

Theology for Troubled Believers: *A Lenten Journey*

4. The New Life in God

Sunday, April 10, 2011
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor
Presenter: David Monyak

St. John in the Wilderness

■ **March 13 and March 20: The Nature of God.**

- Topics: Introduction to Theology. The Holy One of Israel. The Maker of Heaven and Earth. The Limits of Science. What is Meant by “God”

■ **March 27: Suffering**

- Topics: Nature as a Witness and Innocent Suffering. Innocent Suffering and Life Beyond Death. Suffering from Nature and Extreme Human Cruelty.

■ **April 3: The Divine Sacrifices.**

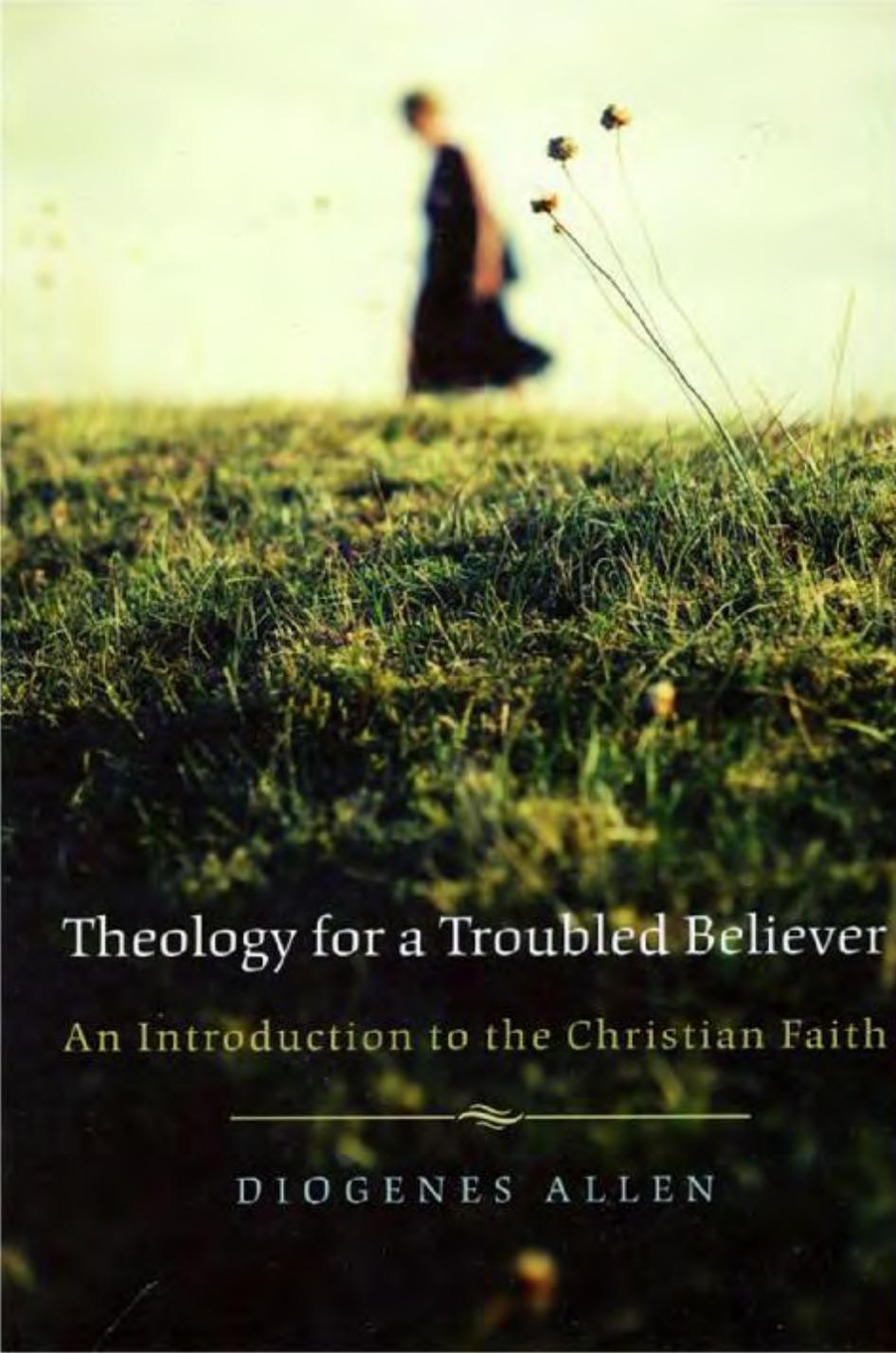
- Topics: The Sacrifice in Creation. Incarnation as Sacrifice. The Temptations in the Wilderness. The Sacrifice of the Cross.

■ **April 10: The New Life in God.**

- *Topics: The Resurrection of Jesus and Eternal Life. Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Servant. Revelation and Faith.*

■ **April 17: Responding to God.**

- *Topics: The Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Sacraments. Sin, Evil, and Hope for the Future.*



Theology for a Troubled Believer
An Introduction to the Christian Faith

DIOGENES ALLEN

Reference

- **Theology for a Troubled Believer. An Introduction to the Christian Faith.** Diogenes Allen, 2010.
Chapters 13, 14, 15

"Theology for a Troubled Believer is one of the richest expressions of theology in years. Allen invites the nonspecialist into the worlds of philosophy, literature, and Scripture in ways rarely made so accessible and compelling at the same time. A very wise work."

—**W. Mark Richardson**, Professor of Systematic Theology,
The General Theological Seminary, New York

"In this powerful book, Allen brings a lifetime of philosophical and theological reflection to the task of explaining how contemporary Christians can fully embrace their faith without compromising their reason and ably addresses the concerns of committed Christians as they strive to make sense of their faith in a complicated and frequently hostile world."

—**William Greenway**, Associate Professor of Philosophical Theology,
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

■ **Theology for a Troubled Believer. An Introduction to the Christian Faith.**

Diogenes Allen, 2010

Jesus, by your dying we are born to new life: by
your anguish and labor we come forth in joy.

Despair turns to hope through your sweet goodness:
through your gentleness we find comfort in
fear.

Your warmth gives life to the dead: your touch makes
sinners righteous.

Lord Jesus, in your mercy heal us: in your love and
tenderness remake us.

In your compassion bring grace and forgiveness: for
the beauty of heaven may your love prepare us.

Anselm of Canterbury, 1033-1109

Monk, Archbishop, Theologian

Feast Day: April 21

This week:
A New Life in God

A photograph of a person walking through a field of tall grass and dandelions. The person is out of focus, walking away from the camera. The background is a bright, hazy sky. The text "Eternal Life vs. Extended Life" is overlaid in a bold, purple font.

Eternal Life vs. Extended Life

Eternal vs. Extended Life

Sharing of Divine Life

- Eternal Life is not “Extended Life,” an extension of our current life.
- Eternal Life:
 - We are invited to share in the *divine life*
 - Through Jesus, an intimacy and participation in the *life of God*, is possible for us
 - By his death, Jesus opens for us the possibility of a *new relationship* with God.
 - To share in the *divine life* is a gift, something that cannot be earned or deserved.

Eternal vs. Extended Life

Sharing of Divine Life

- Extended Life is but an extension of our present life.
- Our present life is a wonderful gift, and it is full of glories but also very seriously marred.
- Eternal Life, a *participation in the life of God*, is life:
 - free of the burdens we now bear
 - free of failure, guilt, and sorrow
 - free of rivalry, gossip, and boasting
 - free of envy, jealousy, and strife
 - free of boredom, depression, and addiction
 - free of aggression, rudeness, ruthlessness, anger, heartlessness, and treachery
 - free of unfaithfulness, deceit, and fraud
 - free of foolishness, violence, destruction, and war

Eternal vs. Extended Life

Heaven

- A common question: what is “heaven” like? Is it truly a place worth striving towards?
- However, the bible does *not* give us a description of heaven. It is *not* interested in describing a “place.”

A photograph of a person in a dark dress walking away from the camera in a field of tall grass and dandelions. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. The text 'The Resurrection Appearances' is overlaid in a large, bold, purple font.

The Resurrection Appearances

Resurrection Appearances

Jesus is LORD

- With his resurrection appearances, Jesus establishes a *new kind* of relationship with his disciples and followers.
- Jesus is no longer simply a teacher (they have often referred to him as master, rabbi), nor even simply the Messiah or Christ.
- With his resurrection, Jesus is now seen to be **Lord**, the expression used to refer to God only.
 - The first confession of the primitive church was “**Jesus is Lord**” (1 Cor. 12:3).
- As Paul puts this new relationship: “**Even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.**” (2 Cor. 5:16b).

Resurrection Appearances

Gospels as “Double Exposures”

- All four Gospels are written from the point of view of the resurrection.
 - All Jesus’ sayings and the events of his life are seen from that new, extraordinary perspective.
- The accounts in the four Gospels are like “double exposures:”
 - there is a story line “the way things seemed at the time,” but
 - superimposed on the story line is the way things are now understood because of the resurrection.

Resurrection Appearances

Significance of the Resurrection

- Understanding who Jesus was and what Jesus said and did in the light of his resurrection did not happen all at once.
- Luke stresses, and John implies, that the resurrected Jesus himself has to teach the disciples before he ascends to his Father.
- Even before that, Jesus had promised them that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, what he has taught them would become clearer (John 14:25-26).
- So over a period of time – and no doubt a great deal of discussion, and prayer – the early disciples were able to bring into focus and to present the story of the salvation brought by God through Jesus.
- The oral traditions of the earliest church then became the basis of the four Gospels, each of which presents the significance of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection.

Resurrection Appearances

Significance of the Resurrection

- It became evident to the disciples that the fundamental significance of Jesus' resurrection was that Jesus' teachings, life, and death had been validated by God.
- When God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus was vindicated against all the charges made against him, from all the misunderstandings of his mission.
- He was shown to be God's Son incarnate, with the power to bring us salvation from sin, evil, and death.
- He was to be listened to, obeyed, and followed.
- He was indeed the one who can bring the divine life into our lives; for in him the Spirit of God lives. Jesus could and did confer God's Spirit into those who open themselves to him.

Resurrection Appearances

Authenticity of the Appearances

- New Testament scholar and historian N. T. Wright has powerfully and convincingly argued that the best and only viable hypothesis that fits the historical data for rise of the church is that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead.
- There are several aspects of the Resurrection appearances that support their authenticity against a charge the disciples were making something up.

Resurrection Appearances

Authenticity of the Appearances

- All four of the Gospels tell us that the tomb of Jesus is first visited by women.
- It was a custom to visit the tomb of a beloved one.
- But given the patriarchal biases of the day, it is surprising that their visit is stressed, much less mentioned, in all four Gospels, especially since the testimony of women was not considered to be credible in law courts or in general.
- There was also a subtle criticism of the disciples for their failure to believe the women who are the first to learn that Jesus is alive.

Resurrection Appearances

Authenticity of the Appearances

- In addition, among the women, Mary Magdalene is always given primacy.
 - Mary has been a notorious person.
 - It is said that Jesus cast “seven” demons out of Mary.
 - In the case of demonic possession, “seven” signifies total, complete, or maximal possession.

Resurrection Appearances

Authenticity of the Appearances

- All the appearance stories indicate that there is some difficulty in recognizing the raised Lord because he looks significantly different.
- Again: not something to stress if you are making up something to convince others that Jesus is raised from the dead.
 - The relation between the resurrected body and our present bodies seems more akin to the difference between a plant and its seed.

Resurrection Appearances

Authenticity of the Appearances

- Jesus is not a disembodied spirit by the fact that he is touched by Mary Magdalene, invites the disciples to put their hands on his wounds, and eats with them (Luke 24:39-43; cf. John 21:9, 13).
- Yet, Jesus also exhibits some unusual qualities, such as being able to appear and disappear suddenly in a locked room.
 - If you are trying to convince others that Jesus was not just a spirit, ghost, or even a hallucination, you would not stress such unusual qualities of his body.

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera in a field of tall grass and dandelions. The person is out of focus, and the background is a bright, hazy sky. The text "A New Kind of Human Being" is overlaid in a bold, purple font.

A New Kind of Human Being

New Kind of Human Being

“Receive the Holy Spirit”

- **John 20: 19-23: When it was evening on that day [when he appeared to Mary Magdalene], the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”**

New Kind of Human Being

“Receive the Holy Spirit”

- Jesus gives the apostles the Holy Spirit by breathing on them.
- Recalls the scene in Genesis when the Lord God formed the first human of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.
- But the gift of natural life is not the same as the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- No one in the Old Testament ever received the Holy Spirit as a *permanent* possession. The Spirit filled people *episodically*. The Spirit came and went as the task for which the Spirit was given was achieved.

New Kind of Human Being

Permanent Indwelling of the Spirit

- Jesus conveys the Holy Spirit to others *permanently*, thereby creating a *new kind of human being*.
- With Jesus resurrection, a *new* creation has begun.
 - He is “**the firstborn from the dead.**” (Col. 1:18)
- When the disciples baptize people, the Holy Spirit is given to them and also dwells with them *permanently*.
- Therefore Paul reminds his converts that they are a temple in which God dwells: “**Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?**” (1 Cor. 3:16).

New Kind of Human Being

Apostles

- Lord commissions the disciples, now called **apostles** (messengers), to go into all the world to proclaim Jesus.
 - **“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”**
(John 20:21b).
- They are told to make disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - It is not until they receive power from the Holy Spirit that they embark on the mission.
 - The founding of the church was not the apostle’s idea, but was based on the authority and power of God.

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera in a field of tall grass and dandelions. The person is wearing a dark, sleeveless dress and is slightly out of focus. The background is a bright, hazy sky. The text 'Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Servant' is overlaid in a bold, purple font, centered on the image.

Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Servant

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Freedom Vs. God

- Christians are people who have a Lord, someone to whom they belong and to whom they are obedient.
- But how can people be free if they have a master? How can people be free if they have someone they must obey?
 - Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), the French philosopher, claimed that the two notions “freedom” and “God” contradict each other. To be human is to be free, to be autonomous. The very idea of God reduces people to slavery and is essentially antihuman.

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Hegel: Master and Slave

- Hegel's (1770-1831) analysis of the relationship between master and slave in his "Phenomenology of Spirit:"
- In human life there is a conflict, with each person seeking to get one's own way.
- One resolution of this conflict is the master-slave relation. One person dominates the other completely.
 - From the point of view of one of the "master" this is the optimal resolution, for that person's will is obeyed and his personhood is fully realized.

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Hegel: Master and Slave

- Problem: The master cannot be *truly* independent or free.
 - To assert one's independence or mastery, one *must* have something that is not oneself: one has status as master *only* as long as one has a slave.
 - Thus one does not have perfect independence.

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Hegel: Master and Slave

- Another feature of the master-slave relation is the master's *contempt* for the slave:
 - By becoming subservient to the master, the slave is debased and so is odious.
 - The slave is debased and odious because the slave is really a person, just like the master. They are essentially the same.
 - If the slave were not a person, there would be no contempt. Why be contemptuous of a river that yields to a dam? Nor do we hold dogs in contempt because they obey us.
 - So the master's very contempt is an implicit recognition that the slave is a person and that the relation is an improper one.

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Hegel: Master and Slave

- The relation is also marked by resentment:
 - The master resents the slave because the master needs the slave in order to have the status of master.
 - The slave resents the master because the slave must obey the master.
- Finally, there is envy:
 - Slaves wish that they would have power like the master.
 - The slaves envy and secretly admire what the master can do and want to do it as well.

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Jesus as Lord

- But the relation of Jesus to his disciples, though one of dominance and subordination, is very different from the one Hegel describes.
- Jesus does not gain or hold subordinates by force. He calls disciples: thus there is an element of choice on their part in becoming subordinate to him.
- Jesus seeks to confer benefits on them by teaching them.
- He even performs an act of a servant or slave when he washes their feet.
- We perceive no resentment or contempt in his treatment of his disciples.
- Why is this so? What enables Jesus to be a different kind of lord?

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Jesus as Lord

- The relation of superior-subordinate is justified if there are genuine grounds for one to be dominant and the other to be subordinate:
 - Teacher – student
 - Doctor – patient
 - lawyer – client
 - pastor – congregant
 - parent – child
 - society toward the individual
 - the state toward the citizen

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Jesus as Lord

- For a relation of superior and subordinate to be different from Hegel's master-slave relation, there must be some *genuine basis* for the two roles.
 - There is none in Hegel's; there is only brute, raw power.
- So what is the basis of Jesus' lordship?
- How can Jesus indeed be our Lord, can command us, have us depend on him always, without this being destructive of our personality?
- What makes Jesus a different kind of lord than Hegel's master?

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Jesus as Lord

- The foundation of Jesus' relation to his disciples and to us is that he does not need us.
- He does not need us in this sense: Jesus is Lord because of who he is, *not* because he has followers.
- He is Lord by his inherent reality.
- He is Lord because he is the Son of God.
- It is *not* because of us that he is the Son of God:
 - Hegel's master is a master only if he has slaves. His status *depends* on his having subordinates.
 - Jesus is the Son of God with or without disciples

Jesus as Lord and Servant

Creatures Destined to Share in God's Life

- By his commands and authority, Jesus does not seek to deny our persons, but to free us:
 - He seeks to free us of the need to have our own person established by domination over others.
 - He seeks to free us of the need to gain recognition at the expense of others.
- The basis of our freedom is that he *gives us* our *status* as people destined to share in the life of God, now and always.
 - That is *who we are*, that is *what we are*: creatures destined to share in the life of God.

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera in a field of tall grass and dandelions. The person is out of focus, and the background is a bright, hazy sky. The text "Revelation and Faith" is overlaid in a bold, purple font.

Revelation and Faith

Revelation and Faith

Reason in Revelation and Faith

- Science studies the physical world and makes its claims of truth on the basis of reproducible observations, controlled experiments, and theoretical reasoning.
- Western religions makes claims on the basis of “revealed” truth and faith.
- Those hostile to religion often distort this difference by claiming religious people rely only on their emotions, *not* on reason and evidence.

Revelation and Faith

Reason in Revelation and Faith

- Our reason is intertwined with revelation and faith.
 - Without some understanding of what is being revealed, there can be no revelation.
 - Without some understanding of what has been revealed, there can be no faith.
- Just as friendship is a relationship involving mutual participation, the Bible involved a long period of interaction between God and God's people.
 - This interaction included some early understanding and *mis*understanding, and an improving and growing understanding of God's purposes.

Revelation and Faith

Reason in Revelation and Faith

- In coming into a personal relationship with the Holy God, we personally will develop *misunderstandings* that we must correct, so that we may grow and develop in our understanding of God
 - Just as did those who initially responded to God and, in time, wrote and edited and reedited the Bible.
- To grow into a proper relationship with God requires us to use our *whole* being, including our mind.

Revelation and Faith

Reason in Revelation and Faith

- Furthermore, we can use revealed truth like a flashlight, to cast light into the darkness to gain additional understanding:
 - We can use revealed truths to gain additional understanding of ourselves, our behavior, our society, our natural world.
- The “illumination” of this additional understanding can help convince our minds that the revealed truths are indeed true, that they make *rational* sense.

Revelation and Faith

Example: Paradoxes of Human Nature

- *An example of using revealed truth like a flashlight, casting light into a darkness to gain additional understanding: the “paradoxes” of human nature.*
 - From an *apologia* (= a *reasoned* defense of the faith) by Blaise Pascal (1623-62)

Revelation and Faith

Example: Paradoxes of Human Nature

- We have reason and can achieve remarkable things, but in making judgments, our reason can be thrown off by the most irrelevant and insignificant factors.
- We who have such greatness can be utterly destroyed by the slightest imbalance in our bodies, or crushed as easily as an egg:
 - **Pascal: Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed. There is no need for the whole universe to take up arms to crush him: a vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But even if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because he knows that he is dying and the advantage the universe has over him. The universe knows nothing of this.**

Revelation and Faith

Example: Paradoxes of Human Nature

- We are both great and insignificant, and our greatness and insignificance do not fit together.
 - They are disparate truths that no philosophical or psychological theory has been able to render compatible.
- Plato and Descartes said our *reason* is our defining characteristic.
- Freud said our *affective, irrational, animal side* is our defining characteristic.
- The former stresses our greatness, the second our insignificance; yet neither theory can be sustained.
- When we try to affirm our greatness, our lower selves and the vastness of the universe pull us from our lofty heights.
- When we stress our insignificance, our distinctiveness from the rest of nature resists this evaluation:
 - However small and irrational we are, we are also conscious of our smallness and irrationality – and that is unique, and cannot be fully undermined by the vastness of space or the irrationality of our passions.

Revelation and Faith

Example: Paradoxes of Human Nature

- We cannot find a compromise by saying that we are neither great nor insignificant, but something in between, because we indeed are both great and insignificant, and these cannot be blended any more than can oil and water.
- Thus no philosophical or psychological theory can tell us what we are: great or insignificant.

Revelation and Faith

Example: Paradoxes of Human Nature

- But Christianity can make sense of these extremes by its recognition of two levels of reality, the natural and the supernatural.
 - We are natural beings with a supernatural destiny.
 - As natural beings we are limited and vulnerable, however much we exceed other creatures.
 - But we have a greatness based on our supernatural destiny, a greatest based on God's gift of eternal life in God's kingdom.
- Christianity enables us to see how easily we are deflated insofar as we are natural beings, and yet how our greatness is secure insofar as we have a supernatural destiny.

Revelation and Faith

Christianity and Science

- For many atheists, science stands for rationality, evidence, knowledge, enlightenment.
- Religion, including Christianity, stands for backwardness, conservatism, superstition, authoritarianism, and it is regarded as the enemy and rival of science.
- In fact however, scholars in the history of science now acknowledge that Christianity was one of the major contributors to science's rise.

Revelation and Faith

Christianity and Science

- The rise of science is one of the great puzzles of history.
 - We take its existence for granted, yet it is a rather recent phenomenon.
 - There have been several great civilizations, with highly organized cities, impressive achievements in poetry, drama, and politics, yet little that we would call science developed in them.
- Classical science began to take a clear shape in Europe in the late sixteenth century.
- Why did science not arise in ancient India, Egypt, China, or Greece, especially Greece?
 - After all, ancient Greece had many of the ideas we have used in our science, and the contribution of the Greeks was essential to the rise of science.

Revelation and Faith

Christianity and Science

- *First*, it is essential to be interested in the material world.
- Christians have a strong otherworldly sense: they believe that the entire universe depends for its existence on a perfect being, but they also believe that nature and matter is *good*.
 - This has not always been the case. There is a rather ambivalent attitude toward matter in much of ancient Greek thought for example.

Revelation and Faith

Christianity and Science

- *Second*, Christians believe that nature is orderly; that it behaves in a consistent and rational way.
 - Nature is orderly because it is created by a good and rational God.
- The ancient Greeks also stressed that nature was orderly, but Christianity modified the Greek idea in a significant way:
 - For Christians, nature's order, though regular, does not have to be the way it is. God could have ordered it differently. Its actual order is just *one possible order out of many*.
 - In contrast, the ancient Greeks assumed that a *single* rational order could be discovered by sheer thought—or at least mostly by thought. Nature *must* be that way in spite of the fact that it might appear to be different.

Revelation and Faith

Christianity and Science

- *Third*, science is only possible if we think that nature can be understood by the human mind.
- Christians believed that God's creation could be understood – for a rational God does not create an irrational universe.
- In addition, Christians felt it was part of our God-given vocation to find as much of that order as we can and to praise God for the wonders of creation.
- Johann Kepler (1571-1630), one of the pioneering giants of classical science, and Francis Bacon (1561-1626) both stressed this religious motive for doing science:
 - It is our *divinely given vocation* to render praise to God by achieving a sounder understanding of God's handiwork.

Revelation and Faith

Christianity and Science

- *Finally*, the results of our investigations are to be shared.
- Christians in the seventeenth century were aflame with the idea that we can serve one another with a better knowledge of nature.
- A knowledge of nature would enable us to improve human life on earth:
 - For example, Christian laypeople felt that it was their responsibility to study nature and thus improve medicine, thereby reducing pain and saving life.

A person is walking away from the camera in a field of tall grass and dandelions. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the image, containing text.

Next Time (April 17):

Responding To God.

Topics: The Holy Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments. Sin, Evil, and Hope for the Future.