

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
SACRED SCRIPTURE.....	4
THE OLD TESTAMENT.....	4
THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	5
TRADITION.....	5
MAGISTERIUM	7
KEY POINTS	7

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

God is the author of Sacred Scripture (the Bible). “The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 105)

“God desires that all men come to the knowledge of Truth and to be saved.”

1 Tim. 2:4 (NABRE)

The inspired books teach the truth. “Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 107)

The Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 82)

The Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God’s Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 113)

Basis of Roman Catholic Belief

INTRODUCTION

1. ***“God desires that all men come to the knowledge of truth and to be saved.”***¹ In order to fulfill His desire, God, in his love, goodness, and wisdom, arranged to reveal Himself so that man would be capable of responding to Him and know Him. God has revealed himself to man by gradually communicating his own mystery in deeds and in words.² It is also God’s desire that the things He once revealed for the salvation of all mankind should remain in its entirety throughout the ages and be transmitted to all generations.³
2. Revelation of God to mankind is found primarily in the Word of God, as found in Sacred Scripture and in the Apostolic Tradition of the early Church. God’s revelation, then, is transmitted to us through Sacred Scripture and Tradition, which we entitle the “Deposit of Faith”. The Deposit of Faith contains all the doctrines and teachings of the Catholic Church.⁴
3. The authoritative interpretation of this deposit of faith is vested in the teaching office of the Magisterium of the Church, that is the Bishops in communion with the Pope. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Pope together with the bishops, supported by the input of learned theologians, have the task of interpreting the Word of God as found in Scripture and transmitted through the ages by Tradition.⁵
4. The Catholic Church defines Sacred Scripture as *“the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.”* Tradition, expressed with a capital “T”, is meant *“the Word of God which has been entrusted to the Apostles by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the Apostles so that enlightened by the Spirit of Truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it by their teaching.”*⁶
5. *“Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal. Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with His own always, to the close of the*

¹ 1 Tim. 2:4 (NABRE)

² Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 28, para. 69) Print.

³ Deut. 4:9; Is. 59:20-21

⁴ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 32, para. 84) Print.

⁵ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 32, para. 85-86) Print.

⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 31, para. 81-82) Print.

age.”⁷

SACRED SCRIPTURE

6. Sacred Scripture is found in what we refer to as “The Bible.” The Bible is not a single book but rather a tome or large collection of separate writings, *each one separate and complete unto itself but a necessary part of the whole story of Salvation*. The writings are of different kinds, by different authors, under divine inspiration, characterized by personal style and various literary forms. These separate writings we call “books” of the Bible.

The Bible encompasses The Old Testament - - the scriptures of the Jewish heritage, also referred to as the Septuagint, - - and of the New Testament - - ascribed as the Christian scriptures.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

7. The Old Testament, as we see it today in its entirety, is the product of Jewish scholars, dating back to the 3rd century B.C. when there was a need to translate their scripture from the Hebrew language into Greek due to the phasing out of the knowledge of the Hebrew language among the “Jews of the Diaspora” - - the period of which the old Hebrew nation suffered persecution, captivity and breakdown of the ancient kingdoms in Palestine and were forced into exile from their homeland to other various lands.
8. Although there is no evidence for the existence of any divinely inspired writings of the Old Testament prior to Moses, any divine revelation in the early days of the human race probably took place by word of mouth only and was handed down orally from generation to generation.
9. The Pentateuch - - the first five books of the Jewish scriptures (also referred to as the Torah or Law) - - is substantially the work of Moses, conceived for the single purpose to keep before the Israelites the memory that God had called them to be the chosen people and had entrusted them with the Promise of a Messiah.
10. The Jewish Bible is composed of 46 books with a distinction of 3 divisions - - the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This grouping is akin to Christ’s own words in Luke, “...*Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.*”⁸
11. The Torah or Law consists of 5 Mosaic books - - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Prophets were divided among the Former Prophets of the Historical Books and the Latter Prophets. The Writings embrace all of the remaining books - -Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Lamentation, et al.

⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 31, para. 80) Print.

⁸ Lk. 24:44

THE NEW TESTAMENT

12. The New Testament announces the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah; His coming and His act of redemption of mankind to the restoration of friendship with God. It recounts the “new alliance” established by Christ between God and the world as opposed to the covenant of which Moses was the mediator.
13. The New Testament is made up of 27 different books attributed to 8 different authors, 6 of which are among the Apostles (Matthew, John, James, Peter, Jude and Paul) and 2 among their immediate disciples (Mark and Luke). If we consider the contents and literary form of these writings, they may be divided into Historical books (Four Gospels and Acts of the Apostles), Didactic books (the Epistles) and the Prophetic book (Apocalypse/Revelation).
14. The books that comprise the New Testament were not written all at once but appear one after another over a period of 50 years, written in different and distinct countries and addressed to different communities. It took time to spread the message throughout the whole of Christendom at that time and much longer for it to be accepted. The writings of the Gospels and letters of the Apostles were not complete until the second century A.D. The compilation of the makeup of the Bible (both the New and Old Testaments) were not officially declared as inspired writings worthy of acceptance as divine revelation until the Catholic Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. Earlier, in 383 A.D. St. Jerome translated the Scriptures from the ancient Greek to the language of the time, Latin, which we refer to as the Latin Vulgate Bible.
15. “The Church and Bible belong to an order of Providence which has destined man to a supernatural end. The divine decree for man to share in the supernatural life made it necessary for God to reveal the secrets of His Divinity, of the counsels of His wisdom and goodness. This communication of heavenly knowledge began to be made from the day of man’s creation despite man’s disobedience and is more wonderfully embodied in a plan of redemption by means of supernatural revelation.”⁹

TRADITION

16. We distinguish the meaning of the word tradition in order to fully comprehend what is truly meant in the content of our doctrinal discussion.

Tradition spelled with a small “t” is understood as “the passing down of elements of a culture from generation to generation,”¹⁰ a cultural passing down of a time-ordered set of practices, be it a set of customs and/or usage. It may also signify religious or devotional ‘practices’ of local churches, which can be ‘changed’ with time.

Tradition in our present discussion is spelled with a capital “T” to signify beliefs, lessons, instructions of a religious nature passed down from earlier period through

⁹ *Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, by W. Leonard and B. Orchard

¹⁰ Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary

divine inspiration and Apostolic Succession. When we speak of apostolic succession we mean the Roman Pontiffs who came after Saint Peter and the Presbyters, the Bishops who succeeded the Apostles.¹¹

17. All revealed truths are not contained solely in the Bible but can also be found in Tradition. Questions have arisen as to the validity of oral truths, as distinct from written truths. A doctrine is not directly dependent solely on Scripture as its source but can also be dependent on the oral teaching of Christ or the Apostles. Both are of divine inspiration/origin in that sense. In the Gospel of John he writes, "*There are, however many other things that Jesus did: but if every one of these be written, not even the world itself, I think, could hold the books that would have to be written.*"¹²
18. That which is contained in the Old Testament and the Gospels was first transmitted orally. The Apostles and early Church Fathers only had the teachings of Christ and those things revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. After His resurrection Jesus told His Apostles, "*I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*"¹³
19. In the Acts of the Apostles we are not told in detail about the spiritual understanding that was imparted to the Apostles, but we know that the Apostles were emboldened and taught their disciples, performed many wonders and signs, and spent time in prayer and breaking bread.¹⁴ The understanding they received from the Holy Spirit was handed on through Apostolic Succession. St. Paul wrote to the young church at Corinth, "*Hold fast to the traditions, just as I handed them on to you.*"¹⁵
20. "There are several points of controversy between Catholics and every body of Protestants. Is all revealed truth consigned to Holy Scripture? Or can it be admitted that Jesus Christ gave to His Apostles, to be transmitted to the Church, what the Apostles received either from the very lips of Christ or from inspiration or revelation - - i.e. divine instruction which they transmitted to the Church and which were committed into inspired writings?"¹⁶ Christ instructed his Church as the official and authentic means to transmit and explain in virtue the Revelation made to man. The Protestant principle is that the Bible and nothing more is the sole theological source; there are no revealed truths except those truths found in the Bible. We hold that there must be of necessity certain revealed truths apart from those contained in the Bible; Jesus in fact, has established a living means to transmit oral revelation to everyone and everywhere through Tradition.

¹¹ Wilhelm, J. (1907). Apostolic Succession. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved September 2, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01641a.htm>

¹² Jn. 21:25

¹³ Lk. 24:49

¹⁴ Acts 2:42-47

¹⁵ 1 Cor. 11:2

¹⁶ Bainvel, J. (1912). Tradition and Living Magisterium. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved September 2, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15006b.htm>

21. St. John writes of Jesus' directive, "*These things I have spoken to you while I was dwelling with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to you whatever I have said to you.*"¹⁷

The Catholic Church accepts the Tradition of the early Church which includes those letters and written accounts of Jesus' life and teachings from the apostles and their disciples. During the apostolic era (circa 30-100 CE), The teachings and traditions of Jesus and the apostles were orally transmitted within the early Christian community. Between approximately 70-200 CE collection of the writings of the apostles began to circulate among Christian communities and recognition of the Gospels, authoritative writings, and traditions as inspired became more formalized. From the third century onward, various Christian communities began to compile lists of authoritative writings, which laid the groundwork for what would later become the New Testament.

MAGISTERIUM

22. The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, endowed by Jesus to give and hold to the authentic interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture and/or Tradition.¹⁸

This function has been entrusted to the Bishops in union with the Pope, the successor of Peter. The Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, rather it teaches what has been handed down. The Church guards this duty with dedication and acts with extreme caution. The Church interprets Scripture and Tradition, and defines dogma, obliging the faithful to strict adherence to it.

23. Sacred Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium; one cannot stand alone without the other; each and together they hold the totality of Christian doctrine and contribute to the salvation of souls.
24. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is a statement of the Church's faith and of catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition, and the Church's Magisterium.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Tradition transmit Divine Revelation to mankind for its the sanctification and salvation.
- ❖ The Church teaches that Tradition transmits doctrine, life and worship to every generation.
- ❖ Magisterium has the task of authoritatively interpreting the Word of God contained in Scripture and Tradition.

¹⁷ Jn. 14:25

¹⁸ Lk. 10:1-16; Mt. 28:18-20

- ❖ God is the author of Scripture, inspiring the human writers, acting in them and through them.
- ❖ God ensures that the writers teach divine and saving truth without error.