

God has Spoken: Sacred Scripture

Myths: Catholic and the Bible

God the Father → Jesus the Word → Apostles

Deposit of the faith →

- 1) Writing
(Scripture)
- 2) Oral (Tradition)
→ The Church
(Apostolic
Succession)

Through the written Word of God, also called Sacred Scripture “the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them” (DV 21). Vatican II went so far as to say that “the Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord...” (DV 21).

I. Reliability of the Documents

- a. Tacitus’s *Annals of Imperial Rome*, written in 116 AD. The most ancient copy of one part of this work is from the year 850 A.D. The other part of the book that is still in existence is based on a text from the 11th century.
- b. For the 1st century Jewish historian Josephus there is one copy of his book *The Jewish War* from the 4th century, and the next most recent is from the 10th century.
- c. The text from antiquity for which there is the greatest number of ancient editions still in existence is Homer’s *Iliad*. There are approximately 650 ancient Greek manuscripts of this work still in existence. This work was written in approximately 800 B.C. The oldest surviving copies are from the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.
- d. The earliest existing copy of a portion of the bible is five verses of the Gospel of John from the year 125 AD. It’s only five verses, but to have a copy of even a tiny part of an ancient text from only thirty years after it was written is incredible.
- e. There are portions of 12 of the 27 books of the New Testament that have been preserved on texts from right around the year 200 AD.
- f. The oldest complete edition of the New Testament that is still in existence is from around the year 350 AD.
- g. So we have copies of the New Testament that are still in existence that are closer in date to the original texts than is the case for any other ancient text.
- h. Also there are approximately 24,000 biblical manuscripts from the first 1,000 years or so of Christianity that are still in existence.
- i. The New Testament has been better preserved than any other text from the ancient world.
- j. “One big game of telephone?”

- k. “Written decades after the event by people who were not eyewitnesses?”
 - l. “Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and continues to hold, that the four Gospels...whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ...really did and taught...” (DV 19).
- II. The Problem of the Canon
- a. How do I know what books are inspired?
 - b. How do I know *all* the inspired books are included? How can I know that none were left out?
 - c. How can I know that they are *all* inspired? Maybe some snuck in that aren't.
 - d. There is no inspired table of contents. What authority tells me what books are supposed to be in the Bible? The Bible didn't drop from heaven bound in leather.
- III. Canon
- a. Types of early books
 - i. Undisputedly authentic (Matthew, Acts, Romans, etc)
 - ii. Controversial books (Hebrews, Revelation, The Shepherd of Hermas)
 - iii. Spurious books (The Apocalypse of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas)
- IV. What we find in the documents (or...why do we believe these are “inspired?”)
- a. Christ claims to be God
 - b. Christ establishes a Church and makes certain promises about it (Mt 16:17-19, et al.)
 - c. The Church establishes the inspired Scriptures**
- V. Criteria for determining inspired, canonical books
- a. Was it written by an Apostle or a co-worker of an Apostle?
 - b. Does it teach the true Faith handed on by the Apostles?
 - c. Is it used by the major church communities in liturgy?
- VI. Timeline of the canon
- a. Canon official at councils of Hippo (393)
 - b. and Carthage (397 & 417)
 - c. and confirmed by Pope Damasus I.
 - d. It is the Magesterium of the Church alone, therefore, the bishops in union with the Pope, that has the ultimate authority to authentically interpret the Word of God, whether it is in Sacred Tradition or Sacred Scripture.
- VII. The Deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament
- a. The Catholic Bible has 46 books in the Old Testament, while Protestants lack seven of these books which they term apocrypha.
 - b. To give a very simplified explanation of this, it was thought that these seven books were written in Greek, while the rest of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew.
 - c. The translation of the Old Testament used at the time of Christ and the Apostles was a Greek Translation known as the Septuagint which contained these seven books. This is the version most quoted in the New Testament.
 - d. Around the year 100 AD, partially in reaction to Greek influences in Judaism, a group of Rabbis decided to fix their canon excluding these seven books.

- e. Many early Christians, however, maintained them in their own list of inspired books, though there is some early debate.
 - f. In the 16th century, Martin Luther, along with the other Protestant Revolutionaries, rejected these books as part of scripture. This was due largely to the fact that these books clearly taught doctrines they disagreed with, such as Purgatory.
 - g. Catholics, however, maintain the canon used by Christ, His Apostles, and the early Christians.
- VIII. Inspiration
- a. "...in composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted" (DV 11).
 - b. The scriptures are, in a sense, both human and divine. They are truly the words of God, but at the same time the work of human authors.
 - c. This is the mystery of *inspiration*. Inspiration literally means that the scriptures are "God breathed."
- IX. Inerrancy
- a. "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation" (DV 11).
 - b. Being that God is the primary author of scripture, the scriptures are also without error when understood in their proper sense. If the scriptures affirmed error, that would be equivalent to God erring, which is impossible.
- X. Three Guides to Interpreting the Scriptures
- a. Attention to the "content and unity of the whole of scripture"
 - b. Read within the Living Tradition of the Church
 - c. Pay attention to the "Analogy of the Faith"
- XI. The Four Senses of Scripture
- a. Literal → What's on the page? The author's primary meaning in its historical context
 - b. Allegorical → Points to Christ
 - c. Moral
 - d. Anagogical → Points to our final destiny: death, judgment, Heaven, or Hell

The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful...to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ." "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy...or through devotional reading with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church....And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying." (DV 25)