

On Sacred Scripture

Class 1

“In order to reveal himself to men, God speaks to them in human words: “Indeed, the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men.” -CCC 101

Everyone is familiar with what the Bible is. But have we ever thought about what exactly we mean when we say the Bible is Sacred Scripture; that is, inspired? Catholic teaching affirms the following about the scriptures:

- God is the primary author of Sacred Scripture
- The books of the Bible are accepted as sacred and canonical whole and entire with all their parts.
- God truly inspired the human authors of the sacred books, choosing them and making full use of their natural faculties, powers and manners of speech.
- God had them consign to writing only what he wanted written, and no more.
- The Scriptures can only be rightly understood when read in the living tradition of the Church and when illumined by the Holy Spirit.

The layout of the bible: Old and New Testaments

If you read the Bible "from cover to cover" you will quickly realize it is not laid out chronologically. (i.e. you won't read of Job until after Moses, but he lived before. You'll read about the birth of Christ, the death of Christ, and then the birth of Christ again.) While individual sections of the Bible are in chronological order the whole Bible is not. This bible is broken up into TWO main sections: Old and New Testaments.

Old Testament

- LAW – The Torah- first 5 books
- BOOKS OF HISTORY (Joshua to Esther)
- BOOKS OF WISDOM (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Eccl, Song of Solomon, etc)
- PROPHETS - major prophets (Isaiah Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, 12 minor prophets)

New Testament

- THE GOSPELS (The Good News of the Life of Christ) - Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
- HISTORY OF EARLY CHURCH – Acts of the Apostles
- EPISTLES - Paul's to churches, Paul's to individuals, Hebrews, Minor Epistles (James, Peter, John, Jude)
- PROPHECY - Revelation

The Bible is NOT a history book, a science book, a manual or a novel... It is the story of salvation.

Since Scripture is inspired by God, we must be careful and respectful in approaching it. It cannot be looked at as just another book. It cannot be read as a science book or a history book, for that is not its intended purpose. In order to get a correct understanding of Scripture, we must read interpret it in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written. For Sacred Scripture was written to reveal a who. Scripture is about God and his relationship with man. For this reason, the Church proposes three criteria that we keep in mind when reading Scripture:

- 1) Be attentive to the content & unity of the whole Scripture
- 2) Read Scripture within the living tradition of the Church
- 3) Be attentive to the analogy of faith (the coherence of truths)

Catholic Tradition likewise distinguishes four modes or “sense” in which we can interpret Scripture.

- □ Literal: the literal meaning of the text. All other senses must flow from this one.
- □ Allegorical: the sign value of the text as it prefigures or symbolizes a mystery of the faith
- □ Moral: The events of Scripture provide us with examples of how and how not to live
- □ Anagogical: the events interpreted in terms of their eternal significance

Divine Revelation vs. Divine Inspiration

Divine Revelation is the content of sacred scripture but it is not that which moved the sacred writers to write down the books of the bible. Divine inspiration exists in three things. It is in God, because he is the one who produces it. It is in man, because it is he who is the object of that inspiration (God inspires man); and in the text (that which God inspired man to write). Divine Revelation are the divine truths/realities that permeate and unite sacred scripture that reveal who and what God is. 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. God is the author of the texts, but that does not mean the human author was not part of the process. We do not believe that a little bird flew down on the shoulders of the writers and dictated verbatim what to write down.

An Oral Tradition

Before the bible was put into written form, all the stories, events, and messages were told and retold and handed down from generation to generation. Even the Gospels originated in this manner in as they were not written down until decades after the death of our Lord. The oral traditions, especially in the OT, were preserved by the disciples and the written authors. These authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal God's message to future generations.

Author Source Point of View:

A good catholic understanding of inspiration must keep both the divine and the human author together. If we want to understand what God is saying in the Bible, then we have to pay attention to the human author. Although inspired by God each of the texts in sacred scripture contain their own means of communicating what God chooses to divinely reveal. For example, in Mark's Gospel the portrait of Jesus emphasizes the cross and the sufferings of Jesus. Matthew, on the other hand, pictures Jesus as the perfect Israelite who continues to challenge his Jewish audience to reexamine their obstinate refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The authors of the biblical texts wrote for a particular purpose and for a particular audience using a particular set of experiences/cultural norms to convey truth. It is an injustice to the texts to read purely at face value and to neglect the intended purpose as to why the human author was divinely inspired to write down the message. Remember, each part of sacred scripture serves a much larger purpose insofar as they reveal who and what God is.

The Purpose of Scripture: Divine Revelation

If we accept the Catholic teaching on biblical inspiration, then we cannot just interpret the Scriptures literally. Divine Revelation means that certain truths of our faith come not as a result of human reason or study, but have been revealed to us supernaturally by God. Without God telling us these truths, we would not have known them. The truths of revelation go beyond reason, but do not contradict it. They are logical according to the dictates of reason, but not provable by the powers of reason alone.

WHO is the all that is Revealed? JESUS. DIVINE REVELATION is not a WHAT it is a WHO! Divine Revelation is that which exists in our Lord, Divine Revelation is the infinite ocean of knowledge and "stuff" that exists in God as GOD. We as humans only chip away at a small portion of what is revealed. Divine Revelation cannot be attained purely on human reason, but divine revelation ***does not*** contradict human reason.

Scripture & Tradition

Divine Revelation comes to us in two distinct modes of transmission: through the writings of the Holy Scriptures and through the Tradition of the Church. These two together form ***one*** body of revelation, the "**deposit of faith**," and have one common source, "For both of them, flowing out from the ***same*** divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one things and move towards the same goal" (CCC 80) *The person of Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation* of God, in whom God has said everything. Christ, the Son of God, is the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word.

Biblical Mistakes??

Most people believe that due to the scriptures being inspired, then that means that they do not contain any errors. In Catholic tradition these two concepts, inspiration and inerrancy, are separate concepts. We do not believe that the scriptures fell from heaven in complete form. So does the bible contain errors? Yes it does, or at least

contradictions. “The books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation” (DV 11) For example, it does not matter whether it was three shepherds, or three wisemen, or both that came to visit our Lord in the manger; what does matter is the larger truth contained in the nativity story. That is, that God became flesh and people came to give him homage fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. The church’s teaching on inerrancy reaffirms the reliability of the Scriptures as trustworthy guide for our spiritual journey in life; it does not guarantee non-essential details.

Why is the Catholic bible longer than the Protestant bible?

The Catholic New Testament is identical to that of the Protestant’s other than some minor translation differences. The difference lies in the contents of the Old Testament where the Catholic Bible has Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and additions to Esther and Daniel. These books are called deuterocanonical (Second canon) by the Catholics. This has its roots among the Jews back in the three centuries before the beginnings of the Christian Church. There were two groups of Jews in those days. The Palestinians who worshipped in the temple, used the Hebrew Scripture (Masoretic text), and maintained a separatist religion in which contact with gentiles and Samaritans was prohibited. Concerning the books of the Old Testament, the early Church generally used the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translated about 250 B.C.). Given the split in Judaism that existed before Christ there already was a debate on what was the old testament. The Septuagint was based upon the Jewish Bible of the Alexandrian canon which contained the longer listing of texts. Protestants in the 1500s removed these books of the bible. They rejected them for being false because Hebrew manuscripts could not be found.

Where to start reading the Bible?

Do NOT read the bible cover to cover, it will just lead to confusion. First read about creation and God making a covenant with his people in Genesis and Exodus, and then jump to the Gospels and read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Four different accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From there read Paul’s letters to the early Christian communities in the New Testament, and then return to the Old Testament and read parts of the Prophets.

The Canon of Scripture

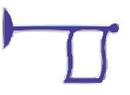
“It was by apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings are to be included in the list of sacred books. The complete list is called the canon of Scripture. It includes 46 books for the Old Testament and 27 for the New.” -CCC 120

The Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi.

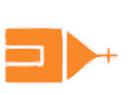
The New Testament: the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters of St. Paul to the Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, the Letter to the Hebrews, the Letters of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude, and Revelation (the Apocalypse). In the early days of the Church, many books were circulating around the local churches and, while most books were commonly agreed upon, some were debated. The Church finally developed a fixed list of books called the “Canon” in 360. The canon was reaffirmed again at the Council of Florence in 1441 and infallibly defined by the Council of Trent in 1556.

BIBLE TIMELINE

OLD TESTAMENT



NEW TESTAMENT



CREATION PATRIARCH EXODUS CONQUEST JUDGES KINGDOM EXILE RETURN SILENCE GOSPELS CHURCH MISSIONS FUTURE

