



National Bible Week

THE BIBLE: A BOOK OF FAITH

Excerpts from the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults

Transmitting God's Revelation

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

Blessed John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council itself illustrate how the Church constantly draws upon Tradition and Sacred Scripture. This chapter examines these foundations of Church teaching because it is through Tradition and Scripture that the Church knows God's Revelation and transmits it from one generation to another.

Sacred Tradition

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.

He commanded the Apostles to proclaim and witness his Kingdom of love, justice, mercy, and healing, foretold by the prophets and fulfilled in his Paschal Mystery. Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit to enable them to fulfill this great commission, to give them needed courage, and to help them in their evangelizing work.

Graced by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles did what Jesus commanded them. They did this orally, in writing, by the heroic sanctity of their lives, and by ensuring that there would be successors for this mission. The first communication of the Gospel was by preaching and witness. The Apostles proclaimed Jesus, his Kingdom, and the graces of salvation. They called for the obedience

of faith (hearing and obeying God's Word), the reception of Baptism, the formation of a community of believers, gathering for the Eucharist, and generosity to the poor.

The Apostles chose men to be bishops to succeed them and handed on to them "what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit" (CCC, no. 83). The pope and bishops in union with him are successors of the Apostles and inherit the responsibility of authoritative teaching from them. We call this teaching office the *Magisterium*. "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone" (CCC, no. 85, citing DV, no. 10).

All the faithful share in understanding and handing on revealed truth. "The whole body of the faithful cannot err . . . in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, 'from the bishops to the last of the faithful,' they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals" (CCC, no. 92, citing Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium; LG]*, no. 12). Another way of understanding this

truth is the principle that the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Church, draws the whole body of the faithful to believe what truly belongs to the faith. “By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*magisterium*), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Thes 2:13), the faith once for all delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3)” (LG, no. 12).

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. This is particularly important to understand and believe when one is faced with the postmodern attitude that Tradition cannot be trusted, and that what the Church teaches as Tradition is really just a reflection of particular judgments and biases. Knowing that what Tradition teaches has its ultimate foundation in Jesus Christ helps a person of faith to respond to Tradition with trust. The theological, liturgical, disciplinary, and devotional traditions of the local churches both contain and can be distinguished from this Apostolic Tradition (cf. CCC, Glossary, “Tradition”).

Sacred 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. There are many in modern society who find incredible the belief that Scripture contains the inspired word of God and so reject the Bible as a collection of stories and myths. There are others who profess belief in the Triune God and are even identified as “Scripture scholars” who work to “demythologize” the Scriptures, that is, they remove or explain away the miraculous as well as references to God’s revealing words and actions. It is important to understand in the face of such challenges to Scripture that it is not simply the work of human authors as some critics allege, but truly the Word and work of God.

Interpretation of Scripture

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).