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# SCRIPTURE & TRADITION

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*"Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours." (2 Thessalonians 2:15, NABRE)*

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# Scripture and Tradition

The relationship between Sacred Scripture and Tradition is a foundational concept in Catholic theology, reflecting the Church's understanding of divine revelation. This relationship is defined and elaborated in various authoritative Catholic sources, including the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and the teachings of the early Church Fathers.

## Tradition Defined

Tradition, in the Catholic context, refers to the living transmission of the teachings, life, and worship of the Church (CCC 78). It is not merely a collection of ancient practices or customs but encompasses the entirety of the Church's faith as it has been handed down through the ages. According to the CCC, Tradition is understood as "the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church" (CCC 76). This transmission occurs through the Church's teachings, liturgical practices, and the witness of the faithful.

## Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture, on the other hand, is the written word of God, comprised of the texts of the Old and New Testaments. It is considered inspired and inerrant, serving as a primary source of divine revelation. The Catholic Church recognizes the Scriptures as a crucial element of Tradition, providing the foundational narratives and teachings that inform the Church's faith and moral guidance.

## The Interrelation of Scripture and Tradition

The relationship between Scripture and Tradition is characterized by mutual enrichment. The Second Vatican Council's document "Dei Verbum" emphasizes that both Scripture and Tradition are to be received and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence (Dei Verbum 9). Together, they form a single sacred deposit of the word of God (Dei Verbum 10).

- **Complementarity:** Scripture provides a written account of God's revelation, while Tradition encompasses the oral teachings and practices that have developed over time. For example, the understanding of the sacraments and the role of the Church's Magisterium (the teaching authority) in interpreting Scripture is rooted in Tradition: *"It is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence"* (Dei Verbum 9).
- **Continuity:** The teachings found in Scripture must be understood in light of Tradition. Early Church Fathers, such as St. Augustine and St. Irenaeus, stressed the importance of the Church's continuous teaching authority to interpret Scripture correctly.

In *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies), St. Irenaeus emphasizes the importance of apostolic tradition as a guide for understanding the true teachings of the faith, particularly in his famous analogy that the Scriptures without the Church's interpretive Tradition are like a mosaic that needs the right arrangement to reveal the true picture.

St. Augustine on the authority of the Church in interpreting Scripture: In *Contra Epistolam Manichaei*, St. Augustine writes, *"I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me"* (Chapter 5).

- **Dynamic Relationship:** Tradition is not static; it evolves as the Church grows in understanding and application of the faith. This dynamic aspect is essential for addressing new questions and challenges in the life of the Church while remaining grounded in the original revelation.

## **Authority of the Magisterium**

The Magisterium serves as the authoritative interpreter of both Scripture and Tradition. It ensures that the teachings remain faithful to the apostolic origins of the faith. The CCC explains that the Magisterium has the duty to authentically interpret the word of God, whether written or handed down (CCC 85).

Tradition and Sacred Scripture are inseparable elements of the Catholic faith. They together constitute the foundation of the Church's teachings and practices, guiding the faithful in their understanding of divine revelation. The interplay of Scripture and Tradition emphasizes the importance of both the written and the lived aspects of faith, fostering a holistic understanding of God's message to humanity.