

Faith in Five – Adults
Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Bible
July 29, 2022

1. **What is Sacred Tradition?** Tradition is the faith that the apostles received from Jesus and handed on to the faithful through verbal, oral teachings. It is the whole process by which the church preserves and hands on the faith through generations. It is living transmission of the apostolic preaching accomplished in the Holy Spirit (CCC 78). "Tradition transmits in its entirety, the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit" (CCC 81).

Tradition – the living and lived faith of the church. Some elements of Tradition include the sayings and deeds of Jesus.

tradition (lower case) – customary ways of doing or expressing matters related to faith. It is closely related to practices, not part of Divine Revelation itself but pious customs. Examples include praying the Rosary, and prayerful devotions to the saints. If not essential, then it is subject to change or elimination. An example of non-doctrinal tradition is the Holy Rosary, where Pope St. John Paul II added another mystery.

2. **What is Sacred Scripture?** Sacred Scripture is the inspired word of God, the collection of sacred books that hand on the truth of Revelation in written form. The Church holds that the Sacred Scripture is "the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit" (CCC, 81). In the Bible, the Church finds strength and nourishment; she welcomes it not as human word but as the word of God (CCC 104).

3. **One deposit of faith:** "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God" (CCC, 97). It can be illustrated as this: Deposit of Faith = Apostolic Tradition (or Sacred Oral Tradition) + Sacred Scriptures

Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are closely together and communicate one with the other. They are both important in the Church and exist mutually. Its interpretation and representation are through the Magisterium, the teaching office of the Church. Without the Magisterium to guide us, there would be many interpretations of God's Word.

The apostles entrusted the "Sacred deposit" of the faith (*depositum fidei*), contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, to the whole of the Church. This sacred deposit includes the canon of scripture, the sacraments, and all teachings since apostolic times. The Church believes that inspired revelation ended with the generation of the apostles: the deposit of faith is closed to further additions or subtractions.

4. **The Magisterium of the Church**

"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. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ (CCC, 85)." This means that the

task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

"Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith (CCC, 86)."

5. One of the words to describe books that belong in Scripture is **canon**. This comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning reed or measurement. A canonical book is one that measures up to the standard of Holy Scripture. Thus, the canon of Holy Scripture refers to the books that are considered the authoritative Word of God.

When referring to a scriptural canon, the word is used to designate a collection of writings that are considered authoritative within a specific religious group. For example, the biblical canon of the Jewish people consists of the books found in the Tanach (Hebrew Bible), known to Christians as the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible itself is a collection of books of the Law of Moses (Torah) the Prophets and the Writings.

The Bible that we know today is a collection of canonical texts chosen, assembled and arranged in a particular order by the Church over many centuries. To combat heretical teachings, the Church established certain criteria for books to be considered inspired, authoritative and acceptable as Scripture for the New Testament.

To be considered inspired and worthy of entry into the New Testament canon:

- The writings must be associated with the teachings of a first-generation apostle (or their closest companions).
- They must be widely circulated and prominent in liturgies, acknowledged by all major Christian communities in the Mediterranean world. It had to be used and read publicly along with the Old Testament among the early Christians in their regular worship services.
- It must contain theology consistent with our understanding of God, the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

The canon of the scriptures is closed, and that is solemnly defined by the Magisterium.

6. What is the Septuagint?

In 1400-400 BC, the books of the Hebrew Old Testament were written. After the Babylonian exile, Hebrew was replaced by Greek as the main language for Jews living outside of Palestine.

In 250 -200 BC, Greek King Ptolemy II commissioned a translation of the Hebrew Bible in Alexandria to Greek. 72 Jewish scholars (six from each of the tribe of Israel) worked independently, yet all made identical translations within 70 days. The Septuagint (Latin for 70) contained 46 books - It is the earliest and only version of how Greek speaking Jews and early Christians read the Hebrew Bible. The Septuagint was acknowledged as the Bible of the Jews, and it is the version used by Christ and His disciples. The majority of the Old Testament references made by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament were from the Septuagint.

7. Old Testament Apocrypha: The Catholic Church refers to these books as the Deuterocanonical books (minus three books). They are part of the Septuagint but rejected by Judaism and the Protestant church. The Church accepts these seven books as part of Scripture: Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and parts of Daniel and Esther.

Towards the end of the first century, Masorete Jewish scribes/scholars were developing their Hebrew canon. As they worked to standardize the Hebrew bible, they rejected these Greek translated 7 books and did not translate them into Hebrew. Some believed this was an attempt to discredit Christianity. The Masoretic Text completed in the 9th century, defines the Jewish canon and are the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible, even though it was produced 1000 years after the Greek Septuagint. The Masoretic text is what Martin Luther based his Protestant bible from.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of ancient Jewish texts. They were discovered in 1946 at the Qumran Caves in Palestine. Copies of the Septuagint were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (oldest surviving biblical texts). The Hebrew texts found among the Dead Sea scrolls pre-date Christ, and more closely match the Greek Septuagint than the Masoretic texts.

6. History of the Bible – why Catholic and Protestant Bibles are different

- Though over 300 books were collected, in 367 AD, 27 books were listed as part of the New Testament canon by St. Athanasius. These books were selected using the rigor of canonicity by various church councils.
 - In 382 AD, a complete list of the Old Testament (46 books) and New Testament (27 books) was formally defined
 - In 393 AD, the Synod of Hippo ratified the canon of Scripture. The canon of Scripture was closed and fixed. All twenty-seven books in our present canon were recognized by all the churches of the West.
 - By the year 500, the whole Greek-speaking church had also accepted all the books in our present New Testament.
 - In the 4th century, St. Jerome translates the complete Bible into Latin, which becomes the language of the Catholic Church - called the Latin Vulgate
- For 1100 years, the canon of Scripture in the Catholic Church contained a total of 73 books.

In 1500 during the Protestant reformation, Martin Luther rejected the authority of the Catholic Church. In his work to translate the Bible from Greek to German, he questioned the 7 books of the Old Testament, moving them to the end (later dropped). Luther made this decision, using the Masoretic Hebrew canon, believed to be more authentic than the Hebrew canon of the Greek ancient church. This is why there is a total of 66 books in the Protestant canon. Of note, Luther also did not accept the 4 books of the New Testament: James, Jude, Hebrews, Revelation and moved those to the end of the Bible. Luther did not believe these books were relevant to salvation history and questioned its legitimacy.

6. Why are we not allowed to add more books to the Bible?

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and is the full revelation of God (“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). The work of the Father was completed in the words and deeds of Jesus. The faith, once for all, was handed to the saints (Jude 3).

In Revelation 22:18-19, there are consequences for adding or removing words from the book of Revelation. Since this last book describes the judgement of unbelievers and eternal life, nothing more needs to be added to Holy Scripture.

There are saints who may have great insight into God or theology. While they were faithfully inspired by the Holy Spirit, their writings are not necessary for salvation. The canon of Scripture is closed, as solemnly defined by the Magisterium.

7. **For further study:** The Second Vatican Council wrote an important document called "[On Divine Revelation](#)" ([Dei Verbum in Latin](#)). It contains definitive teaching on the full meaning of Catholic Tradition.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
2 Timothy 3:16

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