

“But,” Moses said to God, “when I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ if they ask me ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?”

God replied, “I AM WHO AM.” Then he added, “This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you. . . . This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations.”

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

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

Yet Moses persisted, “If you please, LORD, send someone else.”

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

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



GOD REVEALS HIS LOVING PLAN TO SAVE US

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

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

Through the use of reason, we can learn much about God from both creation and conscience, but Revelation enables us to learn about God’s

inner life and his loving plan to save us from sin and share in his divine life. No amount of unaided thinking could penetrate such a mystery. God freely chose to share this hidden mystery with us. God's sharing was an act of friendship for us, revealing himself as one reveals his or her heart to a friend. Love does such things.

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

God continued over the succeeding centuries to provide providential care for those he created in his image and likeness. He called Abraham to make of him a great nation, a chosen people through whom salvation would come to the world. In the encounter of God with Moses, God reveals himself as "I AM WHO AM." These words reveal something about God, who, nevertheless, still remains mysterious. God is revealed as the source of all that is, but who he is will be revealed still further as he continues his loving work for his people. The prophets, in reflecting on God's actions, will make clearer the nature of God. But the clearest Revelation will come in Jesus Christ.

"In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors; in these last days he spoke to us through a son" (Heb 1:1-2). This Son was Jesus Christ, the fullness of Revelation. Wonderful indeed is this mystery of our faith in Jesus Christ, as we say in professing it, "[He] was manifested in the flesh, / vindicated in the Spirit; / seen by angels; / proclaimed to the Gentiles, / believed throughout the world, / taken up in glory" (1 Tm 3:16).

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

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

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

It requires faith to respond to God's revealing word and to perceive the divine action in history. There are those who do not have faith or who consciously reject living in faith. They cannot or will not perceive God's presence or action in the world and sometimes scoff at or ridicule those who do. But for many people, God makes faith possible and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit faith helps those people to grow in an appreciation of how God has worked in history to love and save us.

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

Because the Christian covenant is definitive, there will be no new public Revelation until the final glorious manifestation of Jesus Christ at the end days (DV, no. 4). All that is needed for salvation has already

1 A covenant was originally a treaty in which an overlord and a vassal accepted certain responsibilities toward each other. In the Old Testament, this idea of covenant became the primary analogy for the relationship between God and his people.

FROM THE CATECHISM

1. How does God freely reveal himself?

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

2. What response to Revelation did God plan for men and women?

By revealing himself, God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him, and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity. (CCC, no. 52)

3. If Revelation is complete, what is the next step?

Even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries. (CCC, no. 66)

been revealed. What are called *private revelations*, that is, messages such as those given by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Lourdes and Fatima, add nothing to what was publicly revealed up and through Christ but can help inspire a more profound commitment to what has been revealed through public Revelation.

THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE

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

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

Religion does not exist in a vacuum. It operates in a given culture at a particular moment in time. The understanding of a living God who has revealed a loving plan to save us takes place in real time. There is much in our culture that is good and favorable to faith and morality. The freedom to practice our faith is a treasured principle in our society.

But there are troubling developments. Most history today is taught from a secular viewpoint. Such a prevailing attitude often makes it hard for believers to realize there is a starting point in God's Revelation for understanding human history. The culture in which we live is, in many ways, individualistic, secular, and materialistic. This poses a challenge to Christians and other believers who are asked to respond in faith to God who has revealed himself. It often requires great patience and much virtue to live a faith-filled life, to hand on Gospel values to children and others, and to interact with people—often the young—whose lives are affected by counter-Christian cultural currents.

In many ways, attitudes and actions in the United States have fostered a “culture of disbelief.” The First Amendment, which prohibits the establishment of a state religion, has been interpreted in such a way that it excessively marginalizes religion. Society has reached the stage in which people of faith are pressured to act publicly as though religion does not matter. This has caused many believers to think their faith is strictly a private matter and that it should have no influence on society and politics.

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

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

Cultural change is slow, but it can take place through perseverance and God's grace. Evangelizers need a broad vision as well as wisdom,

courage, fortitude, and perseverance. Evangelizing a culture relies on deep insight into the mysteries of our faith and a keen vision for understanding the basis of our culture.

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

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

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When friends and family members converse with one another, what do they reveal about themselves? What does God reveal of himself to us in treating us as friends and family members? How does God’s Revelation give meaning to our lives?
2. What is meant when we say that we have a “revealed” religion? What are positive features in our culture? How can culture be converted and transformed by the Gospel?
3. What would help you to spend more time reading and praying over God’s revealed word in Scripture? Why can we say that growth in our faith will strengthen us to affect public policy with our beliefs?

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

- Revelation is the self-disclosure of the living God and his plan to save us. Revelation shows us that God desires to have an intimate and loving relationship with everyone.
- The process of Revelation took centuries to unfold. God gradually communicated the divine mystery by words and deeds.

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

MEDITATION

Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation of God:

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

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

PRAYER

Your word, LORD, stands forever;
it is firm as the heavens.
Through all generations your truth endures;
fixed to stand firm like the earth.
Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light for my path.

—Ps 119:89-90; 105



Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.

—2 Pt 1:5