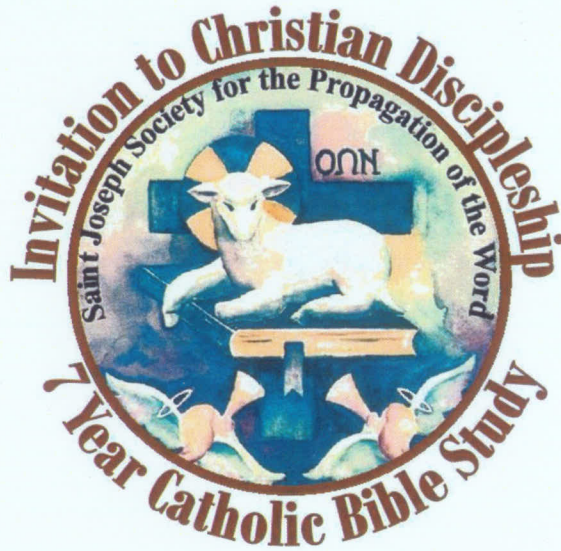


The Invitation

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT



LEADER'S EDITION

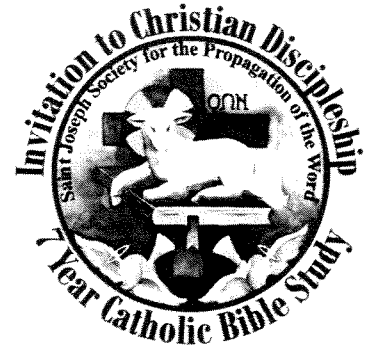
Commentary by

JAMES P. O'BRYAN, S.T.

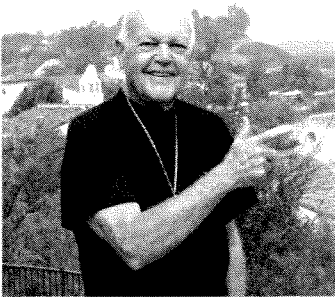
An Invitation to Christian Discipleship

James P. O'Bryan, S.T., Author and Presenter

It was the early 1970's when a group of laywomen in Orange, CA approached Fr. O'Bryan about the lack of Catholic Bible studies in Orange County. There was, of course, the Protestant group nearby that had signed up over 200 Catholics to their study. Father knew he couldn't do the work without a great deal of assistance. Volunteers stepped up to do the logistical tasks and Father worked with the Holy Spirit to provide the inspiration. This was the beginning of his "seven year sentence". Working 60 – 65 hours per week, he was never more than two weeks ahead, and most of the time he was working with less than a day to presentation time. His work was all hand written and needed to be typed and copied for distribution. These two hour sessions (1 hour sharing + 1 hour lecture) were attended by approximately 400 people weekly, split between a morning and an evening class. Father claims he never rewrote a word; "I didn't have the time," he said. He continues his writing today in Riverside, California.



Father's efforts resulted in a seven year study plus several spin-off works used for educating Catholics around the world. The seven year scripture study includes:



Fr. Jim

- The Invitation (Intro)
- The Gospel of St. Mark
- The Gospel of St. Luke
- Acts of the Apostles
- The Gospel of St. Matthew
- The Gospel of St. John
- Romans
- Hebrews
- 1 Thessalonians
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Revelation
- A Christian Walks through Genesis

Other excellent teaching materials, often used in RCIA and formation classes, are the result of Father's dedication to the laity. These materials include "Christian with a Capital C," "Rock Foundation Revisited" and "On Eagle's Wings." In 2005, a group was formed to help publish and distribute Father's work. The **St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of The Word, Inc.** has been instrumental in setting up a web site to take on the ministry of spreading the Gospel by promoting the instructional works of Fr. O'Bryan. **Materials available include teacher's manuals, student workbooks, CD's of lectures, and several inspirational works for RCIA and adult education.**

This study is designed to be presented by either the laity or religious. Each scripture study offers Teacher's Manuals, Student Workbooks and CD's. Instructions for starting a study group are included. These studies are accredited by the Catechetical Institute of Orange County and have the Imprimatur through the Bishop of Orange, California. Check our website for a study near you or start a study in your parish. We'll be happy to help you.

This is an "in depth" study of the scriptures so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, might dwell in us.

Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God Himself (Eph. 3:18-19).

<http://www.invitetodiscipleship.org> / 5123 Scholarship, Irvine, CA 92612

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December 19, 1983

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INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study Series



INTRODUCTORY STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

James P. O'Bryan, S.T.

St. Joseph Society for Propagation of the Word
5123 Scholarship, Irvine, CA 92612
949-244-5251; 949-361-8910

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INTRODUCTORY STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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INTRODUCTORY STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

This introductory study, part of an eight-year study, is unique in that it contains the complete lectures as well as summaries and lesson questions. This study may be taught from the complete lecture or from the summary of that lecture depending on time available for your studies. The lecture provides a wealth of information that a new student will find well defined and informative. The summary, by definition, hits the high points. Other studies in this series are separated into the teacher's manual (complete lectures) and the student workbooks (summaries and worksheets). We hope you find the additional information available in this work a blessing. May the Word of God come to dwell within you.

Thus they will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that they may attain the fullness of God Himself (Eph 3:18-19).

The motivating force behind this study is the preservation and growth of the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. It has four immediate goals:

- 1) To ensure a true spirit of repentance;**
- 2) To foster a deeper commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ;**
- 3) To create a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers;**
- 4) To encourage a more vibrant participation in the life and mission of the Church**

The Catechetical Institute of the Diocese of Orange, California has accredited Invitation to Christian Discipleship. It is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It is designed to be presented by lay or religious.

CHAPTER 1

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

INTRODUCTION

We are beginning a Catholic Bible Study designed for the laity so that, as St. Paul says:

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root, and foundation of your life. Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love, which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself. Eph 3:17-19

The Word of God must dwell. It must not be a passing sound through the mind, a whisper over the heartstrings stirring a few vague emotions. It must be received in Faith and permanently reside. It must dwell in our thoughts, in our imagination, in our desires, in our dreams, in our whole person; it must dwell on our lips and in our hearing--we must respond to its sacred sounds; it must resound in the echo of our voice, in the touch of our hand, in the smile on our lips, in deeds of love and mercy. Simply, the Word and we must become One. Then, and only then, will we

. . . grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that we may attain to the fullness of God himself...

Eph 3:18-19

Jesus of Nazareth stood up in the Temple of Jerusalem and extended the invitation:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me; let him drink who believes in me. Scripture has it: "From within Him rivers of living water shall flow."

Jn 7:37-38

We have received an invitation to come to Jesus. We have a call to be a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth--a disciple who follows and learns.

Christian Discipleship is serious business. It demands serious people. It is a serious but not a sad business. It is Joy! Teresa of Avila once prayed "God deliver me from sad saints!" Sad Christians are not very good advertisement for the "good news" of the Gospel. Once having put our hand to the plow, we are warned not to look back. It makes us unworthy of the Kingdom of God. God invites us to come to Him through Jesus Christ. We have an invitation to follow the Way of Jesus. It is a glorious way but not an easy one. St. Augustine wrote:

Scripture itself, if you reflect, does not promise peace, security and calm; the gospel is not reticent about the tribulations, trials, and even scandals that will come... From the first Adam down to the Adam of today, toil and sweat, thorns and thistles have been man's lot... You always think times past were good; they are good because they are not yours!

It is not the time of your life but the end of your life that is supremely important. The end of our Christian life directs the time of our Christian life. What do today's toil and sweat, thorns and thistles really matter when they earn for us an eternal reward? When they are means for identifying with Christ Jesus? When they may extend the Kingdom of God?

Jesus Christ painted many truths in picturesque language. He was a grand artist with words. On one occasion a great multitude came to hear Jesus. He preached to them the Parable of the Sower of Seed:

"Listen carefully to this. A farmer went out sowing. Some of what he sowed landed on the footpath, where the birds came along and ate it. Some of the seed landed on rocky ground where it had little soil; it sprouted immediately because the soil had no depth. Then, when the sun rose and scorched it, it began to wither for lack of roots. Again, some landed among thorns, which grew up and choked it off, and there was no yield of grain. Some seed, finally, landed on good soil and yielded grain that sprang up to produce at a rate of thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." Having spoken this parable, He added: "Let him who has ears to hear me, hear!"

Now when He was away from the crowd, those present with the Twelve questioned Him about the parables. . . .He said to them: "You do not

understand this parable? How then are you going to understand other figures like it? What the sower is sowing is the word. Those on the path are the ones to whom, as soon as they hear the word, Satan comes to carry off what was sown in them. Similarly, those sown on rocky ground are people who, on listening to the word, accept it joyfully at the outset. Being rootless, they last only a while. When some pressure or persecution overtakes them because of the word, they falter. Those sown among thorns are another class. They have listened to the word, but anxieties over life's demands, and the desire for wealth, and cravings of other sorts come to choke it off; it bears no yield. But those sown on good soil are the ones who listen to the word, take it to heart, and yield of thirty and sixty and a hundred-fold."

Mk 4:4-20

All the seed was good but not all was fruitful. The soil made the difference. Certain environments get in the way of Christian discipleship. Certain living conditions make people fit or unfit people for the Kingdom of God. As we enroll in a School of Christian Discipleship, meditation on Jesus' interpretation of the Parable of the Sower is important. Let us ask ourselves these essential questions: What is the ground of my being, the soil of my life? What is there in my daily environment that is hostile to the word of Jesus Christ? Some ground will not receive the seed; some environments are hostile to its growth. It is not necessary that our lives be alien ground and hostile environment to the Word. . . After the first shock of the Crucifixion some of the Apostles returned to Galilee. St. John presents this scene for us--assembled were Simon Peter, Thomas (the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons (James and John) and two other disciples.

Simon Peter said to them, "I am going out to fish." "We will join you," they replied, and went off to get into their boat. All through the night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak Jesus was standing on the shore, though none of the disciples knew it was Jesus. He said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" "Not a thing," they answered. "Cast your net off to the starboard side," He suggested, "and you will find something." So they made a cast and took so many fish they could not haul the net in. . . . Simon Peter went aboard and hauled ashore the net loaded with sizable fish--one hundred fifty three of them! In spite of the great number, the net was not torn.

Jn 21:3-11

Many symbols may be found in this miraculous catch of fish. Obviously, it points out that disciples of Jesus are fishers of men. The size of the catch encourages the disciples to be ambitious fishermen with high hopes. Some see the number one hundred and fifty-three as representative of all species of fish, thereby symbolizing the universality of the Church--no one is excluded.

As disciples of Jesus, we throw a wide net. We do not pick or choose who will come to Jesus. Ours is the casting of the net and the hauling of it to the feet of Jesus. The picking and the choosing is the Lord's business. In fact he told us, *"That is how it will be at the end of the world. Angels will go out and separate the wicked from the just. . ."* (Mt 13:49). *"The Son of Man will dispatch His angels to collect from His kingdom all who draw others to apostasy, and all evil doers"* (Mt 13:41). When the time comes, the Lord will send his angels to pick and choose. In the meantime, like Peter, we endeavor to bring the whole net of fish to the feet of Jesus.

As today's apostles, you and I must cast wide our net to catch disciples for Jesus. Many are the reasons for accepting an invitation to discipleship: For some, being a disciple of Jesus may be no more than a fantasy, an illusion, a wish without a will; some come because of an inner indeterminate and indefinable restlessness in their hearts; others are lead by academic ambition to know more about the Bible and still others are motivated by a serious desire for union with the Lord. No matter the reason for coming, we pray you will stay and become as Peter, Thomas, James, John, Nathanael, Mary and Martha. . .disciples of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship is not an end in itself but a means to an end. We become a disciple of Jesus in order to become like the Master. St. Paul encouraged, *"Put you on the mind and the heart of Christ."* Discipleship ends when we can, in truth, proclaim *"For, to me, 'life' means Christ; hence dying is so much gain"* (Phil 1:21). It is Christian Graduation Day!

To be a good student demands work. To be a good disciple of Christ demands more than work, it demands prayer! The words of Jesus are "Spirit." The mind, unaided by grace, will never understand the "words of Jesus." A spiritualizing of our minds and hearts takes place when we open them before the Father in humble prayer. Grace sharpens the mind to understand the "words" of the Spirit; grace softens the heart to respond to the words. To Christian disciples at Corinth, Paul wrote:

The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity. He cannot come to know such teaching because it must be appraised in a spiritual way. *1Cor 2:14*

Paul teaches, “*We speak of these, not in words of human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit.*” The Scriptures are not products of human minds but the Divine Mind. The human mind is but God’s agent. If we are to understand the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit of God must be their interpreter. Without illumination from the Holy Spirit, our minds skip over the sacred words like a rock over a frozen pond. Paul teaches:

Are you not aware that you are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? *1Cor.3:16*

The Spirit we have received is not the world’s spirit but God’s Spirit, helping us to recognize the gifts he has given us. *1Cor.2:12*

Yet God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit. The Spirit scrutinizes all matters, even the deep things of God. *1Cor.2:10*

The Scriptures tell us, “*No one knows what lies at the depths of God but the Spirit of God.*” The spirit filled mind of Jesus penetrated these divine depths. We read these words in the twenty-fourth Chapter of Luke when Jesus met the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Then He said to them, “What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?” Beginning then, with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to Him.

Lk.24:25-27

The Mind of Jesus is the perfect interpreter of Scripture. Paul makes a bold claim: “*But we have the mind of Christ*” (*Cor 2:16*). The Holy Spirit brings to us the mind of Christ. This is what we read in the Sixteenth Chapter of St. John's Gospel:

I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. When He comes, however, being the Spirit of Truth, He will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on His own, but will speak only what He

hears, and will announce to you the things to come. In doing this He will give glory to me, because He will have received from me what He will announce to you.
Jn 16:12-14

Disciples of Christ, it will not be those rich in the wisdom of this world, quiet of mind and tongue, who will penetrate the Mind of God and speak words of wisdom to us. It will be those disciples of humble and simple hearts who are docile to the Holy Spirit who will enrich us with “richness we have in Christ.” Jesus prayed in joy: *“Father, I thank you that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to the merest children.”* Some words written by the brilliant St. Augustine aptly sums up the attitude of the unspiritual mind towards the scriptures: *“When I first read these Scriptures, they seemed to me unworthy to be compared with the majesty of Cicero. My conceit was repelled by their simplicity, and I had not the mind to penetrate into their depths.”*

Prayer is the key that opens minds, hearts, and bodies to the spiritual world. When a person engages in humble prayer, it is as if a sealed cave opens itself to the sunlight for the first time; its darkness will never be the same again. A kindly light will gently lead the spirit out of darkness into light. (Cardinal Newman used to pray: *“Lead thou me on, kindly light.”*) The Spirit illumines the mind and enables it to penetrate into the depths of the Word. The mind becomes like a bucket letting itself down into a deep well. The promise of Jesus to the thirsty is realized--a river of living water flows within. *“Pray perseveringly”*, encourages Paul, *“be attentive to prayer, and pray in the spirit of thanksgiving”* (Col 4:2). *“At every opportunity pray in the Spirit, using prayers and petitions of every sort. Pray constantly and attentively for all in the holy company”* (Eph 6:18). *“Draw your strength from the Lord, and his mighty power”* (Eph 6:10). *“In him who is the source of my strength, I have strength for everything”* (Phil 4:13).

If the study of scripture becomes sterile, we need to ask ourselves, *“Has the life gone out of our prayers to the Holy Spirit?”* Prayerfully read the Scriptures! Be careful of careless encounters with the Holy Word. They will prove unfruitful and may grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

When we enter a Church Door we know there is a difference from entering other doors. It calls for a reverential respect and a prayerful attitude--we are more aware of being in the Presence of God. So also, when we open the Scriptures, it is different from opening any other book. Get used to realizing

we are in the Presence of the Living Word of God and, in a unique way, we are within the hearing of God's Voice. How attuned, attentive and prayerful our minds and hearts ought to be. One author writes:

When we read the scriptures honestly, we can admit that certain passages mean little to us. We are ready to agree with God because we have no reason to disagree with him. We can approve of this or that commandment or divine action because it does not touch us personally. We do not yet see the demands it makes on us personally. Other passages, frankly, repel us. If we had the courage we would say “no” to the Lord. We should note these passages carefully. They are a measure of the distance between God and us and also. . . they are a measure of the distance between ourselves as we are now and our potential definitive selves. For the Gospel is not a succession of external commandments, it is a whole gallery of internal portraits. And every time we say “no” to the Gospel, we are refusing to be a person in the full sense of the word.

There are also passages of the Gospel which make our hearts burn, which give light to our intelligence and shake up our will. They give life and strength to our whole physical and moral being. These passages reveal the points where God and his image in us already coincide, the stage we have already reached, perhaps only momentarily, fleetingly, in becoming what we are called to be. We should note these passages even more carefully than the passages mentioned above. They are the points at which God’s image is already present in us fallen men and from these beginnings we can strive to continue our transformation into the person we feel we want and ought to be. We must be faithful to these revelations. In this at least we must always be faithful. If we do this, these passages increase in number, the demands of the Gospel become fuller and more precise, slowly the fog dispenses and we see the image of the person we should be.”

Courage To Pray, Anthony Bloom. Pages 19-20

All encounters with the Divine, sooner or later, demand human repentance if spiritual progress is to be made. Our spirits are like dark rooms that hide the dirt, the sins opposing the power of God. We do not see the dirt; we do not believe in it. When the Light of the World, God’s own lamp, enters our soul, the spirit begins to see itself as never before. The Holy Spirit enters as a

gentle, kindly light revealing one or two dirty spots--revealing an environment not in keeping with a Divine Guest. What now is expected of us? Repentance!

Oh Lord, let me clean that up before you dwell here--Yes, indeed, I'll clean it right now. Oh, it is not coming out too easily. Lord, maybe you can help me?

The Lord will be delighted. He will come again and the next time, His Glory will shine even brighter and, lo and behold, you'll see something you missed. The two of you will clean it up. And, this will go on and on and on . . .as long as necessary. I hope we can be patient. The Lord certainly is! One day He will come and He will be so bright and beautiful and so will you. And He will stay and never leave. That's Heaven! Perhaps now you can understand why the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent bear it away. Those who are willing to do violence, do violence to the evil within.

But what if we ignore the sins of our souls? If we pretend we do not see the dirt or feel it's not that bad after all? I can live with it and certainly infinite Love loves little ol' me just the way I am. Jesus loves little ol' me and you; too much to love us just the way we are. He loves us enough to insist we be, not what we are, but what we ought to be.

Jesus is a patient friend but grace has its day. *"Today, if you should hear the voice of God, harden not your hearts."* If we shun the light, if there is no obedient response to the Word, Jesus will grow sad within our souls. The light will grow dim. One day He comes but we have no time. Our visits have been such a strain of late. We could hardly give Him our attention. We had so many things to do and get on with. It was a relief when the visit was over. Jesus knocks but there is no answer. Again, He knocks but we no longer have ears to hear. He does not turn the doorknob. Love respects privacy too much to invade. No, Jesus must wait until we open the door. He waits and, after awhile, slowly walks away. He is sad. There are tears in His eyes and, if we could listen, we could hear Him say:

How often have I yearned to gather you children as a mother hen gathers her young under her wings, but you refused me. You will find your temple deserted. I tell you, you will not see me from this time on until I come as Judge.

This is Hell!

So you see, as disciples of Christ, we must expect to encounter scriptures such as Colossians 3:5-10:

Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and that lust which is idolatry. These are sins which provoke God's wrath. Your own conduct was once of this sort, when these sins were your very life. You must put that aside now; all the anger and quick temper, the malice, the insults, the foul language. Stop lying to one another. What you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his Creator.

And such as 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8:

It is God's will that you grow in holiness; that you abstain from immorality, each of you guarding his member in sanctity and honor, not in passionate desire as do the Gentiles who know not God; and that each refrain from overreaching or cheating his brother in the matter at hand; for the Lord is an avenger of all such things, as we once indicated to you by our testimony. God has not called us to immorality but to holiness; hence, whoever rejects these instructions rejects not man, but God who sends his Holy Spirit upon you.

These and many others will convict us of sin. Scripture admonishes us:

Keep careful watch over your conduct. Do not act like fools, but like thoughtful men. Make the most of the present opportunity, for these are evil days. Do not continue in ignorance, but try to discern the will of the Lord.
Eph.5:15-17

Encountering such scriptures may be a stumbling block on our path. We may pause. Others, many others, have stopped at these places and turned and sadly went away. If we listen we may hear an echo from the ancient synagogue at Capernaum: "Will you also leave me?" To such temptation may we have the grace to respond as Peter: "Lord to whom shall we go? We have come to believe; we are convinced that you are God's Holy One." When the people of Jerusalem were convicted of their sins by the sermon of Peter they cried: "What are we to do, brothers?" Peter answered:

You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
Acts 2:38

St. Paul seeks to encourage us with the example of his own life:

It is not that I have reached it yet, or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ (Jesus). Brothers, I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead. My entire attention is on the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me--life on high in Christ Jesus . . . It is important that we continue on our course, no matter what stage we have reached.

Phil 3:12-14,16

Be imitators of me, my brothers. Take as your guide those who follow the example that we set.

Phil 3:17-18

But those things I used to consider gain, I have now reappraised as loss in the light of Christ. I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ. For his sake, I have forfeited everything; I have accounted all else rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth and I may be in him. . .

Phil 3:7-9

Paul warns us by telling us what has happened to other Christians:

Unfortunately, many go about in a way which shows them to be enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often said this to you before; this time I say it with tears. Such as these will end in disaster! Their god is their belly and their glory is in their shame. I am talking about those who are set upon the things of this world. As you well know, we have our citizenship in heaven; it is from there that we eagerly await the coming of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will give a new form to this . . . glorified body, by his power to subject everything to himself.

Phil. 3:18-21

For the Colossian people, Paul prayed they would attain full knowledge of the Will of God through perfect wisdom and spiritual insight (Col. 1:9). This would lead, in Paul's opinion, to pleasing God in every way. It will be a life that "will multiply good works of every sort." The very performance of good works will be a means of growing richer in the knowledge of God, the

implication being that our good works uniquely reveal God, not only within us, but through us, and to us.

As disciples of Christ, it is not enough to pray and study to know God and His holy Will, we must also endeavor to live the scriptures . . . to clothe the teachings of Jesus once again with flesh and blood. In a word, to “incarnationalize” the Word of God. Does not Paul indicate this thought in his letter to the Thessalonians?

. . . make your lives worthy of the God who calls you to his kingship and glory. That is why we thank God constantly that in receiving his message from us, you took it, not as the word of men, but as it truly is, the Word of God at work within you who believe. *1Thes:12-13*

In the teachings of St. James, the Christian character finds its proper balance. let us turn to the Second Chapter of his epistle and read verses fourteen through twenty-six:

My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them, “Good-bye and good luck! Keep warm and well fed,” but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that? So it is with faith that does nothing in practice. It is thoroughly lifeless.

To such a person one might say, “you have faith and I have works--is that it?” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you the faith that underlies my works! Do you believe that God is one? You are quite right. The demons believe that, and shudder. Do you want proof, you ignoramus, that without works, faith is idle? Was not our father, Abraham, justified by his works when he offered his son, Isaac... See how Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as justice.” For this, he received the title “God’s friend.”

You must perceive that a person is justified by his works and not by faith alone. Rahab, the harlot, will illustrate the point. Was she not justified by her works when she harbored the messengers and sent them out by a different route? Be assured, then, that faith without works is as dead as a body without breath.

Living faith finds expression in Christian works. It is the fuel of its life! Jesus taught that by the fruit you know the tree. Our deeds truly express outwardly what inwardly we are. Outward signs are not always properly interpreted and we misjudge the motivating inner spirit. The fruit on the tree is not always the fruit of the tree. But, in a general sense, the statement “*by the fruit you know the tree*” stands true. Hidden thoughts, desires, emotions, and wishes tend to express themselves in actions. If we think about a thing long enough, our behavior, in some way, expresses it. On the other hand, actions have a tendency to awaken thought, desire, and emotions corresponding with them. There is a Christian Spirit and Christian behavior, internally and externally, corresponding with it. Such behavior does not flow automatically from our fallen nature.

How well Paul knew this when he instructed, “*put on Christ.*” By a willed effort, often contrary to all feelings, desires, emotions and wishes, we force ourselves to behave in a Christian way. We assume attitudes of patience, kindness, care, concern, interest, and joyfulness even when we feel impatient, hostile, selfish, self centered, or sad. This is neither hypocrisy nor pretense. It is saved from being so by our wills. We outwardly assume a behavior we inwardly will, contrary to all else within us. We are guilty of hypocrisy when we will the opposite of what we do and say. In the above cases we make the decision that at least the external will not be controlled by the worse feeling or thought that is within. If we persevere, little by little and slowly but surely, the internal world will cease to be controlled by destructive desires, feelings, and emotions. At present, between what we will and what we do is a world out of control. We do the best we can. As St. Paul indicates in Romans 7:14-21, deliverance is the answer. Jesus is the Solution. And, in the meantime, he tells us, “*My grace is sufficient.*” In other words, the compassionate and sympathetic heart of Jesus supplies for our deficiencies.

Paul leaves no doubt in our minds that Christian discipleship ought to change our lives:

Because you are God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourself with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive, as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which bind the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ’s peace must begin in your heart, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace . . .

Col 3:12-15

We exhort you to admonish the unruly; cheer the fainthearted; support the weak; be patient toward all. See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek one another's good, and for that matter, the good of all.

1Thes.5:14-15

Be prudent in dealing with outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your speech be always gracious and in good taste, and strive to respond properly to all who address you.

Col 4:5-6

Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1Thes 5:16-18

In summary, we conclude that prayer, study and good works are the essentials of Christian Discipleship. We must not grow tired of doing good. If we do not give up running the race, we will win the prize. *"It is important that we continue on our course, no matter what stage we have reached"* (Phil.3:16).

BLESSED IS HE WHO HEARS THE WORD OF GOD AND KEEPS IT!

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

We have certain abilities, talents and gifts, and one of the greatest is the human mind. The human mind is a fine power. It is a magnificent instrument. It is also often the greatest cause of pride and our fall from grace. Most of us are not that free or honest to let reason be the guiding principal of life. Often we manipulate and pervert reason into an instrument of defense for desired behavior and cherished errors. Smart people can have the best reasons for doing the wrong things. They can always come up with a better reason. They can out-think you and out-reason you at every level.

Many men reason themselves out of truth. A certain such group of men, called the Sadducees, had reasoned to the opinion that there was neither after life nor resurrection from the dead. In order to substantiate their false ideas and to ridicule these truths, they devised a question in the form of a narrative. They presented this narrative to Jesus Christ. The Sadducees told the story of a woman who had seven brothers as husbands and the question was, “*Whose wife will she be after the resurrection?*” Christ answered, “*You err because you neither know the power of God nor the Sacred Scriptures*” (Mt 22:28-29). He added, “*You are very much mistaken.*” Each of us errs and is very much mistaken in opinions, ideas and actions because we do not know the power of God or the Sacred Scriptures. A total guidance by our intellect, unaided by grace, will leave us on the ground floor of scriptural truth.

St. Paul writes to Timothy:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in holiness, so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work.
(2Tm 3:16-17)

Paul indicated that these good effects of inspired scriptures flow only to “*the man of God.*” And to the Colossians he said: “*Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you...*” (Col 3:16). There is power beyond human understanding in the words of Sacred Scripture. As written in the book of Hebrews:

Indeed, God’s word is living and effective [it is the “sword of the spirit” Eph 6:17], sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow. . . (Heb 4:12)

The more one contemplates the life of Jesus Christ, the more one comes to realize that the events and deeds of His life were revealed to Him through His study of the Sacred Scriptures, and His humble acceptance of them.

Jesus said to the dispirited disciples on the road to Emmaus:

And he said to them, “You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?” Then starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself. (Lk 24:25-27)

And as He spoke to them, their hearts were inflamed. We Christians are often foolish and dispirited, discouraged and despairing because we do not believe in depth the words of the Sacred Scriptures.

When the Scriptures are read in faith, Christ speaks. The words were written in the past but the message is not past. These inspired words are living in the present moment because they are being spoken by the living Christ through His Holy Spirit. St. John recorded these words of Jesus:

When he comes, however, being the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but will speak only what he hears. . . In doing this, he will give glory to me, because he will have received from me what he will announce to you. (Jn 16:13)

As St. Augustine wrote, “This was written for us, and preserved for us; it is recited for us and will also be recited for our descendants, right up to the end of time.” The redeeming action of Christ in glory knows no succession of time. In eternity He speaks the words of eternal truth, through the Scriptures, in the present moment of time. Christ speaks to us when we read or listen to the Scriptures. St. Augustine teaches us, “We must listen to the Gospel as Christ among us...the Gospel is the very mouth of Christ.” St. Thomas said, “He speaks directly to our minds, in Sacred Scripture.” Tired of hearing God’s distant echo in the words and writings of men, St. Therese of Lisieux decided to read only the Sacred Scriptures. History substantiates the power these words have to transform the lives of men.

As a young man, St. Anthony heard the words of the Gospel, “*If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me*” (Mt. 19:21). He renounced all and entered the desert to find his soul and God.

In a Milanese garden, under a fig tree, a learned man wept soulfully. Through the garden a child’s voice came like a gentle persistent breeze. “Take and read! Take and read!” The man, with trembling hands, snatched up the Sacred Scriptures from a nearby table and read:

Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord, Jesus Christ, and not make provision for the flesh in its concupiscence. (Rom 13:13-14)

Gently he closed the Scriptures, for an internal Hell had ceased. The inner storming of a body and spirit locked in lethal rage subsided. Through the crevices of a rent heart streamed peaceful light dissolving all doubt’s dark shadows. In the year 382 A.D., Jesus of Nazareth had again passed through a garden into a man’s life. The man was Augustine of Hippo.

For the brilliant and sinful Augustine, this episode with Scripture marked the conversion that led to his becoming Doctor and Saint in the Catholic Church.

Before this historical moment of grace, he had stood paralyzed at the desert edge looking with hunger into a promised land. In his immortal “Confessions” he wrote:

I still hesitated to die to death and to live to life, for the ingrown worse had more power over me than the untried better. . .My lover of old, trifles of trifles and vanities of vanities, held me back. They plucked at my fleshly garment and they whispered softly: “Do you cast us off? From that moment we shall no more be with you forever and ever!”

That day in the garden with the Scriptures in his hand Augustine found the answer and the grace to make the reply. Later he was to confess:

When I first read these Scriptures, they seemed to be unworthy to be compared with the majesty of Cicero. My conceit was repelled by their simplicity, and I had not the mind to penetrate into their depths.

How well this testimony of Augustine demonstrated the truth written by Paul of Tarsus:

If our gospel can be called “veiled” in any sense, it is such only for those who are headed toward destruction. Their unbelieving minds have been blinded by the god of the present age so that they do not see the splendor of the gospel showing forth the glory of Christ, the image of God. (2Cor 4:3-4)

Francis of Assisi heard in a little chapel these words of the gospel,

Provide yourselves with neither gold nor silver nor copper in your belts, no traveling bag, no change of shirt, no sandals, no walking staff. . . (Mt 10:9-10)

He cast away everything and cried, “This is what I have long been seeking; now my desire is fulfilled.”

The reason for the effects of the words of Sacred Scripture is, as Cardinal Bea wrote,

They are the word of God, not that they merely contain the word of God, as a catechism or manual of religion might; they are the word of God through that singular charisma of inspiration by which God, the eternal truth, subjects to Himself, in a manner as unique as it is rare, all the faculties of the human writer and, while leaving to him his own temperament, his own personal features, and his own character, makes him express all those things and only those things which he Himself should command.

Here it is no longer man who speaks; it is the Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets, the spirit of Truth who teaches us the truth by means of the sacred books. When our Lord said of His words uttered in the synagogue of Capernaum, “*The words I spoke to you are spirit and life*” (Jn 6:63), this holds for every sentence and every thought found in Holy Scripture. Although Holy Scriptures cannot be called, as some have wanted to call it, a “sacrament,” in the technical sense of the word, still there is inherent in the very words of Scripture, read and applied with a devout disposition, a light and a power which surpass the light and the power of purely human words and give the words of Scripture a singular, unique authority and strength.

THE BIBLE

The name “Bible” has come into the English from the Greek *ta Biblia*, meaning “the books.” By the word “Bible” we mean a collection of writings that the Catholic Church has solemnly recognized as written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Though we know the Bible as a large single book, it is really a library. The books of the Bible total seventy-three. Some scholars, by combining two books, list the number as seventy-two. The Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew word from which

“testament” is derived means a covenant or contract between God and man. We have two “testaments” between God and man, the Old Testament made between God and the Jewish Nation, and the New Testament made with the human race in and through Jesus Christ.

The books of the Old Testament number forty-six, and of the New Testament--twenty-seven. Some of the New Testament “books” are no more than the size of a letter.

The fact that the Church has been careful to include in the Bible both the Old and New Testament indicates that the Old Testament was a preparation for, and a foreshadowing of, the New Covenant. The two Testaments represent aspects in the unfolding and development of a single divine plan.

The books of the Bible were written over a period of 1500 years. The first book, Genesis--ascribed to Moses--was actually written (i.e. put in print on a scroll) in the 12th or 13th century B.C. The last book, the Apocalypse--ascribed to St. John the Evangelist--was written prior to the year 100 A.D. Some parts of the Bible were written in Hebrew, some in Greek and some in Aramaic. Originally there were no chapters or verses in the Bible. In 1214, Stephen Langton divided the Bible into chapters. *Sanctes Paginus*, in 1528, divided the Old Testament into verses. Robert Stephanus, in 1555, divided the New Testament into verses.

In the early Church, many Latin translations of the Bible appeared. These translations were unsatisfactory in many respects. In the fourth century such diversity existed among texts that Pope St. Damasus (360-384) commissioned St. Jerome, the greatest scripture scholar of his day, to issue a corrected text. St. Jerome worked at the task for fifteen years (390-405), using for the work all the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts available. This new Latin translation of the Bible gradually became the only Latin version of the Holy Scriptures used in the Western Church. It is known as the Latin Vulgate. The word *vulgate* merely means the accepted or common version. The Council of Trent (1546) declared the Vulgate to be the official Latin translation to be used in public worship by the Western Church. The Vulgate has been

declared to be in substantial conformity with the original texts, especially where faith and morals are concerned.

With the Old Testament Scriptures the Catholic Church follows the Greek Septuagint Bible, a Greek version made by seventy (the meaning of Septuagint) translators at Alexandria, Egypt. It was begun around 285 B.C. At this time there were about 200,000 Jews living within and around the city of Alexandria. Many of the exiles had forgotten the Hebrew tongue and wanted a translation of the Scriptures into Greek, their new native tongue. The work was completed around 100 B.C. All the Jews at the time acknowledged it to be authentic. There are 350 quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament; three hundred of these were taken from the Greek Septuagint. It was accepted and used by the writers of the New Testament.

In the Catholic version, the Old Testament contains seven entire books not to be found in Non-Catholic Bibles (some recent versions have added them under the title “Apocrypha” or “doubtful scriptures”). Why this difference? In the centuries before Christ, the sacred writings of the Jewish religion were gathered. Some collections of these writings possessed more books than others. The Septuagint version was made from a collection accepted by the Jewish scholars in Jerusalem as inspired. After the completion of the translation, it was accepted and used by them. The Catholic Church follows the enumerations as found in the Septuagint. Years later the Jews repudiated the Septuagint, declaring for a collection equally as old but with seven less books. Omitted from this collection are the books of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, I and II Maccabees and sections of Esther (10:4-16:24) and Daniel (3:24-90;13,14). Christians later separating from the Mother Church accepted the Old Testament as held by the Jews of the time.

The Protestant Reformers also rejected seven books of the New Testament as uninspired. The books they considered not inspired are: Hebrews, 1Peter, 2Peter, 2John, 3John, Jude and James. When Martin Luther was making his German translation, he dismissed the epistle of St. James from the Sacred Scriptures calling it “an epistle of straw.” At a later date some of these books

were placed back in the Protestant Bible and listed as apocryphal (doubtful).

The books rejected in the Old Testament were held to be inspired for over four hundred years before inspiration was denied. The seven books of the New Testament had been held by all Christians as inspired for fourteen hundred years before they were repudiated. The burden for proving these books not to be inspired rests with those who oppose the traditional belief. Satisfactory proof has never been produced. Therefore, the Catholic Church, with solid reason, can claim to be the possessor, the protector and the defender of the whole and complete Bible!

Some men boast that they believe only what they experience. Basically, we are all people of faith. We know many truths and only a small part comes through personal experiences. The majority of truths we accept on the testimony of others. The historical past is the field from which we must mine the gold of much truth. For instance, we know that Napoleon Bonaparte died exiled on the Isle of St. Helena. Few of us have seen the Isle of St. Helena. None of us saw Napoleon. We accept the existence of Napoleon and the events of his life because we accept the historical evidence. Trustworthy eyewitnesses from his time have left records of the man and the events of his life.

The truths of the past, of necessity, must come through the medium of someone or something from the past. An eyewitness who records the events leaves us a first-hand source for our historical knowledge. If our record comes from a reporter who interviewed eyewitnesses of the events, we have a second-hand source for our knowledge. At times, second-hand information might be even more reliable than the first-hand report. The reporter writes of events that often had many eyewitnesses. It could be a more accurate account of history.

We cannot believe everything we read in the daily paper. We cannot trust every historical record. Before we could accept as trustworthy a supposed eyewitness account of the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, we would have to verify whether it was written by such an author, if the author is trustworthy and if his record has been handed down to us unchanged.

As a book of literature, the Bible is unsurpassed. But for our purposes it must be more. The Bible stands on the claim of being the written testimony of God's dealings with man. To know that this claim is true is of the utmost importance to us.

THE GOSPELS

Nineteen hundred years separate the 20th century and Jesus Christ. Reliable records concerning Him must be equally as old. We have four main sources to consult, known as the Four Gospels. The word "gospel" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *godspel*, meaning "good message." The Greek word *evangelion* carries the same meaning "good news." Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the four accounts of the Gospel, and they are called the four evangelists, as they are the bearers of the "good message" of God in their written works. The Gospel according to Matthew and that according to John are known as our first-hand records, since these men were eyewitnesses to the history they recorded. Those of Mark and Luke are our second-hand reports as they wrote down what others had been eyewitness to.

For us, the testimony of the Jewish revelations stands or falls with the Christian revelation. If the testimony and proofs of the Four Gospels can be accepted concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ, then we can accept the Old Testament. Christ gave direct and indirect testimony to the truth of the Old Testament.

Christ Himself wrote nothing. "*Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming the good news of God*" (Mk 1:14). He chose men to be His Apostles. These men He trained and sent to preach His Gospel to the whole world. The Apostles preached the things that were said and done by Christ. They were regarded by the people as "*ministers of the word*" (Lk 1:2). In the course of time, a set form of Christian instruction began to be developed by the Apostles. The deeds and sayings of Christ were arranged as an aid to memory. These teachings formed the oral teachings of the Church. Between the years 60 A.D. and 100 A.D., these teachings appeared in writing as the Four Gospels. The

Gospels are but the summary of the oral instructions given in the early days of the Church. They had the oral teachings of the Apostles as a common source. In truth, they are four different versions of the one Gospel. St. Augustine calls them “four books of the one Gospel.” The Gospel is one, but it is written in four different ways--according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

St. Jerome, who died in 420 A.D., wrote:

Matthew, also called Levi, first a publican and later an apostle, was the first to commit to writing the gospel of Christ; he wrote it in Aramaic; it was later translated into Greek, but the translator is unknown.

(Many modern scholars believe Mark’s written account predates that of Matthew.)

Matthew must have written between 60 and 85 A.D. Certain expressions used by him, such as “even to the present day” or “even to this day” indicate a passage of some years from the death of Christ. As to the exact time, scholars disagree. Some hold that it was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., since in Matthew’s account the prophecy had yet to take place. The references to violence in Matthew 21:38-41, and the burning of the city in Matthew 22:7, have led other scholars to place the composition of the book after 70 A.D.

Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Jews of Palestine. He began with a genealogy connecting Jesus Christ with the whole history of the Jewish people. He emphasized that Jesus Christ is the Messiah; that the new law is but a continuation of the old; the opposition of Jesus to the abuses and extremes of Pharisaic traditions; that the Kingdom of God was for the Jews first. And secondly, he wrote for the Gentiles of the Jewish rejection, and that Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. He refers to ten prophecies of the life of Christ not applied in the other accounts. This Gospel was the most quoted and used in the early Church.

Around 135 A.D., Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia, recorded this

quotation attributed to St. John, “Mark, the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the words and deeds of the Lord. . .” It is certain that Mark wrote while with Peter in Rome. Tradition fixed the date of its composition between 58 and 70 A.D.

Mark wrote for the Christians converted from paganism. It was to the Romans that Peter preached, and to the Romans that Mark wrote. Since they were the rulers of the world and had great regard for power, Mark presented to them a picture of Christ, the Son of God, as the King who has complete power over the visible and invisible world. His gospel is called the Gospel of the Power of Christ.

Mark omits certain discourses of our Lord. For this reason his is the shortest of the gospels. He achieves a remarkable vividness by giving definite numbers, names of people, places, and times. He adds all the concrete details which an eyewitness like Peter would note.

Early Christian sources attribute the Third Gospel, and also the Acts of the Apostles, to St. Luke. Luke was believed to have been born in Syria of Greek parentage. He entered Christian history as a companion of St. Paul at Troas. Paul spoke to him as the “*beloved physician*” (Col 4:14).

This Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles appear to be a continuous story told in two parts. Luke ends his Gospel account with the Ascension of Christ and begins the Acts with the Ascension of Christ. From his introduction in Acts, we know that he has already written the Gospel. Since he made no mention of Paul's release from prison in the Acts, scholars have concluded that the Acts were written prior to 63 A.D., and his Gospel between 58 and 62 A.D. Others believe Luke's writing of the Acts reveals a Christian defense against accusations arising from Nero's persecution in 64 A.D.

Luke, being a Greek and the companion of Paul the “Apostle to the Gentiles”, wrote for a Grecian audience. As the Roman was devoted to power, the Greek was devoted to human perfection in all its forms. Christ was presented to

them as the fulfillment of the dreams of their philosophers and poets. He appealed to their appreciations of beauty by writing with simple beauty. The unbeliever, Renan, said of this Gospel: "It is the most beautiful book ever written."

Luke used, rather completely, the material of Mark. One fifth of his gospel shows a dependence on Matthew. About fifty-three percent of his matter is proper to him alone. Dante called Luke the "historian of Christ's kindness." His gospel portrays the great mercy of Christ for all mankind, the sympathy of Christ for the poor. Luke gave a special place to women in his gospel. He drew a most touching portrait of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, carrying within her heart the childhood of Christ. A note of joy permeates his gospel. Lastly, *The Gospel According to Luke* brings out the great necessity of a spirit of prayer and penance for a true disciple of our Lord.

Concerning the authorship of the last version of the Gospel, St. Jerome wrote: "John the Apostle, whom Jesus particularly loved, was the last of all to write a Gospel, doing so at the request of the bishops of Asia. . ." John wrote his Gospel at Ephesus sometime between 90 and 100 A.D. The work indicates the aged hand that wrote it. There is a monotony of style and a constant repetition of the one idea that the Lord is the Christ, the Son of God.

John wrote for the Greek converts. He stated his purpose in writing:

Jesus performed many other signs as well--signs not recorded here--in the presence of his disciples. But these have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have life in his name. (Jn 20:30-31)

The Gospel according to St. John is both theology and history. John sought to give his readers a deeper insight into the mystery of Christ. All the facts and discourses tend to illustrate the theme that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Truth that enlightens the world, and He is life itself for all men.

AUTHENTISITY OF SCRIPTURE

At this point, we must show that the Gospels are documents worthy of belief. A claim that is based on a document that is not genuine cannot be accepted as valid. The Declaration of Independence would not be an expression of the mind of our founding fathers if it should be discovered to have been written in 1846. In order to use the Gospels to support the claim of Jesus Christ, we must first prove them to be authentic. By authentic, we mean that the document has been written by the person reported to have written it.

In the early centuries following the foundations of the Christian religion, we find a tremendous wealth of writings by most learned men called ecclesiastical (church) writers. Some of these men were disciples of the Apostles. Others had sat at the feet of such disciples. These men not only quoted the Gospel, but they directly testified to its authenticity.

The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, is a work on religious instruction composed sometime between 70 and 90 A.D. To give authority to its teaching, the Didache reminds the reader: “Thus you find it stated in the Gospel of the Lord. . .” This work quotes Matthew thirty times, Mark once, and Luke four times.

Clement, Bishop of Rome from 92 to 101 A.D. wrote a lengthy epistle to the Church at Corinth to settle a dispute. Though he did not quote the Gospel word for word, he made use of ten passages from Matthew, Mark and Luke to reinforce his plea for unity.

Justin, Martyr, was born in Palestine about 100 A.D. In his work to Emperor Antonius Pius, *Defense of the Christians*, we find these words: “For the Apostles, in their memoirs which are called Gospels. . .” and “In these commentaries, which as I say, were written by the Apostles and their disciples...” In his works, Justin quoted from the Gospels more than 250 times.

Irenaeus was Bishop of Lyons in 177 A.D. In his two works still existing: *Proofs of Apostolic Preaching and Against Heretics*, he quotes from the Gospels

nearly a hundred times each from Matthew, Luke and John and twelve times from Mark. Irenaeus' writings enable us to reconstruct the Gospels in substance. He gave direct testimony to the authenticity of the Gospels:

Matthew wrote a version of the Gospel for the Hebrews in their own tongue at the time that Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel and founding the Church at Rome. After the death of these, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also handed down to us the things which were preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, wrote down in a book the Gospel which was preached by him. Finally, John, the disciple of the Lord who reclined on his breast, published his Gospel also while he was residing at Ephesus. Nor are there more than these, nor again can you find fewer than these Gospels (Adv. Haer.,III,1,1).

The men quoted here are but a few. *It is to be noted that from these numerous writers of the early Church, not one dissenting voice concerning the authenticity of the Gospels can be found.* These men knew the Gospels. Some of them knew the writers of these Gospels. These men were not only willing to live the Gospel but to die for it. Many of them did! These men lived at a time when it was possible to obtain first hand information concerning the writers. Would we not be unreasonable to reject their testimony to the genuineness of the Gospels?

One of the strongest arguments for the genuineness of the Gospels comes from the enemies of the early Church. Such enemies as Celsus, Porphyrius and Julian the Apostate, were learned enough to know that if you destroy the foundation, you destroy the edifice. These men attacked the teachings of the Gospels, but they never attacked the Gospels as being forgeries. So well known and established were the Gospels at the time that such an assault would have been useless.

When the texts of the Gospels are compared with other genuine works from the same era, the Gospels are found to be completely in accord with the times in which they were claimed to have been written. The people, their customs

and their modes of expression are described so accurately by the four evangelists that all honest critics admit that an examination of the documents clearly shows the Gospels to have been written in the period ascribed to them.

For some time, the Gospel of St. John was under attack by certain modern Protestant Biblical scholars. They argued that the internal evidence of the writings did not place it in the apostolic times, but rather in a later period and within Greek culture. It was even suggested to have been the work of a heretical sect. Then in 1946, when a shepherd was trying to retrieve a goat, his foot went through a hole and he discovered the first of the Qumran Scrolls. Qumran lies outside the city of Jericho overlooking the Dead Sea. Here the Essenes, contemporary with Christ, lived and wrote in the same terminology of John's Gospel. This discovery forced these scholars to reconsider the fact that the Church had always maintained, that the Gospel according to St. John was produced in apostolic times.

CHAPTER 3

THE GOSPELS

With valid reason we hold that the Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We must now determine if the texts we have today are substantially the same as the originals. Was the original text altered by fraud or error in any substantial way?

The original scriptures were most probably written on papyrus, a common material of the day. This writing material came from the inner part of the papyrus plants growing in Egypt. It was the cheapest and most handy writing material. The material was easily torn or worn away. The Gospels were written to be read, re-copied, and circulated. It is most probable that the works, when old and correctly copied, were destroyed for safety's sake. The oldest translations of the Gospels date back to 350 A.D., and are Greek manuscripts written on vellum, a parchment made from calfskin. Today's Gospels are in harmony with those dating back to the fourth century. If any change occurred in the Gospels, it would have been in the two hundred year period between the destruction of the originals and the Greek manuscripts.

In the writings of the early Christians, called the Fathers of the Church, we have noted an abundance of scriptural quotations. It is said to be possible to take the whole substance of the Gospels right from the works of the fathers. From what evidence we have, it appears that the quotations from the fathers all substantially agree with the translations we now possess.

In *The Defense of Christians*, St. Justin wrote:

And on the day which is called Sunday, there is an assembly in the same place, of all who live in cities or in the country districts, and the records of the Apostles are read as long as there is time.

This quotation reveals how widespread the Gospels were, even in 150 A.D. It is hardly possible that these Gospels, known so well to all the people, could have been altered, all in the same way, in substantially all the copies. History reveals that the Scriptures, from their conception, have been a treasure well

guarded by the Church. It is hardly possible that any major mistake could have crept into the Gospels without being noted and corrected by the priests and people.

In modern times, archeologists have unearthed papyri in Egypt, preserved air-tight through the centuries in tombs and caves. In 1931 Chester Beatty, an archeologist, discovered a collection of manuscripts containing portions of eleven books of the Bible; eight of them are books of the Old Testament, and three manuscripts are of the New Testament. There are thirty pages from the Gospels and Acts. These were written in a period from 200 to 250 A.D. There are eighty-six pages from the Epistles of St. Paul. These manuscripts essentially agree with those we have today. Until this discovery, many non-Catholics refused to admit such an early date for the writing of the Gospels. Again, Mr. C.H. Roberts, in 1935, made a discovery of a piece of manuscript containing a portion of the text of St. John's Gospel (18:31-33; 37-38) written around 130 to 140 A.D. This is added proof to the early composition of this Gospel. One of the manuscripts discovered in the Qumran Caves was a complete scroll of the Prophet Isaiah which pre-dated, by over five hundred years, any other copy of Isaiah (Qumran scroll c. 150 B.C.).

ARE THE GOSPELS TRUE HISTORY?

We have sufficient external evidence to assure us that our copies of scriptures contain the Gospel story as written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The final question is: Do these writings relate true history?

The Evangelists actually claimed to be writing history, not fiction. St. Luke wrote at the beginning of his Gospel:

Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events which have been fulfilled in our midst, precisely as those events were transmitted to us by the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the word . . . Lk1:1-2

The writers were men who had the facts. Matthew and John had witnessed what they wrote. Mark learned from Peter. Luke collected his report from eyewitnesses. These men were not over-believing in Christ. Our Lord had had a difficult time getting them to understand that he would not establish a temporal kingdom. The events they recorded had been witnessed by many people. When St. Paul was defending Christianity before Festus, the Governor of Judea, and before King Agrippa, he cried out:

No, Your Excellency, I am not mad. The message I proclaim is the sober truth. The king here is well acquainted with these matters. Before him I can speak freely. I am convinced that none of this escapes him--after all, it did not take place in a dark corner.

Acts 26:25-26

At the time of the written Gospel, many people who had witnessed these things were still living. They would have been quick to correct or deny the Gospels. The Gospel's claims were accepted by all the early converts to the Christian Community.

The Evangelists were simple men. How could they have invented this unique character of Christ? Could a doctrine so sublime and perfect that it has surpassed and eclipsed the thoughts of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle come from four deceitful men? The events narrated were public. The narrative gave names of individuals, places, and times that could have easily been checked. The facts they relate are confirmed by non-Christian historians, particularly Josephus. The findings of archaeologists entirely support the Gospel information. Recent research has proved that St. Luke was perfectly correct in stating that Lysanius was Tetrarch in Abilina during the mission of John the Baptist. Formerly, this was denied by some critics.

The Gospels breathe sincerity. They record humiliating as well as glorious events in Christ's life. Without excuse, they show themselves on many occasions worthy of blame. They show themselves as being dull and slow of wit, of being jealous, and ambitious; they show that they had to be rebuked by Christ for lack of faith and courage. Considering that their intention was to prove that Christ is the Divine Messiah, the writers omit things a false account would have readily included. For example, they do not have Christ making clear, direct proclamations of Divinity. They include in their accounts things a false report would have omitted; for instance, Christ seemingly rebuking someone for calling him good (Mark 13:32), and Jesus claiming not to know the day of final judgment (Mark 15:34).

From the time of the so-called "Age of Enlightenment", the Bible has been a target for a steady barrage of critical artillery. The cease-fire has not sounded. Potshots will be taken next week, and next year, in new publications and in Sunday supplements. When reading or hearing of such, we should bear the following facts in mind.

No ancient writings have been subjected to more exhausting tests. The proofs for the reliability of the Gospel as true historical evidence are stronger than for any other ancient document. The investigations of hostile critics have strengthened the proofs for belief in the genuineness of the Gospels as historical evidence. The critics have undertaken in-depth investigations of the Gospels, not as men of science seeking truth, but as anti-Christian men determined to prove their prejudiced theories against Christ and His Church. Renan, a foremost critic, summed up a great deal of this prejudice with these words:

That the Gospels are partly legend is evident, since they are full of miracles and the supernatural. Not because it has been proven to me that the Gospels are undeserving of an absolute faith in them, but because they relate miracles do I say: "The Gospels are legends."

Yet, total guidance by our intellect will leave us on the ground floor of Scriptural truth, or on the outside of the door.

Resting on firm foundations, the Gospels are worthy of belief. The Apostles, or their disciples, wrote them. Their accounts of Christ and His teachings have come to us without any serious change. The Gospels claim to be history. We have the strongest proofs to assure us that the writers knew the truth and conveyed it with simple honesty.

THE INSPIRED WORD

The Catholic Church teaches that the Bible is more than an historical document. Each book of the Sacred Scriptures was composed by a man writing under the inspiration of God. As the Word of God, the Bible is above all books.

The word "inspiration" comes from the Latin word *inspirare*, meaning "to breathe into." By inspiration, we mean a supernatural power by which God so moved and stirred the sacred writers to write, that they wrote all and only that which God commanded them to write, and that they conceived this in a correct way and recorded it with absolute accuracy.

A reading of the Bible reveals its beauty, its ability to move man, its sublime message. In these scriptural pages we are inclined to see more than an expression of man's mind and heart. The pages of the Sacred Scriptures

themselves manifest the Hand of God writing in men's souls.

We have read where St. Paul says, "*All Scripture is inspired of God. . .*" The New Testament reveals that Jesus Christ treated the Old Testament as inspired. He often quoted the Sacred Scriptures. On occasion when men sought the truth concerning a matter, He would ask, "*What is written in the Law, how dost thou read it?*" (Lk 10:26).

Nevertheless, to know for certain that the Sacred Scriptures are inspired, we must look beyond the Book itself and what is written therein. If God poured His Spirit into the writers of the Sacred Scriptures, then the facts, as certain, can only be made known by God. The Divine Inspiration of the Bible has been proclaimed by God through the teaching authority of the Church.

Jesus Christ established a living community, a Church with the responsibility to teach Divine Truth until the end of time. We do know that the Scriptures testify to the fact that the Church is worthy of being heard and obeyed. The enemies of Christianity claim that we argue in a circle. On the one hand we say that we have to look to the Church to know that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and then we look to the Bible to prove that the Church is the divine teaching authority in the world. This charge may be answered by saying that the Gospels are proven first to be historical documents worthy of belief. As historical documents, we use them to show that it's an historical fact that Christ did establish a Church. Scientific research will establish the Gospels as historical documents. The Church merely proclaims that these historical documents are the inspired Word of God.

GOD MAKES NO ERROR

Since God is the author of the Sacred Scriptures, it must follow that the Bible is holy and free from error. It is a dogma (doctrine) of the Catholic Church that the Scriptures are free from error. The ancient and unchanging teaching of the Church concerning the Bible was solemnly proclaimed at the Council of Florence in 1431, the Council of Trent in 1545, the Vatican Council in 1870, and the Second Vatican Council in 1962. The First Vatican Council expressed:

All the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and so far is it from possible that any error can co-exist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible

with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme truth, can utter that which is not true.

St. Justin (150 A.D.) wrote:

I would never dare to say or think that parts of the Scriptures could contradict each other. If some part seems to contradict the other, I would rather say that I did not understand it, than say that there was a contradiction.

St. Augustine writes (390 A.D.):

. . .and if in these books I meet anything which seems contrary to truth, I shall not hesitate to conclude either that the text is faulty, or that the translator has not expressed the meaning of the passage, or that I myself do not understand.

When we say that the Church teaches that there is no error in the Sacred Scripture, two points must be kept clearly in mind. It is a dogma that the Bible is free from error, but this teaching is to be understood as applying only to THE ORIGINAL TEXT OF THE INSPIRED AUTHOR and IN THE SENSE INTENDED BY THE AUTHOR.

The original text of the Bible, as it came from the hand of the inspired author, is guaranteed by the Church to be free from all error. This means that inerrancy is to be understood only of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek original texts of the Bible. Reproductions of these texts, editions, versions, translations and revisions are not guaranteed to be free from error.

The Latin Vulgate Bible is the official translation of the Church. The Church calls it the authentic and official text of the Bible for the Latin rite. This is to be understood as worthy of belief. It is guaranteed by the Church to be free from error in matters of faith or morals.

In the sense intended by the author, the Sacred Scriptures are guaranteed to be free from error. It is the purpose of the scriptural translator to determine what the sacred writer intended to say in any given passage. If the commentator faithfully expresses the thought of the original author, he is free from error.

An eminent non-Catholic scripture scholar, Dr. Hort, stated that the portions of the New Testament in which some doubt arises amounts to no more than one-eighth. These differences consist mainly in word order and certain unimportant variations.

The amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation... can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text.

We need to bear in mind that the intention of the sacred writers was to teach religion, not science. It happens in some cases that a religious truth is intimately connected to a scientific truth, for instance, the unity of the human race as taught in Genesis. In this case, the sacred writers must be held as being scientifically accurate.

In other cases, the sacred writers describe scientific facts as they appear. Such would be the case, for example, when Moses describes the stars as “lesser lights” than the moon. Here he is not understood to be teaching a scientific fact but merely relating things according to appearances.

At times the sacred writer furnishes the readers with a popular account. The fact that God worked for six days and rested on the seventh is adapted to the intelligence of the time. The Jews were accustomed to act in that same manner. Moses was using popular speech of his own era to describe what happened, not how it happened.

Our Lord Himself was not averse to using popular ideas or manners of expression to instruct His followers, for example, when He referred to the mustard seed as the smallest of all seeds. In such instances, the scientific accuracy of the example was not the point of the narrative.

THE COUNCIL AND THE SCRIPTURES

For a Catholic, the Second Vatican Council was the greatest manifestation of the Holy Spirit of our times. The Council directed its attention to the Sacred Scriptures and their study. It would be imprudent to ignore the direction of the Holy Spirit in our study of the Scriptures. He is the author. He directs us, through the Council, how to esteem and study them.

The Second Vatican Council, reflecting on the Sacred Scriptures, had, among others, these inspiring things to teach and decree:

. . . this Council wishes to set forth authentic teachings about divine revelations . . . so that by hearing the message of salvation, the whole world may believe; by believing, it may hope, and by hoping, it may love. By this revelation, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is made clear to us in Christ, who is the Mediator and at the same time the fullness of all revelation. The Bride of the Incarnate Word, and the pupil of the Holy Spirit, the Church is concerned to move ahead daily toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures so that she may unceasingly feed her sons with the divine words.

Here the Council indicates the need to grow in the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, to grow in depth, not just magnitude. It is this in depth knowledge that will nourish the Christian soul to maturity.

From the students of the Scriptures, the Council asks the “obedience of faith.”

The obedience of faith must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals, and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him.

As the night welcomes the rising sun, our souls must receive divine revelations, the Light of God. Darkness does not question the light. It only receives it in order to be transformed into day. Divine truth must be welcomed in the heart in order to bring light to the mind. *“If today you hear the word of God, harden not your hearts.”*

The Council presents the Holy Scriptures as reflectors of divine light for our lives:

Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testament 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.

In this beautiful analogy, the Council teaches the Sacred Scripture to be as a mirror reflecting the face of God in this world. Here in this world is where man may most clearly see God and live.

The Council illumines the divine plan of the Sacred Scriptures:

God, the inspirer and author of both testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New. . . The principal purpose to which the plan of the Old Covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming both of Christ, the universal Redeemer, and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy. . . .The Council proclaims that Christ established the Kingdom on earthHe alone has the words of eternal life. The Four Gospels, whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven. Indeed, after the ascension of the Lord, the apostles handed on to their hearers what He had said and done. This they did with that clear understanding they enjoyed after they had been instructed by the events of Christ's risen life and taught by the light of the Spirit of Truth. The sacred authors wrote the Four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explicating some things in view of the situation of their churches, and preserving the form of proclamation but always in such fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus . . .

The above is the Council's declaration about the Four Gospels. It proclaims that the other works of the New Testament confirm those matters that concern Christ the Lord.

His true teaching is more and more fully stated, the saving power of the divine work of Christ is preached, the story is told of the beginnings of the Church and her marvelous growth, and her glorious fulfillment is foretold.

The Council encourages us to an intelligent and scholarly understanding of these Holy Scriptures. When we teach with the Scriptures, when we instruct through the Scriptures, we are, in some degree, interpreters of the Scriptures. Out of love for the Spirit of Truth, we ought to teach and instruct as wisely

and honestly as possible. The Council teaches:

The interpreter of Sacred Scriptures, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

For example, we read in St. John's Gospel that Jesus "*was troubled in spirit.*" When we look beneath the word used by the writer, we discover it has a meaning of "anger." John is really telling us that Jesus was angry. That opens a new dimension for interpreting that Scripture.

In seeking to understand in a deeper and true way the meaning of the sacred text, the Council teaches that we must have regard for the literary forms used by the writers.

For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways, depending on whether a text is history of one kind or another (Genesis, Exodus, Acts of the Apostles) or whether its form is that of prophecy (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel), poetry (Psalms, Wisdom, Lamentations), or some other type of speech (Tobit, Judith, Romans). The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving, speaking, and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the customs men normally followed at the period in their everyday dealings with one another.

St. Therese of Lisieux had such a desire to do this that she said if time were permitted to her she would study Hebrew in order to be able to read the sacred scriptures in the language in which they were written.

To interpret a text of sacred Scripture isolated from the whole Scriptures and the traditions of the Church has led many teachers and instructors of the Word into serious error. For this reason the Council teaches,

. . .but, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written, no less serious attention must

be given to the content and unity of the whole Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith.

The Council did not want us to conclude that the Church is a static reservoir of truth, but to know that, within the Church, there is an evolutionary understanding of God's truth. The Council declared:

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, through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience.

We see that there is a dependency upon our contemplatives and our scholars for us to have a growing knowledge of God. They are our great benefactors, the people who give their time and study to the Sacred Scriptures.

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. . .

And the Council tells us why:

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 make the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them. . .

Turning its attention to us, the Council says:

This sacred Synod earnestly and specifically urges all the Christian faithful, especially religious, to learn, by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures, the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ. For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose. . . .

And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scriptures, so that God and man may talk together, for we speak to Him when we pray, we hear Him when we read the divine sayings.

Therefore, we see that Scriptural reading is a vital part of our prayer life.

The Council Fathers end this document with this holy hope:

Through the reading and study of the sacred books, let the word of the Lord run and be glorified, and let the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church increasingly fill the hearts of men. Just as the life of the Church grows through persistent participation in the Eucharist mystery, so we may hope for a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's word which lasts forever (Nov. 18, 1965).

Here it is suggested to us that a surge of spiritual vitality will flow into the Christian Community through the frequent and prayerful reading of the Sacred Scriptures.

Some time ago, a Catholic proudly displayed to a friend the family Bible that for fifty-four years had rested on the parlor table. Upon opening the Sacred Scriptures, the friend made a surprising discovery. The front piece of the Bible was a picture of coarse-looking Franciscan monks dancing around a pile of burning bibles. The family treasure was a version of Scripture published by a Bible society with little love for the family Church. Apparently, in fifty-four years, no one had opened the book. Lives and societies have been changed because men "take and read" this book. Untold graces of inspiration and motivation have been lost and countless souls condemned to spiritual mediocrity and anemia because the unopened book gathered the dust of unconcern.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

THE SPOKEN GOSPEL

The writings of the New Testament grew out of the life of the early Christian Church. The earliest writings we possess are the letters of Paul. These are generally accepted to have been written prior to 60 A.D. Our earliest written Gospel, that according to Mark, is believed to have been written between 65 A.D. and 70 A.D. We have a period of approximately thirty-five years of Christian life when the Gospels, as we know them, did not exist. How did the Gospels come to us? What were the circumstances that produced them? What message did they convey to their first readers? To answer these questions, and to properly interpret the New Testament, we need to know something of the early society that produced them. They were the product of thirty years or more of vital Christian living.

The early Church was composed of Jewish men and women who accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel, the Son of the Heavenly Father and the Savior of His People. This group had been commissioned by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the “good news” so that men would come to know Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and believing, be baptized and saved.

This early Christian Community dearly preserved the memory of Jesus. His words and deeds were kept alive. They formed the Christian tradition. It is easy to understand why these traditions were not first written down. The early Church was not a *literary* group, but a missionary organization commissioned by its Founder to go out and preach, teach, and baptize. The time for fulfillment of this commission was believed to be brief. The general belief was that the Second Coming of Christ would be within the lifetime of most of the initial members of the Church. There was a sense of urgency within the community that disregarded a media so slow and painstaking as writing, in favor of fast verbal proclamations.

For the evangelization of Israel, a method of proclamation was needed. The apostles formed and shaped a message about salvation. Early Christian missionaries, such as Stephen and Barnabas, received from the apostles particular instructions in the 'word' in order to convert Israel and to build the *new* Christian Communities. These teachings were not compiled for the purpose of enlightening a future generation, but of evangelizing their own people for whom they had a particular moral responsibility. The custom in the early Church of shaking off the dust from one's clothing before a house or city was a symbolic gesture, which indicated one was no longer morally responsible before God for the salvation of the household or city.

The beginnings of the Church are recalled in the Acts of the Apostles. We read how the Church immediately began to proclaim the "good news" with vigor, power, and emotional appeal. A synthesis of the first Christian sermon delivered by St. Peter on Pentecost Sunday is recorded in Acts 2:14-40. Before continuing our study, let us pause and read this earliest example of gospel proclamation.

St. Luke recorded Peter's sermon about forty years after its delivery. The sermon probably represents an excellent example of the preaching style and method of the early Church. When we read Peter's sermons in the Temple (Acts 3:12-26), and to Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43), and that of St. Paul in the synagogue at Psidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41), we note obvious similarities. These indicate that a *well-planned outline* was used by the early Church.

The evidence from the apostolic time suggests a three-part scheme for preaching the gospel. First, the message, or the *kerygma*, about Jesus Christ was briefly preached. Second, the message was defended with scriptural proof. Third, a response was demanded in the form of repentance, belief, and baptism.

It may surprise us today, but it appears the early Church missionaries did not relate the *life* of Jesus Christ. They preached and proved *who* Jesus was, and the salvation that flowed from his death and Resurrection.

When persecution came to the Church at Jerusalem, the Christian Community scattered. We read in Acts 11:19-21:

Those in the community who had been dispersed by the persecution that arose because of Stephen, went as far as Phoenicia, Cypress,

and Antioch, making the message known to none but Jews. However, some men of Cypress and Cyrene among them who had come to Antioch began to talk even to the Greeks, announcing the good news of the Lord Jesus to them. The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number of them believed and were converted to the Lord.

By means of persecution, the Gospel came to the Gentiles. As the Jews were to refuse it, the Gentiles would accept it. The Gospel had a new audience, and a new media of expression was needed. The language of the Gospel was Aramaic, however the universal language of Greek became the verbal media of proclamation. The Greek Christians translated the teachings of the Apostles into their own language for evangelizing their own people. Here were the remote beginnings of the beautiful gospel according to St. Luke.

Tradition tells us Luke lived in Antioch, and there he entered the Christian Community with his brother Titus. When the time came for him to write his gospel, the 'word' was widespread in the Greek language. We read:

Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events which have been fulfilled in our midst, precisely as those events were transmitted to us by the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. I, too, have carefully traced the whole sequence of events from the beginning, and have decided to set it in writing for you.

Lk.1:1-3

In a few years, the greatest evangelist in the world, Paul of Tarsus, would appear on the Antiochian scene and begin his astounding crusade for the conversion of the pagan world. We mentioned already that his writings are the earliest written scriptures of the New Testament. They are our earliest examples of the means and messages used by the early Church in proclaiming the Gospel.

Around 56 A.D. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, converted about five years earlier, that he had preached to them what the Apostles preached, and their faith had come through hearing this Gospel preached. In an earlier letter to the Galatians, around 48 A.D. he wrote:

For even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel not in accord with the one we delivered to you, let a curse be upon him! I

repeat what I have just said, if anyone preached a gospel to you other than the one you received, let a curse be upon him! Gal.1:8-9

In these letters to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and other converts, the first scriptures of the New Testament are born. Normally the Gospel was preached; for extraordinary reasons, it began to be recorded.

Perhaps in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we have a fine example of the content of the preached message:

Brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and in which you stand firm. You are being saved by it at this very moment if you hold fast to it as I preached it to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. I handed on to you first of all what I myself received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried and, in accordance with the Scriptures, rose on the third day; that he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve. After that he was seen by five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have fallen asleep. Next he was seen by James; then by all the apostles. Last of all he was seen by me, as one born out of normal course . . . In any case, whether it be I or they, this is what we preach and this is what you believed 1Cor 15:1-11

Paul is stressing in this letter that he taught the Corinthians what he himself had received:

Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; he was buried; he was raised to life on the third day according to the scriptures; he appeared first to Cephas and secondly to the Twelve; next he appeared to more than 500 at once. 1Cor 15:3-6

This certainly suggests a formula for preaching designed and used by Paul and the first missionaries. The formula contained, in brief, the essentials of the "good news".

Paul summed up his preaching in one sentence: ". . . I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1Cor 2:2). This emphasized the importance of the death of Jesus Christ in the mind of the early Church. Paul proclaims it to be "a stumbling block to the Jews and an absurdity to Gentiles" (1Cor 1:23). Apparently it had also been a scandal to the early disciples (see

Luke 24:13-27). In the light of the Resurrection and by illumination from the Holy Spirit, the Church realized the glorious mystery of the redemption of the human race through the death of Jesus. She came to realize that atonement, grace, and salvation flowed from the Cross. The Passion of Jesus was the heart and essence of the “good news”. And so Paul cries, *“I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”*

When the time came for writing the Four Gospels, the Passion of Christ was well known by the faithful. The records of the Passion events appear in the Four Gospels with a similarity unequaled elsewhere in the gospels. This led the biblical scholars to hold that the Passion Narrative, by the time of the writing of the four gospels, had achieved a uniform and definite form. At least the following elements were there: Jesus of Nazareth had been sent to the Cross by the Jews; this occurred in accordance with scriptural prophecies and the will of God; God approved of Jesus by raising Him from the dead and sending Him to appear to His disciples. The Passion Narrative is most probably the first part of the written gospel to have been solidified in a written form.

The divergences in recording the other events in Our Lord’s life suggest that they were not regarded by the early Church in the same way. Apparently they did not hold the same significance in salvation history as the Passion and Resurrection. Very little of such material appears in the writings of St. Paul.

The events of the Passion and the Resurrection were of cosmic importance. They changed the history of the world. The other events, the words and deeds of Jesus, were mirrors of the future. Not only do they manifest God to be with Jesus by the divine displays of wisdom and power, but of God personally entering into human history, changing the course of the ages.

Illustrations of this divine power in the world were important in the spreading of the Gospel. These deeds of Jesus were used as examples and illustrations of this power, but not necessarily in detail and exactness. The ministry did not demand the reproduction of them in their context and fullness.

The letters of St. Paul demonstrate the concern in the early Church, not only for the evangelization of the world, but for the spiritual growth of the established Christian Communities. Essential to this growth was proper Christian worship. As we can read in 1Cor 11:23-29, the words and deeds of Jesus were directives for the building and correction of the Christian

Communities. They had to assume a form suitable for the fulfillment of this need. The ministry of the Church dictated the form they assumed.

The words and deeds of Jesus formed Christian tradition. The Church was grounded in Jewish tradition. Jewish tradition would have naturally directed the formation of Christian tradition. This would have directed that the words of Jesus be handled differently from the events in the life of our Lord.

The Jewish community distinguished between two kinds of tradition: *Halakha* and *Haggada*. The Halakha Tradition handed down the rules governing life and worship. Haggada handed down traditions concerning historical events and the theological interpretations and speculations of the respected Jewish teachers. Halakha Tradition was the most sacred, and demanded obedience from the people. It formed and nourished the spirit of the religious community. On the other hand, the Haggada Tradition demanded respect and encouraged speculation and discussion.

The words of Jesus would have been treated as Christian Halakha, and the deeds of Jesus as Christian Haggada. An excellent example of Christian Halakha, incorporated into the written gospel, is the Sermon on the Mount.

Written Aramaic versions of Christian Halakha and Haggada no doubt existed in the first century. Since the Aramaic texts of the words and deeds of Jesus would have had a narrow appeal and be of little use to a Church moving toward the Roman Empire, Greek translations were needed. Jewish tradition would govern the method of translation, demanding the words of Jesus receive a strict literal translation. The same requirement did not exist for translating the historical data and deeds of Jesus' life. The translator had greater liberty in the use of this material.

These two different sources, Halakha and Haggada, would have been available to the authors of the Four Gospels. In the weaving of this material into their accounts, greater freedom would have been allowed with the deeds (Haggada) of Jesus. A good example of this may be found in Matt. 11:2-6 and Luke 7:18-23. We read in Matthew:

Now John in prison, heard about the works Christ was performing, and sent a message by his disciples to ask him, "Are you 'He who is to come' or do we look for another?" In reply, Jesus said to them: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight,

cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them. 'Blest is the man who finds no stumbling block in me.'"

We read in Luke:

The disciples of John brought their teacher word of all these happenings. Summoning two of them, John sent them to ask the Lord, "Are you 'He who is to come' or are we to expect someone else?" When the men came to him, they said, "John the Baptizer sends us to you with the question, Are you 'He who is to come' or do we look for someone else?" (At that time he was curing many of their diseases, afflictions, and evil spirits; he also restored sight to many who were blind.) Jesus gave this response: "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard. The blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them. Blest is that man who finds no stumbling block in me."

We see that the settings of these two accounts are somewhat different, but the question and the answer are almost in the exact words. In Matt. 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10, we have an even more dramatic example of the use of the narrative material. In Matthew's account, Jesus enters the city of Capernaum and a centurion approaches Him to cure his servant. In the account by St. Luke, the centurion sends Jewish representatives to intercede for him. The same event is recorded in both gospels. The circumstances are somewhat different but the words expressed are very similar. These examples illustrate the freedom of the authors in their narrations, and their fidelity to the words of Jesus.

THE PARADIGM

Before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Peter expressed the obligation of the early Church: *"Surely we cannot help speaking what we have heard and seen"* (Acts 4:20). We have already seen the importance of the Passion and Resurrection to the ministry of evangelization. Likewise, a need existed for the building and strengthening of established Christian Communities. The teachings and deeds of Jesus were the directives for building the spiritual edifice of the Church and for the edification of believers.

It was important that the teachings and examples of Jesus be presented as simply and uncontaminated as possible. This necessity created within the early Church a unique literary form called the paradigm. Paradigms were short, concise illustrations from Our Lord's life used for teaching and preaching purposes. These illustrations form the oldest Christian narratives. Let us read a few of the paradigms incorporated into the written gospels:

People were bringing their little children to him to have Him touch them, but the disciples were scolding them for this. Jesus became indignant when he noticed it and said to them: "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them. It is to just such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I assure you that whoever does not accept the reign of God like a little child shall not take part in it." Then he embraced them, and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

Mk 10:13-16

He returned to the synagogue where there was a man whose hand was shriveled up. They kept an eye on Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, hoping to be able to bring an accusation against him. He addressed the man with the shriveled hand: "Stand up here in front!" Then he said to them: "Is it permitted to do a good deed on the Sabbath or an evil one? To preserve life--or to destroy it?" At this they remained silent. He looked around at them with anger, for he was deeply grieved that they had closed their minds against him. Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." The man did so and his hand was perfectly restored. When the Pharisees went outside, they immediately began to plot with the Herodians how they might destroy him.

Mk 3:1-6

They next sent some Pharisees and Herodians after Him to catch Him in His speech. The two groups came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know you are a truthful man, unconcerned about anyone's opinion. It is evident you do not act out of human respect but teach God's way of life sincerely. Is it lawful to pay the tax to the emperor or not? Are we to pay or not to pay?" Knowing their hypocrisy, He said to them, "Why are you trying to trip me up? Bring me a coin and let me see it." When they brought one, He said to them, "Whose head is this and whose inscription is it?" "Caesar's," they told Him. At that Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's. Their amazement at Him knew no bounds."

Mk 12:13-17

The paradigms have certain characteristics. First, they are independent narratives, self-contained units. The paradigms could be lifted right out of the narrative without destroying the continuity of the gospel story. Second, the paradigms are brief. They deal only with the elements to clarify a main thought. Their brevity aids the focusing of attention and discourages the addition of distracting material. Third, like settings for lovely jewels, the paradigms give prominence to the words of Jesus. A paradigm highlights the words of Jesus, the illustration often concluding with them. Fourth, the paradigms are essentially religious illustrations suitable for preaching and teaching the community. Some even end with a choral response: "Never have such things occurred in Israel." "We have never seen such things." "Their amazement at Him knew no bounds." The minister endeavored to elicit these same responses from the congregation.

The paradigms are believed to be the only form in which the traditions of Jesus would have survived in a Church that was seeking to keep itself unspotted from this world, looking for an imminent Second Coming of Christ. The history of the Church was transmitted at this time, in both sermons and in teaching techniques.

In the Gospel of Mark we discover five other examples of pure paradigms.

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| 1. The Healing of the Paralytic | Mark 2:1-12 |
| 2. Question of Fasting | Mark 2:18-22 |
| 3. The Ears of Corn | Mark 2:23-28 |
| 4. Relatives of Jesus | Mark 3:31-35 |
| 5. Anointing of Jesus | Mark 14:3- 9 |

Many of the paradigms known at the time of the gospel composition were woven into the narrative of the gospel story. As they became material to be read, they lost the pure form of the paradigms. For example, we can examine the account of the Rich Young Man found in Mark 10: 17-31:

As he was setting out on a journey, a man came running up, knelt down before him and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to share in everlasting life?" Jesus answered, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments:

*You shall not kill
You shall not commit adultery*

*You shall not steal
You shall not bear false witness
You shall not defraud
Honor your father and your mother.”*

He replied, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my childhood.” Then Jesus looked at him with love and told him, “There is one thing more you must do. Go and sell what you have and give to the poor, you will then have the treasure in heaven. After that, come and follow me.” At these words the man’s face fell. He went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples could only marvel at his words. So Jesus repeated what he had said, “My sons, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” They were completely overwhelmed at this, and exclaimed to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus fixed his gaze on them and said, “For man, it is impossible, but not for God. With God all things are possible.” Peter was moved to say to him, “We have put aside everything to follow you!” Jesus answered, “I give you my word, there is no one who has given up home, brothers, or sisters, mother or father, children or property, for me and for the gospel who will not receive in this present age a hundred times as many homes, brothers and sisters, mothers, children and property--and persecution besides--and in the age to come, everlasting life. Many who are first shall come last, and the last shall come first.”

Before the writing of the Gospel according to Mark, the episode of the rich young man existed as a pure paradigm but we can see here how the paradigm and the subsequent teaching ministry are woven together in the written account. The written Gospel brings a blending of the paradigm and the instruction.

Some other examples of evolved paradigms are:

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| 1. The Healing in the Synagogue | Mark 1:23 |
| 2. The Call of Levi | Mark 2:13 |
| 3. Jesus of Nazareth | Mark 6:1 |
| 4. The Sons of Zebedee | Mark 10:35 |

5. The Blind Man of Jericho	Mark 10:46
6. Cleansing the Temple	Mark 11:15
7. The Question of the Sadducees	Mark 12:18
8. The Inhospitable Samaritans	Luke 9:52
9. The Man with the Dropsy	Luke 14:1

CHAPTER 5

THE MIRACLE STORIES

The telling of stories was traditional in the biblical world. Even to this day in the marketplace of Marrakech, professional storytellers may still be found side by side who recite, by memory, the Koran to respectful hearers. It would have been natural, in such an environment, that the verified miracles of Jesus should have stimulated miracle stories. Gifted narrators artfully weaved the miracles within colorful and picturesque backgrounds. These detailed descriptions and colorful touches distinguished the miracle stories from the paradigms. Unlike the paradigms they were not composed for use in sermons. They contained their own purpose for being.

Miracle stories are illustrations of divine power. They were the revelations of the divinity within Jesus. They were told in order to manifest, in a unique way, that Jesus was *Emmanuel*, “God with-us.” In their composition, the literary form of New Testament times for relating miracles was followed.

First, the miracle stories were created to contrast Jesus with the miracle-workers of the time. In the end, they reveal Jesus to be incomparable. A hint of this intention can be seen in such responses as “not since the beginning of the world has a man opened the eyes of one born blind” and “Never has a man done such works.”

The second intention of the miracle narrator was to demonstrate the unique relationship existing between God and Jesus Christ. A distinction of nature between the Father and Son is erased by the miracles. We see this particularly in the Gospel according to St. John. Jesus is presented as accomplishing the works of God, which are unique operations of the divine nature.

The age of the miracles, inaugurated during the early life of Jesus, continued in His Risen Life through the ministry of miracle-workers within the Church. Peter, before the Sanhedrin, explained the healing ministry in these words:

If we must answer today for a good deed done to a cripple and explain how he was restored to health, then you and all the people of Israel realize that it was done in the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazorean, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead. In the power of that name this man stands before you perfectly sound. (Acts 4:9-10)

A third purpose for the miracle stories was to stimulate belief in miracles, and to present examples for miracle workers. They served as instructions for the ministry of miracles. By narrating detailed descriptions of the particular words used in the miracle, such as “*Talitha Koum*” and “*Ephphatha*,” and the actions performed in the miracles, such as the laying on of hands or the taking of the hand, the narrator manifested the means and methods for working miracles.

An excellent example of a miracle story is found in Chapter Five in Mark:

Now when Jesus had crossed back to the other side again in the boat, a large crowd gathered around him and he stayed close to the lake. One of the officials of the synagogue, a man named Jairus, came near. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and made this earnest appeal: “My little daughter is critically ill. Please come and lay your hands on her so that she may get well and live.” The two went off together and a large crowd followed, pushing against Jesus. . . . He had not finished speaking when people from the official’s house arrived saying, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher further?” Jesus disregarded the report that had been brought and said to the official, “Fear is useless. What is needed is trust.” He would not permit anyone to follow him except Peter, James, and James’ brother, John. As they approached the house of the synagogue leader, Jesus was struck by the noise of people wailing

and crying loudly on all sides. He entered and said to them, "Why do you make this din with your wailing? The child is not dead. She is asleep." At this they began to ridicule him. Then he put them out. Jesus took the child's father and mother and his own companions and entered the room where the child lay. Taking her hand, he said to her, "Talitha Koum," which means, "Little girl, get up." The girl, a child of twelve, stood up immediately and began to walk around. At this the family's astonishment knew no bounds. He enjoined them strictly not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat. (Mk 5:21-24;35-43)

Into this very account Mark inserts another miracle story that actual demonstrates the dynamics of healing power:

There was a woman in the area who had been afflicted with a hemorrhage for a dozen years. She had received treatment at the hands of doctors of every sort and had exhausted her savings in the process, yet she got no relief; on the contrary, she only grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and put her hand to his cloak. "If I just touch his clothing," she thought, "I shall get well." Immediately her flow of blood dried up and the feeling that she was cured of her affliction ran through her whole body. Jesus was conscious at once that healing power had gone out from him. Wheeling about in the crowd, he began to ask, "Who touched my clothing?" His disciples said to him, "You can see how this crowd hems you in, yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'" Despite this, He kept looking around to see the woman who had done it. Fearful and beginning to tremble now she realized what had happened, the woman came and fell in front of him and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, it is your faith that has cured you. Go in peace and be free of this illness." (Mk 5:25-34)

In this miracle, the woman was healed by touching the cloak of Jesus. A transfer of power is clearly described. Something like an electrical contact was set up by the fingers touching the garment. The woman felt power entering

her body. Jesus did not sense the touch, but he did sense the dynamic force that was emitted from his body.

These formulas and gestures guided the Christian healers in their ministry, instructing them how to act in like circumstances.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not only a gospel “of the word” but also a gospel of power. By its preaching, men were saved. By the working of miracles, God’s dynamic power manifested itself in the world. Both the preaching and miracles led men to confess, “Jesus is the Lord.” For this purpose, Mark places both the Paradigms and Miracle Stories within the Gospel.

Like the Paradigms, the Miracle Stories are usually independent and self contained units. These Miracle Stories stand out in Mark:

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| 1. The Leper | Mark 1:40-45 |
| 2. The Storm | Mark 4:35-41 |
| 3. The Demons | Mark 5:1-20 |
| 4. The Feeding of the Five Thousand | Mark 6:35-44 |
| 5. The Walking on the Sea | Mark 6:45-52 |
| 6. The Deaf and Dumb Man | Mark 7:32-37 |
| 7. The Blind Man | Mark 8:22-26 |
| 8. The Epileptic Boy | Mark 9:14-29 |

In the Fourth Gospel According to John, we have recorded these Miracle Stories:

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| 1. The Changing of Water to Wine | John 2:1-11 |
| 2. The Cure of the Royal Official’s Son | John 4:46-54 |
| 3. The Cure of the Lame Man at Bethesda | John 5:1-9 |
| 4. The Man Born Blind | John 9:1-7 |
| 5. The Raising of Lazarus | John 11:1-43 |

PERSONAL TRADITIONS

The evangelists incorporated the Passion Narrative, the Paradigms, and Miracle Stories into the written Gospel. These comprise the largest portion of the written account, and compose the essential elements of the Gospel accounts. They expressed the divine power manifested in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ.

It is expected that other events and persons related to Jesus would have had importance to the early Christians. They greatly loved the Lord and were naturally interested in all aspects of His life even if they were not essential to the history of salvation. Personal traditions developed around people closely related to Jesus. These were circulated for the edification of the faithful who sincerely desired to know Jesus in a more intimate way and to know something of the holy men and women who were part of His earthly life.

To this very day, many of these personal traditions still endure in the Holy Land. A guide will point to a place and say, “Here the Mother of Jesus hid from her persecutors,” or “There is where the Mother of Jesus prayed for the dying Stephen. She could witness his stoning from there.”

Some personal traditions, even though they occupy a relatively small section, were incorporated into the written gospel. The primary intent of the Gospel is to present Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God. In the recording of personal tradition, the gospel spotlight, for a brief moment, lingers on persons and events relative to Jesus, but of secondary importance.

The Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary is one of the most endearing personal traditions incorporated into the Gospel.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, to a Virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. Upon arriving, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.” She was

deeply troubled by his words, and wondered what his greeting meant. The angel went on to say to her, “Do not fear, Mary. You have found favor with God. You shall conceive and bear a son and give Him the name of Jesus. Great will be His dignity and He will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of David his father. He will rule over the house of Jacob forever and His reign will be without end.”

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be since I do not know man?” The angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God. Know that Elizabeth, your kinswoman, has conceived a son in her old age; she who was thought to be sterile is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.”

Mary said, “I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say.” With that the angel left her. (Lk 1:26-38)

Other familiar personal traditions included in the gospel accounts are: the birth of John the Baptist; the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; the annunciation to the Shepherds; the visitation of the Wise Men; the presentation in the Temple with Simon and Anna; the slaughter of the Innocents; the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt; the Boy Jesus in the Temple; the accounts relating to Peter, James, John, Thomas, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, Simeon of Cyrene, etc.

The personal traditions are human interest accounts. They are descriptions of the secondary persons and events surrounding our Lord’s life. They introduce us to all kinds of people, serving as examples to the readers. The early-recorded events from the Life of Jesus, such as the Infancy narrative, foreshadow events to come.

THE CHRIA

Luke, being the only non-Jewish evangelist, does not surprise us by introducing into the gospel account a literary form common to contemporary Greek literature. We discover the *chria*. We have this example of a *chria* from the writings of Aristotle: a man boasted of being a citizen of a great city. Aristotle responded, "One should not be concerned about this, but whether one is worthy of a great motherland." A homemade example of a *chria* is: A particular person complains about another--that he cannot understand him. The response to the complaint is--many persons are not meant to be understood, only accepted.

A *chria* is a short pointed saying with a general application. It is occasioned by a definite person responding to a definite situation with a quick, sharp thought. It grabs attention and stimulates thought because of its brevity and depth. In a sense, the thought expressed in the *chria* surprises the mind and encourages meditation. In the time of Luke, there were many popular books of *chria*.

Here are a few examples of the *chria* found in Luke's Gospel account:

Jesus was told, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to see you!" He told them in reply "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it." (Lk 8:20-21)

While he was saying this, a woman from the crowd called out, "Blest is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you." "Rather," He replied, "Blest are they who hear the word of God and keep it." (Lk 11:27-28)

Yet another said to him, "I will be your follower, Lord, but first let me take leave of my people at home." Jesus answered him, "Whoever puts his hand to the plow but keeps looking back is unfit for the reign of God." (Lk 9:61-62).

Although keeping within the developed boundaries of tradition, Luke does present many words of Jesus in a contemporary manner. He organizes them in a brief framework:

Turning to his disciples, he said to them privately: "Blest are the eyes that see what you see. I tell you, many prophets and kings wished to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." (Lk 10:23-24)

Do not live in fear, little flock. It has pleased your Father to give you the Kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms. Get purses for yourselves that do not wear out, a never-failing treasure with the Lord which no thief comes near nor any moth destroys. Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be. (Lk 12:32-34)

At times Luke transforms stories into small pictures. He shortened the situation so that the following scene has the effect of a chria:

Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to give me my share of our inheritance." He replied, "Friend, who has set me up as your judge or arbiter? . . . A man may be wealthy, but his possessions do not guarantee him life." (Lk 12:13-15)

A discussion arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. Jesus, who knew their thoughts, took a little child and placed it beside him, after which he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child on my account, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes him who sent me; for the least one among you is the greatest." (Lk 9:46-48)

It was John who said, "Master, we saw a man using your name to expel demons, and we tried to stop him because he is not of our company." Jesus told him in reply, "Do not stop him, for any man who is not against you is on your side." (Lk 9:49-50)

At other times, Luke shortens the introduction to a traditional story in order to highlight the words being spoken:

Then he went into the Temple and began driving out those who were selling. "According to Scripture," He said, "my house will be a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a robbers' den!" (Lk 19:45-46)

When all the people were baptized, and Jesus was at prayer after likewise being baptized, the skies opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in visible form like a dove. A voice from heaven was heard to say: "You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests." (Lk 3:21-22)

The forming of Jesus' words into chria, the reduction of larger scenes into smaller pictures, the shortening of introductions to highlight words, were departures from the traditional method of handling gospel material. These indicate the secular style the Gospel material assumed around 75 A.D. It represents a Church applying the gospel to its own times and a new culture.

This completes our review of the early Christian society and their ministerial needs, which supplied the material for the written gospel. It should enable us to understand the similarities and differences between the gospel accounts, particularly those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. These three are called the "Synoptic Gospels" because the three accounts are similar. In Greek, *synoptic* means similar or alike.

CHAPTER 6

THE MESSAGE OF MIRACLES

Before undertaking the study of a particular written gospel, it would be well for us to review the place and importance of miracles in the gospel accounts. This chapter will be devoted to this review.

In the Old Testament, Moses is God's great-prophet. Not only does God speak through Moses and the other prophets, but He performs miraculous deeds through them. God enters into the history of the Jews in a personal and dramatic way:

But Moses answered the people, "Fear not! Stand your ground, and you will see the victory the Lord will win for you today."...Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord swept the sea with a strong east wind throughout the night and so turned it into dry land. When the water was thus divided the Israelites marched into the midst of the sea on dry land, with the water like a wall to their right and to their left. (Ex 14:13; 21-22)

The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that I, the Lord, am your God." In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning, a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "What is this?" for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, "This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat." (Ex 16:11-15)

The Lord answered Moses, "Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. I will be standing there in front you on the rock of Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will flow from it for the people to drink." This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel. The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" (Ex 17:5-7)

Before the death of Moses, he prophesied that another prophet like himself would be raised up among the people. We read in the Eighteenth Chapter of Deuteronomy:

And the Lord said to me, "This was well said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. If any man will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it." (Deut 18:17-19)

We can see that in New Testament times, this new prophet, "like unto Moses" was still expected. We read that priests and Levites came from Jerusalem and they asked John the Baptist:

"Who are you" was the direct question, "I am not the Messiah." They questioned him further, "Who, then? Elijah?" "I am not Elijah," he answered. "Are you the Prophet?" "No", he replied. (Jn 1:19-21)

"The Prophet" like unto Moses would be expected to accomplish works as Moses.

After Moses, Elijah and Elisha are the most spectacular workers of miracles in the Old Testament:

"Do not be afraid," Elijah said to her. . . "For the Lord, the God of

Israel, says: 'The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth.'"
She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and she and her son as well; the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the Lord had foretold through Elijah. (1Kgs 17:13-16)

He [Elijah] called out to the Lord, "O, Lord, my God, will you afflict even the widow with whom I am staying by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself out upon the child three times and called out to the Lord, "O Lord, my God, let the life breath return to the body of this child." The Lord heard the prayer of Elijah; the life breath returned to the child's body and he revived. (1Kgs 17:20-22)

Naaman [the leper] came with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. The prophet sent him the message: "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will heal, and you will be clean." ...So Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan seven times at the word of the man of God. His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (2Kgs 5:9-10;14)

There is an obvious difference between the miracles worked by Moses and those accomplished through Elijah and Elisha. Moses' miracles were worked for the whole people. Those of Elijah and Elisha were worked for private persons. These demonstrated God's personal entrance not only into the history of the people, but also into individual lives.

We have already seen from the Jew's encounter with John the Baptist that the prophet Elijah was expected to return before the end of time. The prophet Malachi had foretold:

Lo, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I

come and strike the land with doom.” (Mal 3:23-24)

The early Christian Community saw Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy. Many of the miracles recorded in the New Testament demonstrate Jesus to be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Throughout the prophets, we hear of a period of supreme divine intervention into the life of God’s people, a period overflowing with divine mercy. It would be the day Isaiah prophesied; the Lord would comfort Zion and turn her deserts into gardens:

Yes, the Lord shall comfort Zion and have pity on all her ruins; her deserts he shall make like Eden, her wasteland like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of song.” (Is 51:3)

And the time of suffering and imprisonment would come to an end:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn. (Is 61:1-2)

In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus applied these very words of Isaiah to himself. He affirmed: *“Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21)*. When the disciples of John the Baptist came to ask him if He was the one to come, He answered in terms of Old Testament prophecy:

In reply, Jesus said to them: “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them.” (Mt 11:4-5)

The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes that was worked from compassion for the multitude demonstrated God’s care for His people, and the abundance of blessings to flow out of the Messianic Age. Some see the

changing of the water into wine at Cana as another sign of the messianic abundance of grace.

THE MESSAGE OF MIRACLES

Not only did the miracles of Jesus fulfill scriptural prophecy, but in keeping with the spirit of the Old Testament, many of them were symbolic. As the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had once done, Jesus also performed symbolic actions to illustrate his ministry. Luke indicates that the miraculous catch of fish was symbolic of the great numbers to be won for Jesus by the apostles and disciples: *“Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men’”* (Lk.5:10). The curse of the barren fruit tree was symbolic of the rejection of Israel for lack of faith (see Mk. 11:12-14, 20-25). The miracle of the coin in the mouth of the fish was most probably symbolic of the primacy of Peter (see Mt.17:24-27). An excellent example of a symbolic miracle is the opening of the eyes of the man born blind:

When they arrived at Bethsaida, some people brought him a blind man and begged Him to touch him. Jesus took the blind man’s hand and led him outside the village. Putting spittle on his eyes he laid his hands on him and asked, “Can you see anything?” The man opened his eyes and said, “I can see people but they look like walking trees.” Then a second time Jesus laid hands on his eyes, and he saw perfectly; his sight was restored and he could see everything clearly. (Mk 8:22-25)

Though this miracle is of undisputed authenticity, it was ignored by Matthew and Luke. It appears to have embarrassed them. In the narrative we find the blind man is healed in stages; the use of spittle indicated the difficulty Jesus had in working the miracle. Just prior to this miracle He said to his disciples:

Do you still not see or comprehend? Are your minds completely blinded? Have you eyes but no sight? Ears, but no hearing? Do you still not understand?” (Mk 8:17-18,21)

Following the miracle we find Jesus asking two questions of his disciples: “*Who do people say that I am?*” and “*Who do you say that I am?*” Obviously, the miracle was symbolic of the problem of faith, of the disciples’ truly seeing who Jesus really was.

The healing of the centurion’s servant and the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman by Jesus are certainly symbolic miracles of the coming faith of the Gentiles and of the power of the Gospel entering their lives. It has been suggested that the primary purpose of the Transfiguration was to symbolize a new Mt. Sinai and a new Moses.

Though many miracles of the New Testament fulfilled the prophecies of the Old, and others were symbolic of the Kingdom of God, they are but a small part of the message of miracles. Perhaps in the second century, the essential message was obscured.

In a work entitled *Apology to Hadrian*, Quadratus, an early second century writer, used the gospel miracles to defend the divinity of Jesus and the divine origin of the Church. Miracles were useful for this purpose and were used as such by the early Church.

Peter preaches in Acts:

Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazorene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you all know.” (Acts 2:22)

There is no question that the miracles worked by Jesus caused people to wonder, admire, and led many to faith. We read: “*And his disciples believed in him.*” Nevertheless, Jesus refused to perform miracles solely to prove Himself. It made no difference whether the request came from the devil, Herod, kin, the people, or the Pharisees:

The Pharisees came forward and began to argue with him. They were looking for some heavenly sign from him as a test. With a sigh

from the depths of his spirit he said, "Why does this age seek a sign?

I assure you, no such sign will be given it!" Then he left them, got into the boat again, and went off to the other shore. (Mk 8:11-13)

Jesus knew the hearts of men and said: *"They will not be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Lk 16:31)*. He foretold that false prophets would come to work miracles and deceive the elect: *"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and produce signs and portents to deceive the elect" (Mk 13:22)*. Jesus is not satisfied with having His miracles looked upon as mere credentials.

In later Church life, miracles became testimonies for the sanctity of the miracle workers. Introducing the sanctity of miracle workers into the ministry of miracles only confused the message of miracles more.

In the Synoptic Gospels, miracles are narrated one after the other. In the first ten chapters of the Gospel according to Mark, two hundred out of the four hundred twenty-five verses are devoted to the miraculous. If almost one half of this material is devoted to the miracles of Jesus, we can conclude that miracles essentially convey the message of the Gospel. The message of the miracles is the message of the Gospel!

THE TWO KINGDOMS

The ordinary term in the Synoptic Gospels for miracles is *dynamis*, an act of power. We are all familiar with the word "dynamo." A dynamo generates power. The Apostles picture Jesus as a dynamo of divine power that has entered into the human race. As Peter says in Acts:

God has anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil." (Acts 10:38)

Mark gives a very interesting account of the first display of dynamis in Jesus:

The people were spellbound by his teaching because he taught with authority, and not like the scribes. There appeared in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit that shrieked, "What do you want of us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him sharply, "Be quiet! Come out of the man!" At that the unclean spirit convulsed the man violently and with a loud shriek came out of him. All who looked on were amazed. They began to ask one another. "What does this mean? A completely new teaching in a spirit of authority! He gives orders to unclean spirits and they obey!" (Mk 1:22-27)

Mark presents a confrontation between the power of Jesus Christ and the power of darkness. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God confronts the Kingdom of Darkness. The miracles of Jesus are connected with the coming of the Kingdom of God and cause the Kingdom to come. The miracles of Jesus were weapons to overcome Satan and his reign.

In the eyes of the New Testament, the position of Satan is summed up in the words of John: *"The whole world is in the power of the Evil one"* (1Jn 5:19). This was written when the Church was already growing old in the world. The New Testament does not imply that there is a diabolical possession of all men, (though in particular cases it is true) but rather, that there is a dominion of Satan that results in bondage. Men in this world are like prisoners of war: some surrender completely to their conquerors, others maintain an inward autonomy and freedom. How did such a terrible thing come to be: *"The whole world is in the power of the Evil One?"* Perhaps this parable explains it to us:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his courtyard, his possessions go undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he comes and overpowers him, such a one carries off the arms on which he was relying and divides the spoils." (Lk 11:21-22)

The world created by God is good. God made man and gave him dominion of the world. The Evil One entered the world; he tempted; he seduced; he overcame; he despoiled; and he took possession. From the moment of sin, Satan has been Prince of this World, with certain power over man and nature. Sin inaugurated the Reign of Darkness. It produced sin and more sin, pain and sufferings, afflictions of all kinds, with death its final and bitter fruit. We read in the Book of Wisdom:

Court not death by your erring way of life, nor draw to yourselves destruction by the works of your hands. Because God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that they might have being; and the creatures of the world are wholesome, and there is not a destructive drug among them, nor any domain of the nether world on earth It was the wicked who with hands and words invited death” (Wis 1:12-14,16)

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: *“The sting of death is sin. . .” (1Cor 15:56).* And *“The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1Cor 15:26).* To the Romans Paul wrote: *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and with sin death, death thus coming to all men inasmuch as all sinned” (Rom 5:12).*

It is no accident that all three of the Synoptic writers begin the public ministry of Jesus with the presence of Satan. Matthew and Luke present a dramatic confrontation between Jesus and Satan. Jesus wins, but it is only the first round. We read: *“When the devil had finished all the tempting he left him, to await another opportunity” (Lk 4:13).*

At the very beginning, we are being informed that the Coming of the Kingdom involves war with Satan. Satan has dominion, and will not yield it to God without a fight--a fight that will ultimately be waged by Jesus and Satan within the individual souls of men.

In the public ministry of Jesus, the two Kingdoms are pitted against each other. Mark demonstrates this with the first use of miraculous power by Jesus. The expelling of demons was the infallible sign of the coming of the

Kingdom. It revealed God's Presence in the world: *"But if it is by the Spirit of God that I expel demons, then the reign of God has overtaken you"* (Mt 12:28). God has entered the world through His son in order to redeem a lost world.

THE DOMINION OF SATAN

The attitude of Jesus toward sickness manifests a relationship between physical and mental disorders and spiritual disorders. He implied that it takes the same power to undo one as the other:

Which is easier, to say "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say "Get up and walk?" In any case, to make it clear to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...he then addressed the paralyzed man: I say to you, get up! Take your mat with you and return to your house. (Lk 5:23-24)

To the man cured at the Pool of Bethesda, Jesus had this advice: *"Remember, now, you have been cured. Give up your sins so that something worse may not overtake you"* (Jn 5:14). We see in the case of the epileptic boy (Mk 9:14-29), and that of the woman afflicted with arthritis (Lk 13:10-17), that both afflictions are attributed to the dominion of Satan. It should be noted that these afflictions are attributed to the dominion of Satan, not to the sins of the afflicted. Primarily, the dominion of Satan flows from the sin of Adam. Remember, when the Disciples of Christ asked him, *"Rabbi, was it his sin or that of his parents that caused him to be born blind?" 'Neither,' answered Jesus: 'It was no sin, either of this man or of his parents . . .'*" (Jn 9:2-3).

Jesus rebuked illness as if the illness itself was a personalized evil, distinct from the afflicted person. He "rebuked" a fever in the same way he would rebuke a demon:

Leaving the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a severe fever, and they interceded with him for her. He stood over her and addressed himself to the

*fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them.
(Lk 4:38-39)*

A word often used for sickness is *mastix*. It implies some kind of punishment or whipping, almost as if directly inflicted by Satan: *“Because he had cured many, all who had afflictions kept pushing toward him to touch him” (Mk 3:10). “There was a woman in the area who had been afflicted with a hemorrhage for a dozen years” (Mk 5:25).* So much of the energy and time of Jesus is consumed with sin and sickness that his public ministry could be identified with the casting out of demons and the deliverance from their dominion.

As we follow Jesus through his public ministry, we realize that our concept of “savior” is somewhat limited. Jesus did not distinguish between saving a body and saving a soul. The entire person is spiritually and physically regenerated by the Savior’s touch. For this reason the supreme proof of Jesus’ triumph over Satan and sin is the resurrection of the body from the dead. Jesus lists this great deed as climactic in his report to John the Baptist:

Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured; the deaf hear, men are raised to life... (Mt 11:4-5)

St. John the Evangelist culminates the public life of the Savior with the raising of Lazarus from the dead, demonstrating that Jesus as Savior is the “resurrection and the life.”

The personal triumph of Jesus Christ over Satan is the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The Risen Jesus is the Victor! We read in the Acts:

God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses to that. . . .For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32,36). By his own right hand God has now raised him up to be leader and savior, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him to Israel (Acts 5:31).

Not only man but all nature suffers--suffers from the dominion of Satan:

Indeed, the whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. Creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but by him who once subjected it; yet not without hope, because the world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. Yes, we know that all creation groans and is in agony even until now. (Rom 8:19-22)

St. Paul teaches us that Satan had established a certain dominion over all creation. The Scriptures tell us that the great struggle at the end of time will shake not only the souls of men but the very sun and stars:

But in those days, after the time of distress, the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness, the stars will come falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. (Mk 13:24-26)

The end of the world may be but a dispossessed Satan acting like a spoiled child, who can no longer have his way, throwing an astronomical tantrum.

We read in the Psalms: “You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet” (Ps 8:6). We could expect, in the ministry of Jesus, that the power of the Kingdom would extend not only to man but to nature. We read in Mark:

It happened that a bad squall blew up. The waves were breaking over the boat and it began to ship water badly. Jesus was in the stern through it all, sound asleep on a cushion. They finally woke him and said to him, “Teacher, does it not matter to you that we are going to drown?” He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea: “Quiet! Be still!” The wind fell off and everything grew calm.

...They kept saying to one another, "Who can this be that the wind and the sea obey him!" (Mk 4:37-41)

This is an excellent example of Jesus' meeting the power of Satan in nature. When the raging of nature threatened the lives of the disciples, Jesus rebuked the wind in the same manner he had rebuked a fever or a demon. He commanded the sea to "muzzle" itself just as he had commanded the demon that called out in the synagogue at Capernaum. After the command of Jesus, the sea became as tranquil as the possessed man in Capernaum had become when the demon departed. The coming of the Kingdom restores order to man and nature.

It is not by accident that Jesus worked many miracles on the Sabbath. God had rested from His work of creation on the Sabbath. In Jesus, God had risen from His rest, and re-creates as He establishes His dominion and renews man in His own image and likeness. This is the message of miracles!

EPILOGUE

Satan's dominion did not enter the world without the cooperation of man. The Kingdom of God is not re-established without man's willful cooperation. The Kingdom came in the Man Jesus' total submission to the Will of God. The extension of God's Kingdom depends on Jesus Christ, and individual men and women. Many scriptures demonstrate that faith is needed for a person to become a receptor of the divine power flowing from Jesus Christ. Faith calls forth the dynamic, divine energy of Christ. It represents a readiness to accept the will of God, His dominion. God's power in this world is brought to fullness by faith and is hindered by infidelity. Faith can open the door for the ministry of healing within the Church. Faith can put the power of God at the service of men so that they can work miracles. Faith varies from initial trust in Jesus' power to complete belief in His divine nature--The Son of God, and Savior of the World! Faith thrives, deepens, and increases through exercise and, as is obvious from scripture, in the presence of divine power--the miracle.

"This is the work of God: have faith in the One whom He sent" (Jn 6:29).

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INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study

Commentary by: James P. O'Bryan, S.T.

This Catholic Bible Study series is entitled INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP. It is an in-depth study of the New Testament for Catholic laity so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, might dwell in us.

Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself. (Eph. 3: 18-19)

The general motivating force behind this course is the preservation and growth of the Christian faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries.

This course has four immediate goals:

1. To ensure a true spirit of repentance
2. To foster a deeper commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ
3. To create a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer
4. To encourage a more vibrant participation in the life and mission of the Church

This Study is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It has been accredited by the Catechetical Institute of the Orange Diocese, Orange, California, for CCD re-certification. The study is designed for presentation by either a religious or layperson. Most studies have received NIHIL OBSTAT and IMPRIMATUR through the Bishop of Orange, California. All studies have been submitted for Imprimatur and no work of Father O'Bryan has ever been rejected.

The complete study consists of:

1. A spiral-bound Teacher's Manual containing the printed text for all of the lectures of the study ordered (Mark, Luke, Acts, etc.)
2. A spiral-bound Student Manual (Meditations) containing a corresponding Summary of the Lecture and Worksheet for each week's study. Each student should purchase a copy of the Student Manual to keep a personal record of their responses to the questions, as well as notes that might be taken during the lecture or group sessions.

Note: A few studies are available only in 3-ring binders. One copy each of the Teacher's Manual and Student Manual are purchased, and copies of the student manual must be made for each participant.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY CLASS FORMAT

First Hour - Small Group Sharing:

- Students break into their small groups (10 or fewer participants)
- Prayer said aloud together (Example: Prayer to the Holy Spirit)
- Songs can be sung
- Sharing begins (approximately 45 minutes)
- Stretch / Break for coffee etc. (10-15 minutes)

Second Hour – Lecture:

- Prayer said aloud by lecturer.
- Lecture begins for the following week's study (approximately 45-60 minutes)

Total Class Time - 2 Hours Each Week

The study can be adapted for 10 to 400 people. Committed people needed may vary depending upon the number of students.

Recommended Personnel:

- Lecturer: To present the material
- Small Group Leader: One for every 10 people sharing answers.
- Secretary: Functions might include making copies of materials (not required if participants each have their own spiral bound student book), distributing copies as required; advertising; registration; collecting fees (where applicable for materials, etc.)

Purpose:

The motivating purpose for the formation of the Bible Study is to preserve and impart the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. Since "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," is there anything more important for a sincere Christian than a study of the Scriptures?

Recommended Work Assignments for Parish Studies

Secretary

Will place announcement of day, time and location in the Sunday bulletin beginning four weeks prior to the Bible Study beginning. A flyer can also be posted on the parish bulletin board.

Accept registrations by mail, phone, through the parish office or personally.

Collect fee, if applicable, at the first session of the Bible Study. The registration fee can be used to defray the cost of the study (workbooks printing, coffee etc.) and is also a form of commitment by persons attending to complete the study. You may choose to have a “love offering” bowl for ongoing costs, i.e., coffee etc.

Be responsible for coffee, treats at break.

Each week reproduce the Summaries/Worksheets for entire group and distribute to each small Group Leader (This may be done by rectory personnel). This is not necessary if each student purchases a personal workbook.

Group Leader

Through years of experience, it has been found that it is best to strictly follow the discipline listed below.

--After community prayer, group shares worksheet answers for the week.

--Working in a clockwise order, the student to left of the leader answers the first question. The leader then asks if anyone has an additional or different answer. Move then to the next student, who answers question number (2) and so on, through all the questions for the week. The leader should help ensure answers are in accordance with the Catholic Church. If in doubt, check it out!

--It is the group leader's responsibility to confine discussion to the subject matter being dealt with in the weekly lesson. (Sharing problems or special prayers can be done after lesson is completed) If extraneous discussion is not regulated, the questions will not be answered in the time allotted.

--If a student has a question on the subject and no agreement can be reached, put that student in charge of finding the answer through a priest or any Catholic resource. The answer is to be brought back to the group the following week. (The leader should research the question as well.)

--ONLY students who have done their written homework may participate in the discussion. Others are encouraged to attend, listen, and write down the answers. There is much to be learned from one another, so incomplete homework is no reason to stay away. On the other hand, sharing off-the-cuff (without prayerful study and written answers) has proven too often to be disruptive and misleading.

--If the student is self-centered and tries to dominate the discussion, the group leader must speak to him privately and gently explain the problem, requesting his cooperation within the study guidelines. If the student persists in unacceptable behavior, that student is asked to remain silent or leave the study. (It is better to lose one destructive student than to lose the entire group.)

- Try to bring out the best in each student.
- Occasionally there is just one correct answer; when that is given, do not allow haggling, just move on to the next question.
- At the end of the discussion period, distribute next week's Summary/Worksheet for the students' home study (not required if participants have purchased individual workbooks).
- If time runs out before ALL questions are answered, BREAK anyway. People need the coffee break in order to move around and relax. This is very important. The student needs to be refreshed and ready to concentrate on the upcoming lecture. This should seldom occur. Manage your time; a student may really need an answer to the last question. Time allowed is 45 minutes for small group sharing.
- The first night of the study is a good time to explain the expectations of the group. We share as a community in love, kindness and consideration. This is not just an intellectual study.

Lecturer

Open with a short prayer.

Prepare (rehearse / edit) and deliver the commentary on Sacred Scriptures for the week. Present the material with personal enthusiasm.

Each lesson contains a great deal of material. The lecturer should read and rehearse ahead of time for a most effective presentation. It need not all be presented. Time allowed is 45-60 minutes per lecture.

You may also elect to play Fr. O'Bryan's recorded tapes or CD's. These are available wherever the studies are sold. They are also excellent for personal review and reflection. (Note: many groups have done years of lessons listening to Father's original recordings...they are great!)

Total Class Time - 2 Hours Each Week!

ESTABLISHING A CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY IN YOUR PARISH

The Catholic Bible Study: INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

By James P. O'Bryan S.T.

This Bible Study is designed to be presented by the laity but it may also be presented by religious. The number of participants will determine whether the study should be presented in the parish hall, class-rooms, or in homes. Some parishes have fifty or more people wanting to attend. (When this study was first presented by Fr. O'Bryan, it drew from the entire diocese, not from just one parish. There were 200 people at both the morning and evening session for the seven years...that's right, 400 people each week attended the study in one place.)

Many groups, large and small, still prefer to use the original (and recommended), method because it provides the fullness of the work. First, the full lecture, or an edited version, is presented by a "lecturer". The lecturer should spend time in prayerful preparation each week before presenting the material, and it should be presented with enthusiasm. Tapes and CDs of Father's original lectures are also available for purchase. They often are used in place of a lecturer. Listening to his recorded lectures at leisure, and being able to pause and replay them provides a wealth of information each week.

The homework portion of the study calls us to obedience and daily prayer as we strive to complete our assignment. Homework is a major factor in our personal spiritual growth. How much time will you give to God? The recommended method requires 2 hours each week as a group and additional study time at home, but the rewards are tremendous. This format may be used in homes or parishes.

A variation on the above, used successfully with High School groups (as large as 50) and adults, is to present the Summaries in place of the full lecture. Homework is assigned, answers are shared in a group, and then the Summary is read for the following week. All students have their printed assignments or workbooks. Homework may be trimmed to one or two questions per day for high schoolers (they already have homework to do). This method can reduce a session to about one hour total rather than 2 hours. This method is useful for severely time-challenged people, but the summaries only include about 20% of the complete lecture. However, the purchase of the recorded lectures which can be listened to during the week may be useful in providing a fuller experience for those who are unable to attend the full sessions.

A more recent method has also been successful for small home groups. Instead of using the Lectures and a lecturer, only the Bible and the Summary/Worksheets or Meditation Workbooks are used. Group members take turns reading aloud the Summary and the Bible references in the workbook--answering the questions as they go along. This eliminates the requirement for homework. A leader is still necessary at each meeting--one leader can be chosen for the whole study, or the attendees can take turns. (Note: Again, listening to parts of the recorded lecture in free time during the week may be helpful in providing more than the 20% of information given in the Summary. Also, the homework portion, though a pain to many, has a place in our lives as we strive to be more obedient to God's call).

All of the above styles have proven to be successful for different people in different situations. Start one in your community today!