

The Church's Teaching on the Truth and Reliability of Sacred Scripture

What is Revelation?, How do Scripture and Tradition relate to each other?, What is the relation between the Source of Scripture and its reliability?

Apostolicity – the hall mark of the Church (Acts 1:15-26, Rev 21:14), is this work of teaching the faith “once delivered” (Jude 3) “always and everywhere in the same meaning” by the mandate of Christ, Mt 28:18-20:

18And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Church’s indefectibility is the result of this faithful transmission of the truth. [See also, St. Vincent of Lerins’ (*died circa* a.d. 450) famous dictum: “*quod semper, quod ubique, et quod ab omnibus... et in eodem sensu.*” or “what is always, what is everywhere, what is by everybody believed.”

The Deposit of Faith and Morals

1 Tm 6:20: O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” 21for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.

What is the Deposit of Faith?

1. Deposit – a treasure, a thing of value
2. Depositor – Jesus Christ
3. Depository – The Church
4. Depository – The Apostles and their successors

The New Testament is a **teaching deposited with teachers**, especially the pastoral epistles of Paul. But also in 1 John 2:

21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but **because you know it**, and because no lie is of the truth. 22Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. 23No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 24Let **what you heard** from the beginning abide in you. If **what you heard from the beginning** abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

The Pastoral Epistles are full of these kinds of references:

Titus 2: **1**But as for you, teach what accords **with sound doctrine**.

2 Tim 4: **1**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **2**preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **3**For the time is coming when people will not endure **sound teaching**, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, **4**and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. **5**As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

1 Tim 4: **6**If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the **good doctrine** that you have followed.

It is primarily **Oral Teaching on Faith and Morals** in brief form, which is then consigned to writing.

Dei Verbum 7 from Vatican II:

HANDING ON DIVINE REVELATION

7. In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore **Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see 2 Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, (1) and to impart to them heavenly gifts. This Gospel had been promised in former times through the prophets, and Christ Himself had fulfilled it and promulgated it with His lips. This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those Apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing. (2) But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place."**(3) This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2).

This deposit is Apostolically shaped and requires Apostolicity for its maintenance.

Modernism assails all this:

1. Jesus proposes a religious “experience”
2. The “community” elaborates this “experience”
3. The **Deposit** disappears
4. So also the hierarchy as “despositary”
5. Connection to the “**Depositor**” is severed
6. The loss is not just of the **content of faith**, but also the **sacraments of faith**

Romans 10: 14How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And **how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15**And **how are they to preach unless they are sent [apostolosin]**? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” **16**But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” **17**So **faith comes from hearing**, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 6: 3Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into his death? **4**We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.... **17**But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to **the standard of teaching** to which you were committed, **18**and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Acts 2:42 Refutes modernism: **They devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching...**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

John 10: 34-36: Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?”

2 Peter 3:15-16: And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he

speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

The Fathers and Doctors of the Church

St. Clement of Rome (c. 96): Brethren, be contentious and zealous for the things which lead to salvation! You have studied the Holy Scriptures, which are true and of the Holy Spirit. You know well that nothing or unjust or fraudulent is written in them. *Letter to the Corinthians* 45, 1 AD 80 [96/98?] WJ 22

St. Justin Martyr (105 – 165): [That the Scriptures contradict one another] I will not have the effrontery at any time either to suppose or to say such a thing. If Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and there be a pretext for regarding it as contradictory, since I am totally convinced that no Scripture is contradictory to another, I shall admit instead that I do not understand what is being spoken of, and shall strive to persuade those who assume that the Scriptures are contradictory to be rather of the same opinion as myself. *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 65 AD 155 WJ 138

St. Irenaeus of Lyon (first half of second century): If, however, we are not able to find explanations for all those passages of Scripture which are investigated, we ought to not on that account seek for another God besides Him who exists. This would indeed be the greatest impiety. Things of the kind we must leave to God, the One who made us, knowing full well that the Scriptures are certainly perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and by His Spirit. *Against Heresies* 2, 28, 2 AD 180/199 WJ 203

St. Hippolytus of Rome (d. 236): Neither does Scripture falsify anything, nor does the Holy Spirit deceive His servants, the prophets, though whom He is pleased to announce to men the will of God. *Commentary on Daniel* 4,6 AD 204 WJ 390a

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339): [Referring to the followers of Artemon who claimed to have corrected Sacred Scripture]...either they do not believe that the Sacred Scriptures were spoken by the Holy Spirit, in which case they are unbelievers; or, if they regard themselves as being wiser than the Holy Spirit, what else are they but demoniacs? *Hist of the Church* Bk 5, Ch28 AD 313-324 WJ 400

St. Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310 – 403): And nothing of discrepancy will be found in Sacred Scripture, nor will there be found any statement in opposition to any other statement. *Panacea Against All Heresies* 70, 7 AD 374/377 WJ 1106

St. Jerome (d. c. 420): I am not...so ignorant as to suppose that any of the Lord's words are either in need of correction or not divinely inspired. [goes on to note that some Latin codices are faulty, so he has gone back to the Greek] *Letter to Marcella* 27,1 AD 382/385 WJ 1347

St. Augustine (354 – 430): I think it is dangerous to believe that anything in the Sacred Books is a lie....For if we once admit in that supreme monument of authority even one polite lie, no shred of those books will remain. *Letter to Jerome* 28, 3, 3 AD 394/395 WJ 1417

I have learned to hold these books alone of the Scriptures that are now called canonical...I do most firmly believe that none of their authors has erred in the anything that he has written therein. If I find anything in those writings which seems contrary to the truth, I presume that either the codex is inaccurate, or the translator has not followed what was said, or I have not properly understood it....the books of the Prophets or Apostles, about whose writings, free of all error, it is not lawful to doubt. *Letter to Jerome* 82, 1, 3 AD 405 WJ 1421

[After repeating the argument above about editorial mistakes or failure of understanding] In that canonical collection of sacred writings, whatever is shown, by the confirmation of the canon itself, to have been said in his writings by even one Prophet or Evangelist, it is not permissible to doubt that it is true. *Against Faustus* 1, 5 AD 400 WJ 1597

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274): Does prophecy deal with conclusions which can be known scientifically?... conclusions which are demonstrated in the sciences can belong to prophecy....We believe the prophets only in so far as they are inspired by the spirit of prophecy. But we have to give belief to those things written in the books of the prophets even though they treat of conclusions of scientific knowledge...Therefore, the spirit of prophecy inspires the prophets even about the conclusions of the sciences.

While saying, “those things which cannot pertain to salvation are outside the matter of prophecy,” he seems only to be indicating what he says below (ST II-II, q. 174, a.2, ad. 3.). This is clear from his saying, “But many things which can be proved from the sciences are useful for this [prophecy].... Hence, we find that mention of these is made in Holy Scripture.” *The Disputed Questions on Truth* q. 12, a. 2.

Hence they [the Prophets] spoke as God’s representatives, saying to the people: *Thus saith the Lord*: but not so the authors of the “sacred writings,” several of whom treated more frequently of things that can be known by human reason, not in God’s name, but in their own, yet with the Divine light withal. ST II-II q. 174, a.2, ad. 3.

The Magisterium of the Church, the Creeds, Conciliar declarations, Popes, other organs of the Magisterium:

Vatican Council I (1869 – 70) (Pius IX) Dogmatic constitution on the Catholic faith, Chap 2 On Revelation:

5. Now this supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, as declared by the sacred **Council of Trent (See also Florence [1438-45] DZ 706 and Trent [1545-63] DZ 783-4)**, is contained in written books and unwritten traditions, which were received by the

apostles from the lips of Christ himself, or came to the apostles by the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and were passed on as it were from hand to hand until they reached us [16].

6. The complete books of the old and the New Testament with all their parts, as they are listed in the decree of the said council and as they are found in the old Latin Vulgate edition, **are to be** received as sacred and canonical.

7. These books the church holds to be sacred and canonical not because she subsequently approved them by her authority after they had been composed by unaided human skill, nor simply because they contain revelation without error, but because, being written under the inspiration of the holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and were as such committed to the church.

8. Now since the decree on the interpretation of holy scripture, profitably made by the **Council of Trent**, with the intention of constraining rash speculation, has been wrongly interpreted by some, we *renew* that decree and **declare** its meaning to be as follows: that in matters of faith and morals, belonging as they do to the establishing of Christian doctrine, that meaning of holy scripture **must be held** to be the true one, which holy mother church held and holds, since it is her right to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of holy scripture.

9. In consequence, it is **not permissible** for anyone to interpret holy scripture in a sense contrary to this, or indeed against the unanimous consent of the fathers. (DZ 1787-8)

Leo XIII, Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, 1893

Intro: This supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, is contained both in unwritten Tradition, and in written Books, which are therefore called sacred and canonical because, "being written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they have God for their author and as such have been delivered to the Church."(Vat I)

5. Dictated by the Holy Ghost, it contains things of the deepest importance, which in many instances are most difficult and obscure. To understand and explain such things there is always required the "coming"(24) of the same Holy Spirit; that is to say, His light and His grace;

14 [Encourages the interpretation of the Fathers, Doctors and Magisterium, both literal (doctrine) and spiritual (piety and morals). These are to be adhered to, but going beyond them is permitted (15):]

His teaching (Irenaeus), and that of other Holy Fathers, is taken up by the Council of the Vatican, which, in renewing the decree of Trent declares its "mind" to be this - that "in things of faith and morals, belonging to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be considered the true sense of Holy Scripture which has been held and is held by our Holy Mother the Church, whose place it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures; and therefore that it is permitted to no one to interpret Holy Scripture against such sense or also against the

unanimous agreement of the Fathers."(Vat I) ...the Holy Fathers, We say, are of supreme authority, whenever they all interpret in one and the same manner any text of the Bible, as pertaining to the doctrine of faith or morals; for their unanimity clearly evinces that such interpretation has come down from the Apostles as a matter of Catholic faith.

On inspiration:

20. For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical, are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and so far is it from being possible that any error can co-exist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. **This is the ancient and unchanging faith of the Church, solemnly defined in the Councils of Florence and of Trent, and finally confirmed and more expressly formulated by the Council of the Vatican.**

Pius XII, Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 1943

37. Nevertheless no one, who has a correct idea of biblical inspiration, will be surprised to find, even in the Sacred Writers, as in other ancient authors, certain fixed ways of expounding and narrating, certain definite idioms, especially of a kind peculiar to the Semitic tongues, so-called approximations, and certain hyperbolic modes of expression, nay, at times, even paradoxical, which even help to impress the ideas more deeply on the mind. For of the modes of expression which, among ancient peoples, and especially those of the East, human language used to express its thought, none is excluded from the Sacred Books, provided the way of speaking adopted in no wise contradicts the holiness and truth of God, as, with his customary wisdom, the Angelic Doctor already observed in these words: "In Scripture divine things are presented to us in the manner which is in common use amongst men." [Comm on Hebrews] For as the substantial Word of God became **like to men in all things, "except sin,"** [Heb 4:15] so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, **except error.** In this consists that "condescension" of the God of providence, which St. John Chrysostom extolled with the highest praise and repeatedly declared to be found in the Sacred Books.

***Humani generis*, 1950**

38. Just as in the biological and anthropological sciences, so also in the historical sciences there are those who boldly transgress the limits and safeguards established by the Church. In a particular way must be deplored a certain too free interpretation of the historical books of the Old Testament. Those who favor this system, in order to defend their cause, wrongly refer to the Letter which was sent not long ago to the Archbishop of Paris by the Pontifical Commission on Biblical Studies.[13] This letter, in fact, clearly points out that the first eleven chapters of Genesis, although properly speaking not conforming to the historical method used by the best Greek and Latin writers or by competent authors of our time, do nevertheless pertain to history in a true sense, which however must be further studied and determined by exegetes; the same

chapters, (the Letter points out), in simple and metaphorical language adapted to the mentality of a people but little cultured, both state the principal truths which are fundamental for our salvation, and also give a popular description of the origin of the human race and the chosen people. If, however, the ancient sacred writers have taken anything from popular narrations (and this may be conceded), it must never be forgotten that they did so with the help of divine inspiration, through which they were rendered immune from any error in selecting and evaluating those documents.

Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 1965

SACRED SCRIPTURE, ITS INSPIRATION AND DIVINE INTERPRETATION

11. Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. (Vat I, et al.) In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him (Pius XII, *DAS*) they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, ("in" and "for" man, *SS* various) they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. (Leo XIII, *PD*)

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 (Aug; Thomas; Trent; Leo XIII, *PD*; Pius XII, *DAS*) for the sake of salvation.* Therefore "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (this is the catechism of Vat. II – The Roman Catechism, from Trent)

[**Roman Catechism 12** "The whole teaching of Christianity which is to be handed on the faithful is contained in the Word of God, which in turn is transmitted in Scripture and Tradition."]

106 God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. "To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more."(*DV* 11)

107 The inspired books teach the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the

books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures."(DV 11)

[CDF Commentary on JP II's *motu proprio Ad Tuendam Fidem*, 1990:

11. ["all those doctrines of divine and catholic faith which the Church proposes as divinely and formally revealed and, as such, as irreformable"] Without any intention of completeness or exhaustiveness, some examples of doctrines relative to the three paragraphs described above can be recalled.

To the truths of the first paragraph belong the articles of faith of the Creed, the various christological dogmas and marian dogmas; the doctrine of the institution of the sacraments by Christ and their efficacy with regard to grace; the doctrine of the real and substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the sacrificial nature of the eucharistic celebration; the foundation of the Church by the will of Christ; the doctrine on the primacy and infallibility of the Roman Pontiff; the doctrine on the existence of original sin; the doctrine on the immortality of the spiritual soul and on the immediate recompense after death; the **absence of error in the inspired sacred texts**; the doctrine on the grave immorality of direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being.

Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 2010

Sacred Scripture, inspiration and truth

19. A key concept for understanding the sacred text as the word of God in human words is certainly that of *inspiration*. Here too we can suggest an analogy: as the word of God became flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, so sacred Scripture is born from the womb of the Church by the power of the same Spirit. Sacred Scripture is "the word of God set down in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit".[66] In this way one recognizes the full importance of the human author who wrote the inspired texts and, at the same time, God himself as the true author.

As the Synod Fathers affirmed, the theme of inspiration is clearly decisive for an adequate approach to the Scriptures and their correct interpretation,[67] which for its part is to be done in the same Spirit in whom the sacred texts were written.[68] Whenever our awareness of its inspiration grows weak, we risk reading Scripture as an object of historical curiosity and not as the work of the Holy Spirit in which we can hear the Lord himself speak and recognize his presence in history. The Synod Fathers also stressed the link between the theme of inspiration and that of the *truth of the Scriptures*. [69] A deeper study of the process of inspiration will doubtless lead to a greater understanding of the truth contained in the sacred books. As the Council's teaching states in this regard, the inspired books teach the truth: "since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture **firmly, faithfully and without error**, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred

Scriptures. Thus, 'all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work' (2 *Tim* 3:16-17, Greek)".[70]

Summary of the Teaching

Since the Church teaches that all the canonical books of Holy Scriptures, Old Testament and New, are inspired by the Holy Spirit (primary Author), they are free of error (*de fide*), although, because the human authors (secondary) are also engaged as real instrumental causes of the revealed text, all the characteristics of written human communication (except error) may be found in the Bible (figures of speech, metaphor, approximations, hyperbole, poetry, symbolism, etc.). This inspiration is directive and protective, but not mechanical, and spans the whole work of their production by the human authors. Even those things which are written by the authors out their own knowledge and investigation are also subject to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Study of the sacred page should therefore include attention to both the human and divine aspects of its provenance.

The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word That Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World, by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, is a non-magisterial document, as indicated in the forward:

The present document of the Biblical Commission does not constitute an official declaration of the Church's Magisterium on this topic, nor does it intend to set forth a complete doctrine regarding inspiration and the truth of Sacred Scripture. It only wishes to report the results of an attentive exegetical study of the biblical texts regarding their origin in God and their truth. The conclusions here are offered to the other theological disciplines, to be completed and deepened according to their own particular perspectives.

His Eminence, Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller President, Pontifical Biblical Commission
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