

Revelation and Magisterium

The sources of what we teach in our church

Goals for today

After today, we should be able to answer these questions:

- What does it mean to say that the Bible is the “Word of God?”
- Why is Scripture alone not enough?
- What role does Sacred Tradition play in the life of the Church?
- What is the Magisterium and what role does it play in the life of the Church?
- How is the exercise of papal infallibility related to the Holy Spirit?

We should know a little bit about how we got our Sacred Scripture, how the Sacred Tradition had guided their development, and why it’s necessary that the Sacred Tradition is first. We should know how the Church was entrusted with safeguarding this Tradition and some of the ways she has done this.

After today, hopefully, we can begin to understand the following quote:

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.
—CCC, no. 80, citing DV, no. 9

Sources for today

US Catechism for Adults: chapters 3 & 11

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: nn. 11 – 24

Sacred Scripture and Tradition

“Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (St. Jerome)

To understand where we get Sacred Scripture, we must start with Sacred Tradition. Traditions are customs and ways of living that are passed on. So where does the so-called “Sacred Tradition” start? It starts with Jesus Christ.

As I mentioned last time we met, Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became a human being. We call him the *fullness of Revelation*, because through him and in him all of God was revealed to humanity.

Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God become man, is the fullness of Revelation by his teaching, witness, death, and Resurrection. On the road to Emmaus, the risen Jesus showed the two disciples how the teachings of the prophets were fulfilled in him and proclaimed by his own lips. Just before his Ascension, Christ commissioned the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all whose hearts would be open to receive them.

The revealed Word of God in the Gospel would be for everyone a source of saving truth and moral discipline.

“SACRED TRADITION,” USCC, p. 23

Tradition is the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church. The oral preaching of the Apostles and the written message of salvation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Bible) are conserved and handed on as the Deposit of Faith through the Apostolic Succession in the Church. Both the living Tradition and the written Scriptures have their common source in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

USCC, p. 25

Magisterium – teaching authority of the Church – helps to guide and nurture the tradition. Through Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church, the Sacred Scriptures have been collected, compiled, and preserved for two millennia. Through these same tools, spurious, non-scriptural documents were identified and not kept with the scripture.

Sacred Scripture is inspired by God and is the Word of God. Therefore, God is the author of Sacred Scripture, which means he inspired the human authors, acting in and through them. Thus, God ensured that the authors taught, without error, those truths necessary for our salvation. Inspiration is the word used for the divine assistance given to the human authors of the books of Sacred Scripture. This means that guided by the Holy Spirit, the human authors made full use of their talents and abilities while, at the same time, writing what God intended.

“SACRED SCRIPTURE,” USCC, pp. 26-27

It has been this way since the beginning, and it has been meant to be this way.

“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” – 2 Thessalonians 2:15

words

When interpreting Scripture, we should be attentive to what God wanted to reveal through the authors for our salvation. We need to see Scripture as a unified whole with Jesus Christ at the center. We must also read Scripture within the living Tradition of the whole Church, so that we may come to grasp a true interpretation of the Scriptures. The task of giving an authoritative interpretation of the Word of God has been entrusted to the Magisterium. Last, we need to remember and recognize that there is a coherence of the truths of faith within Scripture (cf. CCC, nos. 112-114). The Church recognizes two senses of Scripture, the literal and the

spiritual. In probing the literal meaning of the texts, it is necessary to determine their literary form, such as history, hymns, wisdom sayings, poetry, parable, or other forms of figurative language. “The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis [the process scholars use to determine the meaning of the text], following the rules of sound interpretation: ‘All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal’” (CCC, no. 116, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, 1, 10).

The spiritual senses of Sacred Scripture derive from the unity of God’s plan of salvation. The text of Scripture discloses God’s plan. The realities and events of which it speaks can also be signs of the divine plan. There are three spiritual senses of Scripture:

- 1. The allegorical sense. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ’s victory over sin and also of Christian Baptism.*
- 2. The moral sense. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written “for our instruction” (1 Cor 10:11).*
- 3. The anagogical sense. . . . We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem. (CCC, no. 117)*

The Church’s Scripture scholars are expected to work according to these principles to develop a better understanding of Scripture for God’s people. Interpretation of Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Magisterium, which exercises the divine commission to hold fast to and to interpret authoritatively God’s Word.

“INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE,” USCC, pp. 27-28

Fundamentalism and Literalism vs. the Literal Sense of Scripture. We must account for context of writings, cannot give a merely private interpretation to Scripture. Scripture cannot be unlinked from the Tradition in which it was nurtured, otherwise it loses its depth and meaning and vitality.

Historical Reductionism vs. the Spiritual Sense of Scripture. Tendency amongst modern Biblical scholars—even those who call themselves Christian, even Catholic—to deny the spiritual elements and realities of scriptures, to explain away the miracles. This confines Scripture to a merely natural order and denies the possibility of divine intervention. For those who don’t believe in spiritual reality, perhaps this is a tenable option, but it doesn’t work for those who do.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission lists five unacceptable assumptions found in forms of scriptural interpretation:

- 1. the denial of a supernatural order;*
- 2. the denial of God’s intervention in the world through revelation;*

3. *the denial of the possibility and existence of miracles;*
4. *the incompatibility of faith with historical truth;*
5. *an almost a priori denial of the historical value of the nature of the documents of revelation. (Pontifical Biblical Commission, Historical Truth of the Gospels [1964], no. 5)*

USCC, p. 31

Tradition and Scripture together form what we call *Divine Revelation*. The Revelation of God to humanity is a person, Jesus Christ, and *he* must be proclaimed to all the ends of the earth. The person of Jesus Christ is alive in the Church, which is his Body, and we learn from him and get to know him through Tradition and Scripture.

Magisterium

The teaching authority of the Church

Faith

Requires submission to another. USCC chap. 4

Church

Christ left a Church on the earth and entrusted his Revelation, the Tradition to her.

Marks of the Church

One

Holy

Catholic

Apostolic

Bishops as successors to Apostles

“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”
(Ephesians 2:19-22)

A little about the hierarchy of the Church (deacons, priests, bishops) – more on this another time?

To further ensure the Church's fidelity to the Gospel, Christ has willed that the Apostles be succeeded by the bishops. The Apostles acted together as a body, with Peter at their head, in their leadership of the Church. Thus they are called by the Church a “college.” The college of bishops has succeeded the college of the Apostles, and it is the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, who has succeeded the role of Peter as head of the college. Thus they are called by the Church a “college,” and their essential unity as one body is understood as the principle of collegiality.

Each bishop works in his particular diocese in a priestly shepherding and teaching role. He possesses the fullness of the priesthood and so is the principal celebrant of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, by which the Church grows in holiness and union with Christ. He is also the chief shepherd of the diocese and so is responsible for compassionate and loving governance of the people entrusted to him. And he is the chief teacher of his diocese, responsible for authentic proclamation of the Gospel.

*The teaching office of the college of bishops is called the “Magisterium.” When all the bishops throughout the world, together with the Pope, in the fulfillment of their teaching office, proclaim a doctrine that has been divinely revealed, it must be accepted with the obedience of faith by the whole People of God. “The Church, through its magisterium, has been entrusted with the task of authoritatively interpreting what is contained in revelation, so that ‘all that is proposed for belief, as being divinely revealed, is drawn from the one deposit of faith’ (DV, no. 10). In some cases, these doctrines have been explicitly defined; in others, they are universally considered to be an essential and irreformable element of the one Catholic faith” (USCCB, *The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop* [1992]).*

However, at certain times, the bishops gather in an Ecumenical Council with the Pope, and they teach and proclaim a doctrine that must be accepted with faith because it is divinely revealed. The bishops of the world defined and proclaimed a divinely revealed doctrine at the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). This was when they taught that under certain conditions the Pope himself can proclaim a doctrine that is divinely revealed and must be believed by all. This is known as the dogma of papal infallibility.

The entire Church as a body is infallible because the Holy Spirit ensures that she will not err in matters of faith and morals. But this infallibility is exercised in a special way by the Pope and the bishops when together they teach what has been divinely revealed either in the ordinary way of their day-to-day teaching or the extraordinary way of an Ecumenical Council or the Pope himself.

The Pope and bishops also together teach truths that flow from Divine Revelation or that are closely related to it. Sometimes they teach these truths as being definitive, which means they must be firmly accepted and held. Sometimes they teach in a less than definitive way, which requires a religious submission of will and mind.

USCC, pp. 133-134

Always good to clarify papal infallibility.

Magisterium

God assists us in living the moral life through the Church, who is our mother and teacher. The faith of the Church is found in its Creed and in its ordinary teaching, as articulated by its shepherds, the pope, and the bishops in communion with him.

Jesus said to the Apostles, “Whoever listens to you listens to me” (Lk 10:16). In the Church, when we deal with matters of faith and morals, the authoritative voice of Christ is exercised by the pope and bishops, successors of Peter and the Apostles who form the Magisterium. They are guided by the Holy Spirit, who abides with the Church to lead us into all truth.

The Church hears the perennial questions that each person asks at some point: “How shall I live?” “What values or principles shall I accept?” “What norms shall I make my own?” “What gives meaning to my life?” To answer questions such as these, we turn to a wise teacher. Christ is the ultimate teacher, and he continues to be heard in and through the Church today. The Catechism notes that “the Magisterium of the Pastors of the Church in moral matters is ordinarily exercised in catechesis and preaching, with the help of the works of theologians and spiritual authors” (CCC, no. 2033). In the task of teaching and applying the vision and practice of Christian morality, the Church relies on the dedication of pastors and the studies of theologians, as well as the contributions of all people of goodwill (cf. CCC, no. 2038).

The response based on faith that Catholics must give to the Church’s teaching authority—the Magisterium—extends also to moral principles:

The Church, the “pillar and bulwark of the truth,” “has received this solemn command of Christ from the apostles to announce the saving truth.” “To the Church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgments on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls.” (CCC, no. 2032, citing 1 Tm 3:15; LG, no. 17; CIC, can. 747 §2)

“The Church as Mother and Teacher”, USCC, pp. 330-331

Summary

Doctrinal Statements (from USCC p. 31-32,)

- Jesus Christ, the fullness of Revelation, entrusted his mission to the Apostles. They transmitted Christ’s Gospel through their witness,

preaching, and writing—under the guidance of the Holy Spirit—meant for all peoples until Christ comes in glory.

- Divine Revelation is transmitted through Apostolic Tradition and Sacred Scripture, which flow from the same divine wellspring and work together in unity toward the same goal.
- “The Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes” (DV, no. 8, §1). This is what is meant by the term *Tradition*.
- Because of the divine gift of faith, God’s People as a whole never ceases to receive and reflect on the gift of Divine Revelation.
- The teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium—that is, the pope and the bishops in communion with him—has the task of authoritatively interpreting the Word of God, contained in Sacred Scripture and transmitted by Sacred Tradition.
- Sacred Scripture is inspired by God and truly contains the Word of God. This action of God is referred to as *Inspiration*.
- God is the author of Sacred Scripture, inspiring the human authors, acting in and through them. Thus God ensured that the authors taught divine and saving truth without error.
- The Catholic Church accepts and venerates as inspired the forty-six books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The unity of the Old and New Testaments flows from the revealed unity of God’s loving plan to save us.
- Our response to God’s Revelation is faith, by which we surrender our whole selves to him

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- The four Marks of the Church—that she is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—are inseparably linked to each other, and all are essential to the Church’s mission and pursuit of holiness.
- The Church is one. She professes “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5). This unity, sustained by the Holy Spirit, includes a diversity of gifts, talents, cultures, and rites.
- The Church is holy. Jesus, the founder, is holy and makes his holiness available through his death and Resurrection. The Holy Spirit imparts holiness to us, especially through the Sacraments. The Church’s holiness shines in the saints, and most especially in the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- The Church is catholic. The word *catholic* means universal. All the means of salvation are found in the Church. The Church has the fullness of the faith, the Sacraments, and apostolic succession. Jesus commissions us to bring the Gospel to all peoples at all times; hence the Church is “by its very nature missionary” (Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity* [*Ad Gentes Divinitus* ; AG], no. 2).
- The Church is apostolic. Jesus willed to build the Church on the

foundation of the Apostles. The Church hands on the teaching of the Apostles through all generations. Christ shepherds the Church through Peter and the other Apostles, whose successors are the Pope and the college of bishops.

- Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles chose bishops to succeed them. Helped by the priests and deacons, the bishops teach the faith; celebrate the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist; and guide the Church. Their responsibility includes concern for all the Churches in union with the Pope.

Questions to ponder:

- Why might you say it makes perfect sense for Jesus to commission followers to carry on his saving vision? (USCC, p. 31)

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How is the hierarchy—pope, bishops, priests, and deacons—valuable for your growth in faith?