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, One who was wholly and completely a man like us in all save sin, and yet true God from all eternity. Christians group all the events that led up to this central event of history under the term "*Old Testament.*" It was that period between the call of Abraham about 1800 years before Christ to the coming of Christ Himself. It was that patient struggle of God to show man how far he had drifted from God, how little he actually knew about either God or man himself. By His unselfish, relentless pursuit of man, God brought at least some – those who were willing to do what they knew how to do for God – to realize that their only happiness in their own lives and in their nation was to be found in obedience to God.

## MAN'S NATURE

The people whom God dealt with during this period have much in common with people of all ages – greed, pride, lust, cruelty, dependence on material power rather than on God. It was out of such as these that God established His Kingdom on earth. The people of the Old Testament are a mirror of what men always are when left to themselves, or when they reject God. In our more advanced technical civilization, we have worked out more subtle ways of killing and cheating and imposing upon the weak. And just because of our advanced technical civilization, we are even more inclined to rely on material power and wealth than upon God. These are just more refined expressions of the distortion of our human nature that we hold in common with the people before the coming of Jesus.

If people of that time were slow to learn, so are we. If they were caught up in the immediate pleasure of the moment, we are also. But if God could bring good and salvation out of that moral decadence, He still can and will do so today. We know that because He showed us in the times before the coming of Jesus how much He loves the man whom He has created; how ceaseless is His desire to bring man to Himself in His Kingdom here on earth as well as in the afterlife.

The central event of the Old Testament was the Covenant of God with His own people; this was a treaty between God and the nation of Israel, by which He pledged Himself to be their God in a most special way, provided that they fulfilled His commands, especially as set forth in the Ten Commandments. This was the way they were to show the world the nature and the love of the one true God – not

principally by preaching, but by living; not simply by living within the private lives of their little homes but by living openly as a nation which embodied the notion of the true God. The *historical books* of the Old Testament deal with the great deeds of God in establishing this people and protecting them; they deal also with the continual failure of many of the people to embody the truth of God in their national life. The *prophetical books* are the record of the inspired preaching of those individuals sent personally by God to point out these failures to His people so that they could save themselves from the effects of their failings by turning again to Him. These books also contain things foretold about the future; these were spoken to give the people the assurance they needed to turn back to God; they were also spoken to encourage those who would see the disaster that followed from the failure of the bulk of the people to turn to God. The *wisdom* or *didactic books* contain the prayers and the reflections of the devout on the great deeds of God in order to appreciate the meaning of these deeds in their own lives.

By itself, the Old Testament is incomplete, unfinished. The devout pray for the coming of the Kingdom in its perfection. The prophets foretell that it will come about in God's good time, when men have become ready for it through trial and purification. All look forward to the coming of the Messiah, the anointed of God, who will establish the Kingdom of God in its perfection. The subject of the *New Testament* is the coming of this Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and the events which brought about the final and perfect founding of the Kingdom of God here on earth. The New Testament relates the establishment of God's new

order for men in the world and explains what this means for all mankind.

It would be a mistake to think of the Old Testament as suddenly replaced by the New Testament. It would be wrong to picture the Old Testament as having been God's mistake, which then had to be corrected in the New Testament. The Old Testament is supposed as a basis for the New Testament. The New Testament is not a reversal of the Old, but its perfection.

We have seen that the Old Testament relates the coming of God as Savior, entering personally in the ordinary lives and institutions of man. There, God shows Himself a just God; a God of the whole world, and of everything in it; a provident Father who seeks only the good and the happiness of man; a God of love who is concerned about even the least and most earthy conditions of human life. He makes Himself known as King in actions that could be understood by people of good will, even of those times. He teaches His own little nation how to make Him known to the powerful and wealthy, but principally by what they are and what they do as a body.

By the time of the coming of Christ, a true understanding of God as Savior of the world in every aspect of personal and national life had been firmly implanted in His own people. At this point, Jesus came into the world in the fullness of time.

The preaching of Jesus begins among those people who had been formed in the revelation of God. He doesn't have to describe for them what it means for God to be a King among men; they already know that from the Old Testament. "Do not think that I have come to destroy the

Law and the Prophets. I have come not to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

## THE NEW KINGDOM OF GOD

The Kingdom He proclaims brings the Old Kingdom to its perfection. The Old was established in a people who would proclaim by their lives the nature of the God who was their King; so will the New Kingdom be established in a living people of God. It will be more perfect because it will share in the life and activity of God Himself in a perfect way, while still remaining in the human and visible order where men can find it. It will embrace in a visible unity men of all nations. It will come quietly from little beginnings, just as God’s first reign among His own people had come about. But it will penetrate the world and all human activities in every area of life like a bit of yeast that penetrates and raises a great mass of inert dough.

But the greatest and most difficult truth to human minds was this: that the power and the life and the glory of this Kingdom are embodied in Jesus Himself. He is not only their expected Messiah who will establish God’s Kingdom on behalf of God; He is Himself the Son of God as well as son of Mary. As He is one God with the Father, He will bind men into a oneness with God in every aspect of their lives that will be like the very oneness of Father and Son in one Godhead. This is God’s final revelation of Himself to us. In the life and the sufferings of Jesus, we can finally come to an idea of how perfect is the love of God for us. We will finally know how far God will go to bring us to Himself. “In this we have come to know his love, that he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16).



Of old, God established His Kingdom among a people who would make Him known as their King by the lives they led. To embody this new revelation of God becoming man in Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus also established a new and more perfect people, growing out of the former people. They also would have the mission to the whole world to embody in every area of their lives this final revelation of God to man in Jesus Christ. This people is His visible Church, known by its loyalty to Him in every area of human activity – personal, political, social.

## THE GOOD NEWS

The deeds of the life of Jesus, which made Him known, are found especially in the *Gospels*. The word “gospel” doesn’t mean just a life of our Lord. The word itself means “good news,” the announcement of a joyous event. The events of salvation in the life of Jesus are the most excellent *good news*, the events that are more joyous for all humankind than anything else that has ever happened, or will happen. The Bible is *the book*, more excellent than any other book; the Gospel is *the good news*, surpassing anything else that we will ever hear.

As you know, there are four Gospels – those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each of them contains the essential and basic facts of the life of Jesus as it was being proclaimed by the Church He had founded. Each of them, from its own point of view, is the account of the man who turned out to be God Himself! Each of them contains the basic elements of the founded Church, the Kingdom of God in its final form in this world. Yet, each of them brings out special features of the life of Jesus and the nature of His Kingdom that were of particular importance to the

members of the Church whom each of the authors addressed. As it has turned out, the four Gospels give a whole portrait of the character and work of Jesus that is needed for the life of the Church in every age. Here is the finger of God; for no one of them set out to give a whole history of the life of Jesus; that was the work of the living Church which He founded to embody His life for all people of all ages. In fact, the last Gospel written states: "There are, however, many other things that Jesus did; but if every one of these should be written, not even the world itself, I think, could hold the books that would have to be written" (John 21:25). It was the living Church, matching these Gospels with her own living organic life, that determined that these Gospels were the needed truths for all humankind.

Besides the Gospels, the New Testament contains another book of deeds and history – the *Acts of the Apostles*. In it, the events are traced which put the teachings of Jesus into real existence in the organized bodies of men, the churches in various cities and areas of the ancient world. These individual churches are bound together into the one Church not only by ties of faith in Jesus, but also by obedience to Him through His visible representatives on earth. "He who hears you, hears me; and he who rejects you, rejects me; and he who rejects me, rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16). In the events of the book of the *Acts*, the command of Jesus to His Church has already become an established fact during the lifetime of the Apostles: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded

you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world” (Matthew 28:18-20).

## LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

The second group of books of the New Testament is the *Epistles* or *Letters* to the Churches. Some of these are addressed in general to all the churches, and are called the Catholic Epistles – since “catholic” means “universal” or “world-wide.” Others are addressed to the churches in individual cities, or to the leaders of those churches in those areas. But even these individual letters were soon shared with the local churches of other places because of their importance in understanding the meaning of the life and teachings of Jesus, especially in relation to God’s revelation in the Old Testament.

You will learn a great deal about the Church and the Bible by seeing how these epistles, particularly those of Saint Paul, came to be written. Our Lord Himself wrote nothing in a book. He lived the truth of Godhead; He explained Himself to others; He explained what He would do for them. When He founded His Church, He gave it no commission to write or to fix His teachings in a final form that would dispense with the need of a body of men, proclaiming in word and deed what He had done for us. His commission to this Church was to teach by its living voice; to guide by applying His teachings to every area of the world and every age of mankind; to bring holiness and salvation to men by personal contact with them. More than half of the original twelve Apostles have left nothing in writing under their name; only Matthew, Peter, John, James, Jude and Paul have left any writings in their name (Mark and Luke were not of the original Twelve.)

In the case of Saint Paul especially, we can see that these writings which now form our New Testament came about humanly by chance. Surely God planned it this way, but the Apostles didn't. The Letters to the Thessalonians came into being in this way. Saint Paul had not quite finished founding the local church at Thessalonica when he was driven out by his enemies. When he got to Athens, he found out that the persecution had not ceased after he had left, and it worried him greatly. Since he failed twice in trying to return to Thessalonica, he sent one of his companions to encourage his people in their trials, and to bring him news about how they were faring. By the time his companion had returned, he himself had had to move to another city, Corinth. There he received the good news that the people of Thessalonica were continuing firm in their life as followers of Jesus. With a heart overflowing with joy, he wrote his two letters within a few months to give the Thessalonians further encouragement in their trials, and to explain some points of his teaching that they had not clearly understood, particularly the point of the Second Coming of Jesus. Almost all the other letters of Saint Paul arose likewise out of what were apparently chance circumstances, when he could not come to them in person. Later, we will see how these came to be accepted by the living Church as the norm for future generations within the Church.

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

There is also a final book of the New Testament that stands apart from all the other books: the *Book of Revelation* or the *Apocalypse*. Both these names mean the same thing; the difference is that the first name comes from a Latin word, and the second from a Greek word. The special feature of this book is that it is written in a special

style of writing, called the apocalyptic style. Just above, we quoted from the Gospel of Saint John, stating that if everything Jesus did were written down, “not even the world itself, I think, could hold the books that would have to be written.” This is a way of saying that no one could write enough to exhaust the meaning of the sayings and deeds of Jesus; we don’t have to suppose that Saint John had actually measured the size of the world and the number of books that it could hold. Rather, this is a manner of speaking called “hyperbole,” or exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. You probably have heard people say that they have “a million and one things to do today.” This is a normal and acceptable way of saying that there are too many things to do.

Apocalyptic writing is a sort of exaggerated hyperbole, but it is known by certain set forms of expression and images. Figures of beasts and horns, or dragons and rivers, of the falling of sun and moon and stars are used to convey special meanings beyond the actual description of these things. The Book of Revelation, written in this style of apocalypse which was quite popular in the first Christian century, conveys the sustained teaching that Christ will conquer in the world, in all events of the world, over all obstacles that the world places in His way. It is a book of consolation, but is expressed in figures of speech that are surely not common among us today. Other books of the New Testament give a glimpse into the future through the deeds of Jesus in His lifetime and in the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church; but this view of the future is in the forefront of the *Book of Revelation*. Hence, it is usually classified as the prophetic book of the New Testament.

## II THE SETTING

Our salvation was worked out through a clearly defined people, the people of Israel, living in an organized society, in a known period of history. In the events of the history of this people and their nation, God made Himself known both as Creator of man and his Savior. From these events, we draw the principles by which man lives in the organized Church of Christ down to the present day. Hence, it is most valuable to go back to these events, and to see how wonderful is the work of God, how much His love for us is beyond anything we could have expected.

The setting for most of the events of the Bible is the land of Palestine. Today it is partially included in the State of Israel, and partially in the Kingdom of Jordan. Of course, there are other areas in the nearby countries that are known from the deeds of God recorded in the Bible. But if you know something of this principal area, Palestine, you will be in a better position to see God at work in the events of our world.

By modern standards of size – now that we know the different areas of the world – Palestine is indeed quite small. In Biblical times, it was not quite 150 miles from north to south. Like a cone, it flared out from the north down to the south. In the northern part, it was only about 20 miles in width. Farther to the south, near the city of Jerusalem, it reached about 55 miles. And at the extreme south, where boundaries were never quite fixed in Biblical times, it could have reached to about 100 miles in width. It was in this very small area, hardly larger than the State of Vermont, that

God worked those works of salvation that have influenced the course of history ever since, in all parts of the world.

In spite of the smallness of its size, Palestine contains the sharpest of contrasts in elevation of the land and in types of climate and agriculture. On the west, it is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea. Around that sea were grouped most of the main countries of the world in the time of Jesus. Bodies of water were very important for commerce in those ancient times. Roads on land were mostly broad paths cleared of brush; rarely were they the paved roads which we take for granted. Moving heavy loads of cargo up and down hills and over rivers with this type of road was a great problem. It was made even more difficult by the fact that men were just then beginning to devise a collar for dray animals that would not choke them to death when they were pulling heavy loads.

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

The presence of the Mediterranean Sea was even more important for Palestine, the Holy Land, because of the moist breezes that blew in from the sea every evening. Palestine is a land of relatively little rain – rain that runs off quickly because of the steep ridge of mountains that runs through the land. Hence, these breezes daily provided some additional moisture for the parched lands during the long periods between rains. The climate along the coast of Palestine was quite mild, and it was well fitted to the raising of crops of grain by reason of these nightly winds bringing in the dew. This dew that appeared on the ground each morning was one of the special figures among Biblical writers for the gentle, life-giving action of God.

The center of the country is a spine of mountainous land, beginning in the very north at an elevation of about

4,000 feet. It then slopes down to a valley that runs across the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Lake of Galilee. This plain is one of the most fertile areas of Palestine, and a very important key to the prosperity of the country. Below this plain, the Plain of Jezrael, the mountains again rise southward, where they reach about 3,500 feet below the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem itself, which is the scene of many of the most important deeds of God, rests within surrounding mountains at an elevation of about 2,500 feet above the sea. Though there are some small areas for farming in this mountainous range, the land is most adapted to the growing of vines, fig trees, and olive trees. Although it is considerably cooler than the coastal area, this mountainous country is still quite mild.

To the east of Jerusalem, within less than twenty miles by air, the land drops almost 4,000 feet, down to 1,300 feet below the level of the sea at the Dead Sea. This Dead Sea is the lowest point of a great slash that runs all through Palestine from north to south. In this valley is the River Jordan, beginning at the foothills of Mount Hermon in the north, then running into the Lake of Galilee, then continuing through the barren Jordan Valley until it empties into the Dead Sea. There is no outlet to this inland lake; all the water that flows into it is evaporated in the intense heat that is almost constant here. There are many baseless legends attached to this Sea because, perhaps, of the fact that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were on its banks. Nothing lives in it because of the high mineral content of the water, a mineral content that is explained by the constant evaporation process that takes the moisture, but leaves the minerals that the waters constantly bring with them. The sides of the valley above the Jordan River are quite barren.



They are very steep in most places, so that rains quickly run off in a few hours. The moist winds from the Mediterranean Sea skip over the valley, leaving it dry and desert.

Beyond the Jordan, the country rises very sharply to the plateau region of Transjordan. This area, because of the deep gash of the Jordan Valley, is not easily linked with Palestine itself. At some periods of the Old Testament, it was occupied by peoples other than the Israelites. But it does benefit to some degree from the winds off the Mediterranean.

### STRATEGIC VALUE OF PALESTINE

During all periods of history, Palestine has been of great strategic importance, because of the wealthy and powerful lands that surrounded it. Human civilization developed in two great centers: the land of Egypt, to the south of Palestine; and the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, to the north and east. Palestine was the only corridor through which commerce and caravans could pass between these two great and powerful centers of civilization. Each of these two important centers vied with the other to control this vital corridor. Yet, by reason of its peculiar geographical structure, Palestine could not be easily absorbed by either of them. The people of Palestine lived somewhat in isolation from these centers, yet they were able to profit by the development of culture in both of them.

“When the Most High assigned the nations their heritage, when he parceled out the descendants of Adam, he set up the boundaries of the peoples after the number of the sons of God; while the Lord’s own portion was Jacob, his hereditary share was Israel” (Deuteronomy 32:8-9). By design, God had chosen this land as the scene of His great

deeds of salvation. His people there could learn the arts and the skills of the world, without being absorbed by the world. The land was sufficient to provide them with enough means to live and thrive, but its character would never let them forget that they depended on God for their security. Jesus taught His disciples to pray “Give us this day our daily bread.” For their own well-being, men must know that God is the source of all their benefits. They need to acknowledge this by praying for enough for their own situation in life; but to have too much is a danger, for this usually makes a person think that he can do without God in his life. In the land which God chose for His own people, He would teach them this fundamental principle of happiness and holiness – dependence on Him who can never desert them in their real and eternal needs.

## THE CLAN OF ABRAHAM

Into this land, God called a man and his clan from the area of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, to the northeast. As a clan, his family was large enough – more than 300 persons, to be sure (Genesis 14:14). But it still was only a clan, a group of shepherds and traders that owed no special allegiance to any settled peoples, but lived on the borders of settled civilization. Their language was closely akin to the language in which the Old Testament is written, Hebrew. Although they loom large in our eyes, in their own times the men of this clan were of little account among the peoples with whom they lived. Hence the astounding nature of the prophecy of God to these people: that all the nations of the world would count themselves blessed through them. Through them, without any condition of possible failure, God would bring the salvation that was worked out in Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham. By their loyalty to God,

this man, Abraham, and his family would come to know the power and the love of God, who personally concerned Himself with the salvation of man. God will protect and shelter them. He will build them first into a mighty people, then into a great nation in Palestine. He will save them from being absorbed by the much more powerful nations which surrounded them for two thousand years. Within the hills and valleys of Palestine, He will make known to mankind in this people who He is and what He will do in all mankind, if it is willing to follow His teaching and live entirely for Him.

Throughout these two thousand years, this people treasured above all the memory of what God had done in them and was continually doing in them for the salvation of mankind. As a nomad people, wandering from place to place in search of water and pasture for their flocks, they had no way of recording their memory of these things in monuments and buildings, as was customary among the great nations surrounding them. Writing materials were very scarce, very costly, and very difficult to preserve in these wanderings. But they did faithfully commit to memory the things which God had done for them. These they handed down from generation to generation as the explanation of the way they lived and of what their calling was in their way of life. In the course of time, when they came into a settled civilization and when the custom of alphabetic writing became common, they began to draw up written accounts of these deeds. But for any people of primitive times, the written account was secondary. The long rehearsed accounts of these deeds passed from father to son, and through them the people were instructed in their relations with God. "He set it up as a decree in Jacob, and established it as a law in Israel, that what he commanded our fathers, they should

make known to their sons; so that generations to come might know, their sons yet to be born, that they too may rise and declare to their sons that they should put their hope in God, and not forget the deeds of God but keep his commands” (Psalm 78:5-7).

### **III**

## **WHEN THE BIBLE WAS BORN**

You may think it rather strange to speak about “when the Bible was born.” Generally, people don’t think much about how the Bible came to be. They seem just to assume that God delivered it to man, so that man would immediately recognize it as God’s word. Then all he would have to do is to read it, and find the right way to live and to save his soul.

Yet, the fact is that God’s people were worshipping Him and serving Him and embodying His truth in their lives for a thousand years before they came to recognize that He had given them His word in writing through the hand of men who had lived in their own nation. It is most useful and salutary to look into the manner in which the Bible came into being. In so doing, we will see how God has been dealing with men throughout all the ages since He first came to man as his Savior. We will see also how God continues to deal with men in our own day.

A comparison may help to bring this out. We know that God comes to man to bring him to salvation. But this is the same God who first brought man into being through creation, the same God who sustains him in every act of his life, the same God who guides the forces of nature and the destinies of men and nations. We cannot separate God into different compartments, or into two different beings. Not only does God save man in the world which God has made; He saves man through the things of this world and through other persons in this world. Nothing in our material world is outside the plan of God’s salvation. Hence, when God undertakes to save man from himself and his sins, He does

so through the world that responds to every act of the will of God.

We also know that God speaks to man through His word in the Bible. But first of all, He spoke to men who lived and worshipped Him before He brought forth the Bible for them. We cannot separate God as speaking through the inspired words of the Bible from God as speaking to His people in and through material events of history and in and through the representatives He has sent to them in His name.

### AUTHOR OF THE BIBLE

From outward appearances, there is nothing about the Bible that could not have been produced by man alone. It is a completely human work, so far as it appears to man. And yet, God has made known the fact that He Himself is the principal and responsible author of the Bible, that He has used the mind and the will and the hand of man as a human being uses an instrument, such as a pen or word processor in writing a book.

Surely there is a vast difference between a pen and a free, intelligent human being. When we use a pen, we use it only by acting on it from the outside – that is, by holding it and moving it so that it makes lines that form words to be understood by ourselves and others. But it is quite true to say that the pen used in this way does enter into the producing of an intelligent work – the act of expressing thought, even though a pen certainly cannot think. For a while, a piece of wood or plastic or metal has actually acted above and beyond anything it could do by itself without a human author.

The pen is used because it does add something to the writer – if only the making of strokes on a piece of paper, strokes that the writer’s finger could not make when rubbed on that same piece of paper. Each separate pen also adds something distinctive to the expressions of the writer, even though he expresses the same idea by writing with different pens. One pen will make a bold and broad stroke, another a light and spidery stroke. One will write smoothly and with ease, another with laborious scratching. The pen may even be a rather imperfect pen, one that makes little blots or skips a stroke here and there. But if it can do the job that the writer wants done, it is good enough for the work.

But, as we said, this pen is not an intelligent and free being, as a man is. A writer could not use a man for writing, as he uses a pen. But the principal writer in the case of the Bible is not a man; He is God Himself. God has brought human beings into existence, and constantly keeps them in existence. He can use this human being in the very inner actions that make him especially human – his intelligence and his free will – without violating or destroying either of these.

In her life and her worship, the Church has preserved what Christ taught her about the Bible: that it is the product of God working through man (Mark 12:36). She has always used this book with the reverence that is due to the thoughts of God Himself, and has always taught with Christ that the Scriptures cannot be in error – a quality that belongs only to God Himself by right (John 10:35). The early teaching of the Church through Saint Peter brings out the relationship between God and the human author in the writing of the Scripture: that men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). The thought of Saint Peter is that the

motion of God on the sacred author is like the motion of the wind in moving a sailboat. As all the motion of the boat comes from the wind which moves it, so all the motion of man in writing – his thinking, his willing, his expressing of thoughts – comes from the Holy Spirit who moves him to this writing.

## WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

Notice that these facts are now found in the Bible itself. But, as we will see in a little while, they are the teaching of the Church and of Christ Himself before these works were even known to be Scripture. Christ, as the Son of God, bears witness to the truth of the writing of the Bible by God and man. The Church in her life from that time to the present bears witness to the same truth that Christ had taught her. *We are here quoting the living Christ in favor of the inspiration of the Scriptures, not the inspired Scriptures in favor of themselves.* This latter point wouldn't mean anything unless first you knew that the Scriptures were inspired. Further, as we will also see later, the Scriptures here mentioned are only the Old Testament Scriptures.

God uses man to write a book because man also adds something to God's expression of His thought. Man adds something to the expression of God's thought, not to the thought itself. What he adds is what other men need to have in order to follow the thoughts of God. For God does not think as man does – step by step, from facts to conclusions, from conclusions to application. In God, there is one simple, brilliant, eternal act of knowledge that knows in one simple instant all that God is, all that God will ever do. In God, there is neither increase in knowledge, nor lapse of memory.



Obviously, this is not the kind of knowledge that God can transmit directly to man; man simply cannot grasp this. Hence when God comes to us to share His knowledge with us according to our abilities, He adapts Himself to our way of learning. He takes men as His instruments, and thinks out His thoughts through their human minds so that we can grasp them. By their free will, He freely produces a book that will be within the grasp of our limited minds. He works through them in definite historical circumstances. Hence, by knowing the thought of the human author in his time and in his circumstances, we know the mind of God and the truth of God about that time and those circumstances. To know this fact is to see the marvel of God's love that brings Him to meet us on our own level.

Men use different pens to get different results in view of the purpose they have in mind. So also does God use different human instruments in view of the purpose He has in mind in writing. Each of these is a distinct human being, with distinct characteristics and ways of speaking. What God is saying through each of them is always brought back to one supreme truth – that God is our Savior, saving us from ourselves and our fallen tendencies; that God has freed us to live with Him now and always. But this message is spoken through different instruments and at different times. The times and the instruments add new depth of knowledge of this infinite truth that cannot be grasped all at once by any human mind. No inspired author will say exactly what every other one has said or will say. Each of them impresses on his work the personal characteristics of his time, his background, his situation in life. Each of them was chosen by God for the purpose of conveying His message in that set of circumstances. In each case, therefore, God is to be

understood through the investigation of the meaning of the human author at the time he wrote and in the circumstances of his writing. But then, all of them lead back to the basic truth of our own lives – that God comes to a definite body of men; in them He reveals His truths by His dealings with them; through their lives, the work of salvation will be produced in living image for the rest of mankind to see. Through His writings in the Bible, men can come to know something of the personality of God; then they are invited to come and to meet Him personally in His living body, the Church.

Thus the Bible takes its rise in the living Church, God's people. The Bible contains the record of what He has done through them, His people; for this is the measure of what He will do in these people during all the ages of time. It contains the invitation to come and know Him in personal, living contact with Him in His Church.

Now you can perhaps understand better what we had in mind by asking when the Bible was born. The Church is not an appendage to the Bible, a group of men gathered to follow its principles. Rather, the Bible is the record of God's dealings with His living Church, His own people. In the long centuries before the Bible was put into its present form and recognized as the work of God Himself through human authors, the truths of God formed the very backbone of His people – in their civil and private lives, in their prayer and in their worship. It was these dealings of God with His people that made them what they were as a nation. When some part of this tradition failed to influence His people in their daily lives as a nation, they became lopsided and got into trouble. Then, God sent His living representatives to them to explain where they were failing, what were the consequences of this,

what were the hopes that had to sustain them as His own people.

## THE LIVING VOICE OF GOD

At least from the time of Moses, about 1300 B.C., some of God's dealings with His people and certain of His laws were put into writing. These were given on the authority of the visible representatives of God, not as a work of God independent of those authorities. But what percentage of people could read in those early years? It is hard to say with exactitude. But the disturbances of the times, the difficulty of obtaining writing materials, the labor of copying books by hand, and the relative lack of importance of reading in daily life would lead us to conclude that very few were able to read. The main source of the knowledge of God and His deeds and His laws was then, as it still is, the living voice of those who spoke in the name of God and by His authority – the kings, the judges, the priests, the prophets.

The actual gathering and recognition of God's written work was, by human standards, accidental. The first set of writings to be gathered and recognized as God's own words were the five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch. They were gathered when the nation of Israel, founded by God through Josue about 1300 B.C., was on the verge of collapse and of being dispersed among the pagan nations around them. Their collapse was threatened because they had failed to live the truths of God in their national and personal lives. In spite of warnings, they persisted in treating God as belonging to them, rather than in treating themselves as belonging to God. In effect, what they were doing showed that they thought God could not get along without them. And God was in the process of showing that He could get

along very well by allowing their national power to collapse under the attacks from nations round about them. About 750 B.C., the nation began coming apart. By 586 B.C., it was gone as a political power in the world, but not as a people.

### TRADITIONS FORMED INTO ONE GROUP

This great crisis brought the leaders of the people to gather and form into one group those traditions that they should have been following. There were the traditions of the first call of their people in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There were the great traditions of their freedom from slavery in Egypt and their covenant or treaty with God at Sinai. There were the basic laws and customs from the time of Moses that had been brought up to date to meet the changing circumstances of the people. There were the laws of prayer and worship that likewise had been made more and more perfect over the passing of the years.

The final formation and recognition of this work as God's own written work was surely made before 400 B.C., after the Israelites had miraculously been restored to their homeland after captivity in Babylon. This work was not only recognized as a true record of what God had done, but as God's own record of what He had done. To recognize this fact, they had to have God's own statement that He had written these works using human beings as His instruments. Exactly how God made this known to His people at that time is beyond what we can discuss here. But we do know that this revelation of God came through His living people at that time, and that this revelation of God was emphatically affirmed by Jesus Himself, the Son of God.

A second collection of writings was added to the Books of Moses and recognized as inspired by God around 200

B.C. Again, remember that this is not the time when these works were written, but the time when they were recognized as inspired by God and gathered into a collection. Here the traditions were gathered that described God's dealings with His people in bringing them into their Promised Land, in building them into a great nation under David, about 1000 B.C. These works then described the failure of that nation to live up to its duties to God, bringing about its destruction in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Side by side with these traditions, the preaching of the prophets during this period that led up to the fall of Jerusalem showed the inexcusable failure of the people. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve lesser prophets kept warning the people of the doom that would overtake them; yet, at the same time, they saw that God would not let His work be undone by any men, and that He would bring greater blessings and show greater love through their failures.

### A THIRD COLLECTION OF WRITINGS

About 100 B.C., a third collection of writing was added to the Bible of the Old Testament. In this collection are books of exhortation to courage based on God's constancy in dealing with His people; there are books of meditation and prayer, searching for the proper response to God's action in the world. Among these books is the great prayerbook of Israel and of all Christians, the *Psalms*.

All these books were gathered and explained by the living Church of the Old Testament; through these books, the living voice of that Church nourished the eager yearning of the people for the perfection of the Kingdom of God on earth through His own Chosen People. Into this atmosphere of yearning Jesus came, proclaiming that perfect Kingdom

as now in their midst. Those who were willing to make the sacrifice of everything for the sake of that Kingdom became themselves the new Kingdom of Jesus. They, in their lives for God, in their public worship of God, in their obedience to the commands of Jesus were commissioned to bring all the world into the unity of holiness with God. "I pray... for those also who through their word are to believe in me, that all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:19-22). "But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the preaching by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20).

Very shortly, the Church gathered the sayings and deeds of Jesus into set forms of oral recital. Through these, the early Christians learned the perfection of what was taught them in their Scriptures, the Old Testament. Very shortly also, these sayings and deeds began to be put in written form for a more thorough instruction of the meaning of the life of Jesus. The account of the sufferings and death of Jesus probably came first in writing. Then also, the sayings and deeds of Jesus which make known that He is truly a divine person, equal with God the Father and yet distinct from Him. Finally, our four Evangelists gathered together this traditional material for special areas of the Church and particular audiences within the Church.

## AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

This was the Gospel, the "good news" that was preached by the living voice of the Apostles and of those with whom they shared their commission from Christ our Lord. The written form of this Gospel was also proposed on

the authority of the living Church as the official interpretation of the Scriptures in light of the events and sayings of the life of Jesus. Because the Church was able even to reverse some of the clear teachings of the Old Testament, as in the case of Acts 15:6-11, it is not difficult to see that the writings containing these decisions would soon be recognized as on a par with the Scriptures of the Old Testament themselves.

Before 200 A.D., most of the New Testament writings which we now have were acknowledged by the Church through God's revelation as written by God Himself through the hand of man, as were the Old Testament Scriptures. Before 400 A.D., all our New Testament writings had been carefully screened from other works that pretended divine origin, and were recognized as God's legacy to His Church for the instruction of the faithful in all ages.

Our information about the recognition of divine authorship in the New Testament writings is clear. First, these works had to propose the same truths of God as were being proposed by the living Church of that time. Christ founded His Church as His living voice and His Mystical Body; nothing that contradicted that divine institution could have come from God Himself. Secondly, these works had to be of Apostolic origin, either directly by being written by an Apostle, or indirectly by being acknowledged as authoritative in Apostolic times. It was on the Twelve that Christ said He would found His living Church in the world; hence those works which were acknowledged in Apostolic times as of divine authority had another mark of divine inspiration. Finally, these works made up that Bible which the Church used in divine worship and instruction of the

people throughout the world. As founded by Christ, the Church was to last until He came again in glory; it could not disappear or betray His final commission: “Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world” (Matthew 28:20). When used by the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of truth (John 16:13), these writings were thus known as written by God. Through these three conditions combined, the Church came to know by the end of the fourth century what were and what were not the writings which God had truly written after the time of Jesus: our New Testament.

If you are aware of the content of the Old Testament as used by Catholics and as used by other Christians, you know that there is a very considerable difference. In Catholic Bibles, there are seven books that are not usually found in other Christian Bibles: the books of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees. Small portions of Daniel and Esther are also found in Catholic Bibles in addition to the parts found in other Christian Bibles. It is important to see how this difference came about.

You have seen how the process of gathering God’s writings had been going on for centuries before the coming of Christ and after His coming. The Church at the time of Jesus had gathered many of these writings. But at no point up to then had God said that this was enough. In fact, God continued the process of inspiration through the Apostolic age.

When our Lord came among men, there was yet another group of writings produced in the Old Testament Church, but not yet finally recognized by it as inspired. They



were widely circulated in the Greek translation of the Scripture, intermingled with the books that had already been acknowledged as inspired; hence, many were then putting them on an equality of authorship with the other Scriptures.

When our Lord founded His Church as the perfection of the Church of the Old Testament, this Greek translation with its seven extra books and parts of two other books became the official Bible of the Christian Church. As the true Church of God now, after the coming of Jesus, this Church had not only the right but also the duty to decide on the inspiration of these books. During that period when the Church was investigating the divine origin of the New Testament writings, it was likewise looking into the origin of these books as of divine authorship. The result was that the Church admitted all of them to the Canon of the Scriptures, that is, the list of the inspired writings that God had written for His Church. Tested by the norms of true doctrine and continual use in the worship and instruction of the Church, these Old Testament books were found acceptable, just as the New Testament books were. The same living Church, the continuation of our Lord as Savior, accepted these writings of both the Old and New Testaments, and gave them to the Church for its spiritual benefit.

For over a thousand years, these books were all accepted in the Church and used by the Church for the instruction and benefit of the faithful. At the time of the Reformation, these books were rejected in most other Christian bodies. The Old Testament Scripture as used among the Jewish people was considered the norm of the content of the Old Testament. To be sure, the leaders of Judaism had determined that the Scriptures were completed

with their Bible, and could not be added to. But that decision was taken at almost 100 A.D., several generations after the coming of Christ, and at a period when the Christians were already recognizing the inspired Scriptures containing the sayings and deeds of Christ written after His Ascension into heaven. Without a true appreciation of the living Church, embodying in its own life the life and teachings of Jesus, the Reformers were misled into rejecting what had been acknowledged as inspired Scripture in the Christian Church for more than one thousand years.

## IV

# THE CHURCH'S BIBLE

The Bible came into being through God's personal action on members of His Church. It came into being as God's legacy to that Church, so that the Church could always keep before her members what God had done to bring them into His own Church. God gave this Church many blessings by which it would unite every person with God. The living, indwelling Holy Spirit will always see to it that this Church can never, under any circumstances, abandon the truths and the divine gifts that make up her nature; otherwise the salvation of Christ would have been worked in vain; the work of sin would have completely taken hold of the world again, as it had before the call of Abraham. The very fact that we recognize that the whole Bible is the word of God is witness to the fact that we know that God's Church has continued on in the world long after His Ascension – a visible body of believers that can distinguish divine truth from mere human teachings through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Once given to the human family, the Bible does not supplant the living Church. The Bible does not supplant the Holy Spirit who leads the Church at every age into all the truth it needs for the guidance of people of that age. But as the measure of what God has done in the world, the Bible is of supreme importance in the teaching and worship of the Church. The Bible is not everyman's Bible; it is the Church's Bible. Like every sacred gift of God, it must be carefully treasured and preserved wholly for every generation.

In making Himself known to His people, God used men of the Old Testament, whose language was mostly the

Hebrew language; in the New Testament the language was the Greek language. But when our Lord gave His Church the commission to preach to all nations, He gave them the commission to bring them His words in a language that they could understand. The practice of putting the Scriptures into a language more easily understood had begun about 250 years before Christ. This was the start of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, made in Egypt for those who spoke Greek, not Hebrew. It was this translation that contained the seven additional books of the Old Testament that we have spoken about. This translation was used, to a large extent, as the source of the quotations of the Old Testament in the writings of the New.

## TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

About the third century after Christ, as the Church became more widespread among those who spoke only Latin in the West and only Syriac in the East, translations into those languages were used alongside the official Greek Bible of the early Church. These translations, however, were carefully watched over by the Church, whose mission is to safeguard her members against translations that would betray the meaning of God as contained in the Scriptures. Just as the New Testament Scriptures were being gathered by the Church during these centuries and were being judged first of all by their conformity to the teaching of the living Church, the translations of the accepted Scriptures also had to measure up to this same norm. As the Church spread into newer regions of the world and came into contact with newer or different languages, the Bible was translated into these also.

The barbarian invasion of Europe in the early Christian centuries produced tremendous changes not only in political organization but also in culture and language. The Latin language was gradually supplanted by newer languages that developed out of the Latin. In Northern Europe and Britain, newer Germanic languages developed. It took centuries before these newer languages came to stable literary forms that could be the basis of lasting books. This was a period that had not seen the printing press, the easy means of communication between different regions, and still less the modern inventions of electronic communications.

As in ancient times, most of the people of those times could not have read a Bible, no matter what language it was written in. Those who could read anything at all could generally read Latin. And yet, there were numerous sections of the Bible translated into the shifting languages of the day for the benefit of those who might be able to read them. For those who could not read, the stained glass windows of their churches provided pictorial explanations of the events of the Bible. In addition to this, they were instructed through the miracle plays, through the preaching of the Church, through the dramatic actions of the Sacraments and Holy Mass, and through their prayers which taught them, as well as expressed their needs and hopes. It was not unusual in those times for people to learn the whole book of the Psalms by heart, as well as large sections of other parts of the Bible.

In our present circumstances, we have a hard time realizing what our civilization would be like without the printed word – if the only reproduction of books were by the laborious process of copying word by word. The abundance of writing material that we rarely think about simply was lacking in those times. The ease of buying a book with the

earnings of a few minutes or an hour makes us unaware that only the very wealthy could afford to buy any book in medieval times. The myth of “the chained Bible” shows how far we can misunderstand those times. Yes, there were chained Bibles. But they were not chained shut. They were chained to a reading stand so that no one could carry away this precious source of teaching which was for the benefit of all. Chained telephone directories in public places are chained for the same reason the Bible was – so that all can have their use. In light of these things, then, you can appreciate the care and love of the Church in providing for the copying of the Bible. Every monastery in medieval times had its “writing room,” where copies of the Bible were copied out by hand, sometimes on the most costly materials, so that these copies would be always available for those who could appreciate them and benefit by them.

### PROPER USE OF THE BIBLE

The main problem, then, is not just having the Bible, but also profiting by its use. This should not be hard for any one of us to understand. Our lives are surrounded by gifts of God, everywhere we look. Our own life itself is a gift from God. Yet, we don’t have to look far to see how these gifts of God are constantly misused. The Bible is one of the greatest of God’s gifts. But the fact that the Bible is God’s gift does not automatically mean that everyone is going to make good use of it. Misuse of the Bible is at least as old as Christianity itself. For Saint Peter writes of Saint Paul’s epistles: “In these epistles there are certain things difficult to understand, which the unlearned and the unstable distort, just as they do the other Scriptures also, to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16).

The Bible is a religious book, one which teaches us how God acts with man and in man for his salvation. Since it is a record of God's dealings with His people in the past, it reflects the times and customs of these men. But it is not, as we have pointed out, simply a history of civilization. We have noted also the startling differences of the times in which these men lived, the language which they spoke, the customs which they followed. God used people of those times, living by those customs to state the truth of what He was doing through His own people.

Hence, to understand the Bible profitably, it must be read with a view of understanding how the life of each person in the Church must be lived as manifesting in every action of his day the truth of God whom he worships. Likewise, to understand the Bible fully, it must be read according to the ideas and ways of speaking in ancient times. Records, for instance, carried by word of tradition for centuries will have characteristics different from records of current events which you read in the daily newspaper. In those days, people didn't encumber their memory with details that had no meaning for their daily living. They were concerned first of all about God's dealings with them among their own people; what He was doing elsewhere would not help them to understand their own religious obligations to God.

It is a gathering of the teachings of the people of God regarding their own lives. Some of these teachings were in simple narrative form. Others were in the form of customary laws. Others still were either stories told to explain a situation or perhaps poetic compositions which delight in exaggeration and startling contrasts. Sometimes fables were told to teach a lesson, just as we do with children. Language

was taken from the religions of surrounding peoples who did not know the true God, and this language was used to show that the true God was all the false god pretended to be and infinitely more. Surely, the preaching of Jesus did not in any way deny the truth of God as revealed in previous times. But it did lead people to understand the profound realities that God had been referring to in those times.

You might come to the conclusion that the Bible is meaningless for the bulk of mankind. But that would be going too far. It is God's written message to mankind; and His word will not return to Him empty, no more than the word of creation was simply an echo in empty space. He has spoken to men in ancient times to give them a dignity that is beyond any that man could possibly dream of: to be the living image of the truth of God in the world. These messages to men, God later put into writings that were His own writings, and entrusted them to the group which He had founded as His Kingdom on earth. Other people, not of that Kingdom, would be able to read the truth of God as lived in the lives of the members of His Church, and thus understand His written word.

## BENEFITS OF READING THE BIBLE

The reading of the Bible, therefore, will lead you to a keener understanding of the nature of God's work among us. It will teach you that God is not afar off, speaking to us through the pages of a book that most people could not have read. Rather, He speaks to others through you and your loyalty to Him, if you don't count the cost.

You will read the pages of the Bible to see living examples of the teachings which the Church sets before you. You will know that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church,



leading it to all truth. Hence, if some passage of Scripture seems to say to you something that is contrary to the teaching of the Church, you will know that you have misunderstood it. There are many passages of the Bible that still puzzle even scholars. But through the teaching of the living Church, they know at least some things that these passages cannot be saying. Otherwise, God could have made a mistake in one place or the other; or He would have abandoned that very institution which He brought into the world as the living pillar of truth. Neither of these is at all possible. What is possible is that we do not know all things; there are many things which you might know right now that would be of practically or absolutely no value in your relation to God. But when you look at the immensity of the truths proposed by God through the Bible, you ought not be disappointed to admit that they must be beyond you in all the wealth of their meaning.

Secondly, you will read the Bible as it was directed to the people of its own time in the Church. What He said through them is what He says to us. Reading into the Bible curious statements about modern times and political situations that have no relation to salvation is the most fundamental and basic mistake. What the Bible must mean to us is what it meant to the people of those times; nothing different. From these truths, the Church will draw many applications to present conditions through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Or we ourselves may draw conclusions of this kind; but in our case, we have to admit candidly that we are neither infallible nor all knowing. God guaranteed that His work and His teaching through His people would not fail. But He has not guaranteed that each individual will know all things with certainty.

## DAILY READING RECOMMENDED

You should therefore undertake to read the Bible day by day. If you can do so, read it out loud. You don't need to set out to read as much as possible at once; rather, read what you can thoroughly grasp as applying in some way to your own life. It may even be possible to read passages with someone else; this, too, is of great value because you have the benefit of their understanding as well as your own. A slow and thoughtful reading of the passages of the *Gospels* and of the *Acts of the Apostles* will be unquestionably of value if it is done in the proper spirit.

And what is this proper spirit? It is the earnest and unflagging desire to draw closer and closer to God. You are first of all using the Bible as the word of God to you. God is your Savior. He wants you to live in peace with Him and with others for His sake. He wants you to live the truth of His revelation not only in church, but also in the shop, in the home, in matters concerning our nation and other nations. Knowing that you don't know everything about the Bible, you won't be afraid to admit that certain passages are puzzling. But that will not discourage you from reading further, where other passages will open your heart to the light of the Holy Spirit. This desire to know God, joined with the effort to practice His truth day by day, will bring you to realize the truth of the saying of Jesus: "If anyone desires to do his will, he will know of the teaching whether it is of God!" (John 7:17).

THE BOOKS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS  
AND THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

**THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Genesis	Gn	Proverbs	Prv
Exodus	Ex	Ecclesiastes	Eccl
Leviticus	Lv	Songs	Sng
Numbers	Nm	Wisdom	Wis
Deuteronomy	Dt	Sirach	Sir
Joshua	Jos	Isaiah	Is
Judges	Jgs	Jeremiah	Jer
Ruth	Ru	Lamentations	Lam
1 Samuel	1 Sm	Baruch	Bar
2 Samuel	2 Sm	Ezekiel	Ez
1 Kings	1 Kgs	Daniel	Dn
2 Kings	2 Kgs	Hosea	Hos
1 Chronicles	1 Chr	Joel	Jl
2 Chronicles	2 Chr	Amos	Am
Esdra	Esd	Obadiah	Ob
Nehemiah	Neh	Jonah	Jon
Tobit	Tb	Micah	Mi
Judith	Jdt	Nahum	Na
Esther	Est	Habakkuk	Hb
1 Maccabees	1 Mc	Zephaniah	Zep
2 Maccabees	2 Mc	Haggai	Hg
Job	Jb	Zechariah	Zec
Psalms	Ps	Malachi	Mal

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew	Mt	1 Timothy	1 Tm
Mark	Mk	2 Timothy	2 Tm
Luke	Lk	Titus	Ti
John	Jn	Philemon	Phlm
Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb
Romans	Rom	James	Jas
1 Corinthians	1 Cor	1 Peter	1 Pt
2 Corinthians	2 Cor	2 Peter	2 Pt
Galatians	Gal	1 John	1 Jn
Ephesians	Eph	2 John	2 Jn
Philippians	Phil	3 John	3 Jn
Colossians	Col	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thes	Revelation	Rv
2 Thessalonians	2 Thes		





*“Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response.”*

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

### **About Catholic Information Service**

Since its founding, the Knights of Columbus has been involved in evangelization. In 1948, the Knights started the Catholic Information Service (CIS) to provide low-cost Catholic publications for the general public as well as for parishes, schools, retreat houses, military installations, correctional facilities, legislatures, the medical community, and for individuals who request them. For over 70 years, CIS has printed and distributed millions of booklets, and thousands of people have enrolled in its catechetical courses.

CIS offers the following services to help you come to know God better:

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#### **On-Line Courses**

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In the case of coming generations, the lay faithful must offer the very valuable contribution, more necessary than ever, of a systematic work in catechesis. The Synod Fathers have gratefully taken note of the work of catechists, acknowledging that they “have a task that carries great importance in animating ecclesial communities.” It goes without saying that Christian parents are the primary and irreplaceable catechists of their children...; however, we all ought to be aware of the “rights” that each baptized person has to being instructed, educated and supported in the faith and the Christian life.

Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34  
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission  
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

## About the Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus, a fraternal benefit society founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut, by Blessed Michael McGivney, is the world’s largest lay Catholic organization, with more than 1.9 million members in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. The Knights support each other and their community, contributing millions of volunteer hours to charitable causes each year. The Knights were the first to financially support the families of law enforcement and fire department personnel killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and to work closely with Catholic bishops to protect innocent human life and traditional marriage. To find out more about the Knights of Columbus, visit [www.kofc.org](http://www.kofc.org).

Whether you have a specific question or desire a broader, deeper knowledge of the Catholic faith, CIS can help. Contact us at:

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Proclaiming the Faith  
In the Third Millennium