

# Introduction to Revelation, Inspiration, and Vocation

In the student book, the students are given formal, dogmatic definitions for Revelation, biblical Inspiration, and vocation. These terms are narrowly defined to provide accurate understandings of the Church's dogma. We want to be sure these foundational dogmas are clearly presented, because understanding and accepting them is a key to learning and appreciating many other dogmas and teachings. If students do not understand that God intentionally revealed himself and his will to us, than why would they believe any of the other teachings that proceed from Divine Revelation?

But the formal, dogmatic definitions alone do not do justice to the full reality of these truths for us as individuals. Yes, God definitively reveals himself in the Scriptures and Tradition, but he also reveals himself in each person's life in myriad other ways. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of the Scriptures to write so that their words revealed the truth God intends for us to know for our salvation, but he also inspires each of us to continue the mission of Christ in the world and provides the gifts we need to do so. Most of us will be called to one of the religious vocations—priesthood, consecrated life, or marriage—but we are also called to more specific vocations in service to Christ's mission. The process in the guide for teachers helps the students to explore how the dogmatic truths given in the student book are fleshed out in the lives of believers, using the lives of biblical people as examples.

This article gives a quick refresher on the dogmatic understandings of Revelation, Inspiration, and vocation. Then it explores how these truths are fleshed out in the lives of believers. Examples are given of how this occurred in the lives of biblical people as background for the process given in the guide for teachers.

## The Dogmatic Understanding of Revelation, Inspiration, and Vocation

(See also *Catechism*, paragraphs 50–100)

**Divine Revelation** is God's self-communication, through which he makes known the mystery of his divine plan. The process of Divine Revelation has proceeded gradually, as God has revealed himself in stages since the beginning of creation. God revealed himself intimately and immediately to our first parents; this is the meaning of the symbolism in the Garden of Eden accounts. However, Adam and Eve's sin and its consequences—which we call the Fall—changed this. Creation continues to be a natural revelation of God and his order, beauty, and majesty, but creation is scarred by human sin. God continues to reveal himself but generally in less intimate and immediate ways.

To bring humanity back into full communion with him, God intentionally revealed himself and his plan for salvation through the covenants he made with his Chosen People and the prophets he sent to them. His Chosen People, in turn, were to be a light to the world, proclaiming God's truth to all the nations. God's plan for salvation was thwarted time and again by human sin until it was perfectly fulfilled when he walked among us once again as the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. As Christ, God again revealed himself to us intimately, immediately, and completely, for all of Christ's words and actions are revelatory. In particular, his Death, Resurrection, and Ascension reveal to us the Paschal Mystery, the heart of God's plan for our salvation.

All Revelation is Trinitarian, the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But in a particular way, it was the work of the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide the Apostles to remember and teach all that



they had learned from Christ. We call their teaching the **apostolic Tradition**, or just **Tradition**. The Holy Spirit also inspired the Apostles and their followers to write the Gospels, letters, sermons, and apocalyptic literature that are the books of the New Testament.

We call this **biblical Inspiration**: the divine assistance the Holy Spirit gave to the authors of the books of the Bible, both Old and New Testament books, so they could communicate in human words all that God wanted to reveal for the sake of our salvation. Scripture flows from the apostolic Tradition because the New Testament is based on the witness of the Apostles, and the Old Testament books were approved and used by Jesus and the Apostles. Both the Scriptures and Tradition are guided by the same Spirit, and thus have the same source. The Scriptures and Tradition are the two modes of definitively transmitting the same Divine Revelation, which we also sometimes refer to as the Deposit of Faith.

**Vocation** is the call to know and love God, to share the divine message of salvation with others, and to enjoy the eternal happiness of Heaven. This is the primary vocation that all Christians receive through the Sacraments of Initiation. Most Christians also receive a particular call to the vocation of ordained ministry through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, or to the vocation of marriage through the Sacrament of Matrimony, or to the consecrated life through lifelong religious vows. Each of these vocations serves the Church and the world in ways that are appropriate to their unique charisms.

## The Expansive Understanding of Revelation, Inspiration, and Vocation

The broader understanding of Revelation, Inspiration, and vocation are closely connected in a biblical pattern. When God **reveals** himself to someone, say a prophet or other leader, that person is also **inspired** to fulfill a particular mission or **vocation**. Often this vocation comes with special **charisms**, or gifts, given by God to the individual to empower the person in fulfilling his or her God-given vocation.

This process often takes the form of a calling, and nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the lives of the prophets. Let us take, for example, the call of Isaiah.

In Isaiah, chapter 6, while Isaiah is serving in the Jerusalem Temple, God **reveals** himself in a vision (vv. 1–4). The Lord wonders aloud, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (v. 8), an indirect call for Isaiah to take up the **vocation** of prophet. Isaiah is **inspired** to answer positively to this call (v. 8), partially because an angel of the Lord has already cleansed Isaiah of his sin (vv. 5–7). Prepared and strengthened with the **charism** of a clean heart and tongue, God further guides Isaiah in his vocation by giving him the words he is to speak (vv. 9–13). This pattern—with many variations—is repeated throughout the Old Testament.



God reveals himself in many ways throughout the Scriptures. In fact, a pattern develops as salvation history progresses. Consider this chart:

Person(s)	How God Reveals Himself
Adam and Eve Genesis, chapters 2–3	God reveals himself to Adam and Eve face-to-face; he walks in the garden with them, talking to them directly.
Abraham Genesis, chapter 18	God reveals himself to Abraham and Sarah in person, disguised as a traveler.
Moses Exodus, chapter 3	God reveals himself to Moses in a miraculous burning bush.
Solomon 1 Kings 3:5	God appears to Solomon in a dream.
Ezekiel Ezekiel, chapters 1–2	God appears to Ezekiel in a vision.
Joseph Matthew, 1:20, 2:13	An angel (not God himself) appears to Joseph in a dream.
Apostles	God is revealed in the divine person of Jesus Christ.
Early Christian converts Acts 2:14–42	God is revealed through the words of the Apostles and Baptism (sacramental initiation).

This list is not exhaustive by any means. But notice that as we progress through salvation history, there is a movement from Revelation that is mediated through direct and immediate appearances of God to Revelation that is mediated through dreams, angels, and finally human beings. (I will sidestep the discussion of how much of this is historical and how much of this is symbolic!) Without dismissing the possibility of dramatic and miraculous Revelation, since Apostolic times Revelation has been mediated predominantly through the reading of the Scriptures and through the teaching and witness of faithful Christians.

Let's look at one more example from the Scriptures to see how this process unfolds in the New Testament. Priscilla and Aquila are a wife and husband with a tent-making business in Corinth. We read about them in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 18. They had originally been Jews in Rome, presumably in a Jewish diaspora community. Paul meets them in Corinth, and because they are all tent makers, he stays with them and works with them there. It is unclear when Priscilla and Aquila convert to Christianity, but whether it is in Rome or in Corinth, God **reveals** to them the Good News through the preaching of an early Christian evangelizer. Through Paul, God **inspires** them to be evangelizers too, and they travel with Paul to Ephesus to evangelize there. In their married **vocation**, God further calls them to the particular ministry of evangelization. When Paul leaves Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila remain to support the fledgling Christian community. Acts of the Apostles tells how they discreetly correct another Christian evangelizer, Apollos, so he can preach the Good News accurately. Thus they also became instruments of God's Revelation.

## Modern-Day Application

It should not be hard to see the modern-day parallels to the process of revelation, inspiration, and vocation described in the Bible. I will use small "r" *revelation* and small "i" *inspiration* to indicate the ordinary and daily ways in which God reveals himself and inspires us. These are connected to, but not exactly the same as, dogmatic Revelation and Inspiration.



Just as God's saving love was revealed to Priscilla and Aquila through early Christian evangelists, it is **revealed** to us by the evangelists God places in our life journeys. It probably starts with our parents and grandparents, who first share their faith with us. But God's call also comes through catechists, teachers, priests and deacons, religious brothers and sisters, and Christian friends. Many people experience God's Revelation and call through the preaching, witnessing, and even music at Christian conferences and retreats. It can also come through books and textbooks.

With the call comes the **inspiration** to live a life of Christian love and service. In particular this comes through the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. Whether we feel their effects or not, these sacraments impart grace and the charisms for living the Christian life. Through them we receive our general **vocation** to continue Christ's mission in our world today. And although it may be years before a young person discovers whether he or she is called to the specific vocation of marriage, consecrated life, or ordination, he or she can and will experience informal vocations to specific ministries in his or her teen and young adult years.

Let us take, for example, Melissa, a composite of several young people you have probably known. Melissa grew up in a Catholic family that attended Mass and received the other sacraments regularly. God was initially revealed to her through the faith of her parents. In particular, Melissa was inspired by a grandmother who always talked to her about prayer and faith. Melissa attended a Catholic school in which the teachers also regularly revealed God's saving plan to her through their catechesis. When Melissa was confirmed in the eighth grade, she had no doubts about the love of God and God's plan for salvation.

But Melissa was also torn in her commitment to Christian morality. The influence of friends who did not believe as strongly as she did, and media that did not portray Christian values, was strong. Seeking to strengthen her faith, she went to a parish youth retreat and the National Catholic Youth Conference in her freshman year. She was overwhelmed by the love and witness of so many Catholic teens and adults at these events. At the closing liturgy, she clearly felt God's call to be stronger in her commitment to living her faith. Upon returning home she talked more freely about her faith and gradually changed her circle of friends to include those who also took their Christian commitment seriously.

Melissa found herself particularly attracted to do something about the needs of homeless people in her community. She began to volunteer at her parish's meal ministry to the homeless. As a college student, Melissa volunteered regularly at the Catholic Worker house. She is admired by her friends for her commitment and faithfulness to this ministry.

Melissa's story has endless variations being lived out by young people in our communities today. Even though his definitive Revelation has already occurred in the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has not ceased the process of revealing himself to us, nor has he ceased inspiring people to share his love and message of salvation with the world.

