

CHAPTER I

The One True God

EXODUS 3:13-14

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

One can imagine how mystified Moses must have been as he knelt in awe before the burning bush and heard God reveal his name to be I AM WHO I AM. For one thing, that doesn’t sound like a name, and for another, it is not easy to understand what it means.

Upon further reflection, it makes sense that God’s name would tell us something very important about his nature. This name reveals that God is *he who is*. In other words, God doesn’t simply exist; he *is* existence itself. All other things “live and move and have [their] being” in God (Acts 17:28).

The second of the commandments God gave to Moses was the prohibition against taking God’s name in vain (see Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11). Violating this commandment became one of the few sins that were punishable by stoning (see Leviticus 24:15–16). This helps us understand more clearly some things that happened to Christ during his public ministry.

In John 8:56–59 Jesus shocked and angered the Jews of his day by declaring that “before Abraham was I am.” He used the divine name in a way that clearly showed he was claiming to *be* God. Many of the Jews in the audience, being zealous for the

law of God and not realizing that Jesus Christ is God, took up stones to throw at him. In John 10:30–33, Christ again claimed divinity: “The Father and I are one.” And again his audience reached for stones.

Of course, if Jesus had been a mere man, his words would have been blasphemy. He was telling the Jews a truth that they were not ready to hear. He was revealing himself to be true God and true man.¹

Some non-Christian groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, deny the divinity of Christ, imagining him to be a kind of super-creature. If you should encounter someone who believes this error, be sure to point out Exodus 3:13–14 and how it relates to John 8:56–59. Those people who tried to stone Jesus understood him to mean that he was claiming to be God. And they understood him correctly.

PSALM 8:3–9

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you have established;
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him little less than the angels,²
and you have crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

When the Hubble Space Telescope was launched into orbit in 1990, it opened a breathtaking and mind-boggling view of the

universe. This amazing piece of scientific equipment can detect objects that are *billions* of light years away from the earth.³

Now consider another scientific discovery: Looking inward, we see that our bodies, like all physical objects, are comprised of increasingly smaller particles (for example, molecules, atoms, protons, neutrons, electrons, leptons, quarks and so on). The “deeper” we go, the greater the relative distances between these infinitesimally tiny objects.

What’s the point of these scientific matters, you ask? As Psalm 8:3–9 reminds us, God created human beings to enjoy an immensely privileged place in the cosmos. He has placed this incomprehensibly vast expanse of creation under our dominion (not tyranny). Not only should we fall to our knees with awe-filled gratitude to God for having created all this *for us*, but also we should never forget that everything in the created universe reflects his brilliant glory. His wisdom, power, beauty, truth, goodness and love radiate from each of his creatures. The heavens and earth and everything in them are, really and truly, a love letter from God, a reminder that he has something even *better* in store for those who love him (see 1 Corinthians 2:9).

Knowing this, doesn’t sinful rebellion against his loving appear utterly ridiculous?

PSALM 139:1–4

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 you discern my thoughts from afar.
 You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.
 Even before a word is on my tongue,
 behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

Depending on your spiritual state, it will be either comforting or disconcerting to realize that almighty God knows all your

thoughts, no matter how secret. Those who are in the state of grace have nothing to fear, but those who persist in a state of rebellion against God may cringe at the idea that God sees inside them.

Doesn't it make sense to live in the light of God's truth? How happy are they who throw open their hearts unreservedly and invite God to fill them with his light and peace and joy!

PROVERBS 3:5–7

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

Humility is a very attractive virtue in a person. Saint Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), for example, classified it as the queen of virtues. This teaching from Proverbs is well worth memorizing and repeating often.

First, it reminds us that, while we may think we know what's best in a given situation, we might be wrong. (Just recall how often in your life you *have* been wrong!) And since God always knows what is right, it only makes sense to trust in his wisdom, not our own. After all, there is no comparison between his knowledge and ours. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 16:25).

Second, this passage reminds us that by relying on God's wisdom and seeking his will, we are guaranteed his assistance. Those who trust in the Lord find solutions to the most complicated and vexing problems life can throw at them, often with miraculous ease.

Just ask the saints. Their lives are vivid testimonies to the truth that God provides astonishing, wonderful and seemingly impossible help, often out of the blue and at just the right moment. And one thing these holy men and women had in common was humility.

ISAIAH 12:2

Behold, God is my salvation;
 I will trust, and will not be afraid;
 for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,
 and he has become my salvation.

To paraphrase a popular saying, “Life comes at you fast. Pray hard.” This earthly life is, for most of us, an unceasing blur of activity, commitments, errands, busywork and real work. There’s very little “down time,” and we tend to spend little of it alone with God. A person who watches two hours of television per day will watch for 730 hours in a single year, and that translates to an entire month spent vegetating night and day in front of the tube—talk about priorities being out of whack.

What’s the solution? Well, it begins by taking seriously one of Scripture’s most common themes: the steadfastness of God’s love for us. He loves all creation, but he has a special love for human beings, as evidenced by the fact that he chose to become a *man* to save the human race and redeem the entire created order (see Romans 8:19–21).

It should come as no surprise then to see how Scripture abounds in promises such as Isaiah 12:2 above or Isaiah 41:10: “[F]ear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.”

When challenges arise, trust in the Lord. He loves you more than you can imagine.

ISAIAH 45:5–6

I am the LORD, and there is no other,
 besides me there is no God;
 I clothe you, though you do not know me,
 that men may know, from the rising of the sun
 and from the west, that there is none besides me;
 I am the LORD, and there is no other.

Years ago I had a conversation with a young man who had left the Catholic Church for Mormonism. His devout Catholic mother was beside herself with anguish, and she asked me to try to bring him to his senses.

I found this conversation sad because the young man accepted Mormonism's teaching that there are many gods.⁴ This is so obviously contrary to God's revelation in Scripture, "There is no other." How could he be so deceived?⁵

Now, most of us are not attracted to polytheism. Yet it is well for us to ask, what are *my* false gods? What occupies my time, my thoughts? What motivates my actions?

Let's remember that there is only one God, and he alone deserves our total devotion.

MATTHEW 6:25–26

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

It's easy to become caught up in worry about things. Whether it's money or employment or some other real necessity, what

God is asking is that we trust in his generous providence. Matthew 7:7–11 reminds us:

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Watch very little children, and see how they rely on their parents for everything: what they eat, what they wear, protection from the elements—literally everything. And notice too how utterly *free from worry* little children are. They know that Mom and Dad will take care of things. That leaves them free to do what little children were created to do: grow, learn and enjoy life.

Can you see why Jesus said we must “become like children” (Matthew 18:3)? The fact is, childlike trust in God is the key to simplicity. And simplicity is the key to happiness. And true happiness is what God wants for you.

So be at peace and trust him. He loves you more than you can imagine, and he won’t let you down.

EPHESIANS 1:3–6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Like the rest of the Book of Ephesians, this passage's rich imagery of the Father's love for us is one every Catholic should commit to memory and pray often. The thought that God knew me from before the foundation of the world is, to use popular jargon, "mind blowing." God in his boundless love desires to make us his sons and daughters—not just on paper but really.

God showers on us the grace to love him and to be willing to be transformed. This takes us from being me-centered to being God-centered, from the flesh to the spirit, from the darkness of sin to the light of truth.

I JOHN 3:1

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

In heaven we will not just be with God, we will become more *like* him, as his sons and daughters. This simple but profoundly mysterious passage can be compared to what happens when a bar of iron is thrust into a furnace. Gradually the iron (human beings) begins to participate in the communicable attributes of the fire (God). The fire's glowing heat is imparted to the iron, which now glows white-hot because of its being in the presence of the fire. The iron does not cease to be what it is by nature, nor does the fire cease to be what it is by nature. The iron does not *become* fire, but it now participates at a very high level in certain aspects of the fire's nature. And so it will be with us in heaven, living in the immediate presence of God. We will then be fully, perfectly and forever his children to the fullest extent possible.

This process begins with our baptism. The more we immerse ourselves in God, the more we conform to his image.