

Chapter 3

The Bible

Reading the Catechism: Paragraphs 101-141

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

– St. Jerome

As we saw in the last chapter, the **Bible** is that part of Sacred Tradition which has been “crystallized” in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This crystallization of Tradition became known as Sacred Scripture. These holy writings serve as the core or heart of Sacred Tradition which has been faithfully handed down to each generation through the teaching office of the Catholic Church.

We will discuss how the Bible was never meant to stand alone as the only source of God’s revelation, or to be interpreted alone apart from the Tradition from whence it came. The history of Protestantism is a living witness of the consequences of interpreting and reading the Bible apart from Sacred Tradition. Far from bringing about unity and clarity in faith, it has resulted in the continuing fragmentation of Christianity.

The purpose of this chapter is to show the proper place of Sacred Scripture as a vital part of the whole of Sacred Tradition, which as Christ established, would be interpreted and handed on by his Church. It will also address the proper ways to interpret Scripture, the history of the Bible as it was compiled in the early Church, and finally, we will look at an overview and outline of both the Old and New Testaments and how the two work together to reveal to us and prepare us for God’s salvation, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The Development of the Canon of Scripture

Throughout the first four centuries after Christ’s death the Magisterium of the Church gradually collected the books of the Bible into what is called the **canon of Scripture** (meaning measure or rule).

The Church was given the responsibility and authority to discern which writings were “measured” to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and worthy to belong to the sacred canon of Scripture. Let’s take a closer look at how the Bible came to be.

The Old Testament was already intact during the time of Christ in a collection called the Septuagint, which was the Greek translation of the Hebrew or Jewish Scriptures. The Jewish faith already held these writings as inspired and the Septuagint was also almost universally accepted as the inspired Old Testament by the early church Fathers which prepared for the coming of Christ and which Christ fulfilled. They used the Old Testament as proof that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah.

While the Old Testament was already written and intact at the time of Christ, the New Testament did not begin to be written until about 50 AD, almost twenty years after the resurrection of Christ, Pentecost, and the birth of the early Church. As the apostles and their successors and associates began to preach the Gospel and the Church began to grow, some of the apostles and those closely associated with them began to write letters of instruction, guidance and encouragement to certain communities. For example, Paul began to write letters to certain Church communities he had established when the need arose to correct false teachings or admonish sinful behaviors, and also to continue to teach them certain doctrines more clearly in his absence. These letters of Paul to the various Church communities such as the Corinthians in Corinth, the Ephesians in Ephesus, or the Philippians in Philippi, form a majority of the New Testament. Other apostles, such as Peter, James and John also wrote letters of instruction which the early Christians treated as holy writings.

Meanwhile, some of the apostles and their associates began to write down the story of Christ’s life. The exact dates that the Gospels were written is not certain, however scholars believe they were written between 65 and 95 A.D. Matthew’s Gospel was written for Jewish converts. Mark’s short Gospel was written as catechesis for the new Gentile converts. Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles were written as a legal defense for Paul, who was to be tried in Antioch. These three Gospels we call the “synoptic” Gospels because they are very similar in style, structure, chronology, and they seem to borrow stories and sources from each other. John’s Gospel was written last about 90-95 A.D. His Gospel gives us events and teachings of Jesus not seen in the synoptics, and its focus was a much deeper theological

understanding of Christ's life, death and Resurrection. Because these Gospels were the earliest depictions of the life and teaching of Jesus, and they were written by Christ's own apostles or their close associates, they were quickly seen in the early Church as the inspired writings containing the witness of Jesus.

There were other "gospels" written at that time as well, such as the "gospel of Thomas", but these were heavily influenced by the Gnostic heresy which was popular at that time, even among these new Christians. Because these so-called gospels contradicted the teaching of the apostles, they were rejected as not being truly inspired writings. There were also countless letters and writings in the early years of the development of the Scriptures which had to be prayerfully considered before an official declaration of a canon could take place.

As the Church continued to grow and emerge into the second and third centuries, the Gospels, along with the letters of Paul and the other apostles, began to be collected and read as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. The official canon of the New Testament was not immediately clear and the process took much time, prayer and debate. Some of the apostle's successors thought that certain books were not inspired, such as the letters of Jude and Hebrews. Others claimed that the writings of Clement, the second Pope after Peter, were inspired. But, slowly, there emerged a consensus within the Church's Magisterium on what was truly inspired and what was not. The criterion that was generally used as the standard by which to measure the canonicity of writings was as follows:

1. The writing had to have been written in the apostolic age, between 33-95 A.D.
2. The text had to have been written by an apostle or a direct associate of the apostles.
3. The content of the writing itself, had to be in keeping with apostolic teaching and Tradition.

In 382, Pope Damasus I convened a council of bishops in Rome to settle the matter of the canon of Scripture. At the council, he issued a decree that finally officially listed the canon of scripture which included the books of the Old Testament contained in the Septuagint as well as the 27 books of the New Testament. The canon was then also affirmed at the Synod of Bishops in Hippo in 393 A.D., and also later at the Synod in Carthage in 397 A.D. Both synods were heavily influenced by St. Augustine. Therefore, after 300 years, the Church finally had her official canon, which is upheld and honored in the Catholic Church to this day.

The Deuterocanonical Books or the “Apocrypha”

This same canon was unquestioned throughout the history of the Church until the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The pope convened the Council of Trent in 1545 and one of the fundamental issues addressed was to answer the rejection of Catholic doctrine by the Protestant reformers. The Council reaffirmed what had been taught from the early Church and officially defined the canon, despite the current trend to question the canonicity of several books which became known by the Protestants as the “Apocrypha.”

The Apocrypha, or what is also called the Dueterocanonical books, includes Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach and Baruch. There are also six chapters in Esther and three in Daniel that were part of the original Catholic canon but were also rejected as apocrypha. These books were rejected by Protestant reformers, following Luther, because of several reasons. Primarily, there were things which conflicted with the new theology which they were proposing, such as a rejection of the communion of saints in heaven and on earth. They did not believe in prayer for the dead (Tob 12:12; 2 Macc 12:39-45; 1 Cor 15:29), nor did they believe that the saints and angels were interceding for those on earth (2 Macc 15:14; Rev 6:9-10; Tob 12:12, 15; Rev 5:8, 8:3-4). We know this from Luther’s own words indicating that he wanted to toss Esther and Maccabees into the Elbe River.

Another seemingly reasonable justification used by Protestants is that the Dueterocanonical books were found only in the Greek canon of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) and not in the original Hebrew Canon. However, by the time of the apostles, the Septuagint had been the accepted translation of Scripture for 300 years. Even more profoundly, the Septuagint was the Scriptures that Jesus and the apostles themselves used! The Church had believed that these seven books were an indistinguishable part of the Canon of the Old Testament for 1500 years. It must also be mentioned that without the guidance of some authority, Luther also wanted to remove, or at least regard as non-apostolic, parts of the New Testament as well. Such books as Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation all appeared at the end of his translation of the Bible and were called the New Testament “Apocrypha.” This lack of respect for such a vital part of the foundation of Christianity clearly illustrates the need for the Church’s guidance and the teaching office of the Church which was given

authority by Christ to safeguard both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

The Old Testament

Now that we have seen how the canon of Scripture was compiled within the Church, let us now explore in more detail exactly what the Old and New Testaments reveal concerning the Father's loving plan of salvation accomplished by Christ.

The Old Testament reveals creation, the fall of humanity into sin, and God's gradual revelation of himself and his loving plan of salvation to the chosen people of Israel. In the Old Testament we see how God does not abandon humanity after the fall, but out of the chaos of sin he slowly and lovingly gathers a chosen people and prepares them for their final redemption in Christ.

The Old Testament Reveals a Series of Covenants between God and His People

The Old Testament reveals a series of covenants established by God between himself and his chosen people. A **covenant** is a very solemn promise in which God and his people enter into a pledge of love and fidelity. It is much more than simply a contract or an agreement. God continuously offers covenant after covenant with humanity, even though time after time God's chosen people are disobedient and reject them.

Some examples of people with whom God made covenants are as follows:

- Adam and Eve, husband and wife and the first parents of the human family.
- Noah and his family, the faithful remnant of a humanity consumed by sin.
- Abraham, our father in faith, who from his great faith emerge the twelve tribes of Israel, the foundation of God's chosen people.
- Moses, who gains his people's freedom from slavery to the Egyptians and brings them to the Promised Land.
- David, who becomes the king of the nation of Israel, one of the great nations of the ancient world.

Each covenant in the Old Testament not only reveals more about God and his loving plan of salvation, but also brings about the gradual gathering and preparation of God's people. They prepare for, and are fulfilled in, the coming of Christ who establishes the new and everlasting covenant with all of humanity through the universal or Catholic Church, extending to the very ends of the earth.

The Old Testament Foreshadows and Prepares God's People for Christ

Since the Old Testament is the gradual unfolding of God's plan of salvation, it can be said that it is ultimately all about Christ! That is why the Church, in her wisdom, did not discard it as the Old Testament, but kept it as the first part of the canon because it reveals Christ just as the New Testament does.

However, Christ's revelation in the Old Testament is not explicit, but rather through analogies and what is also called **typology**. Typology is when characters or events foreshadow or point to events and other people who were to come in the future. These events really were an actual foreshadowing of Christ and his fulfillment of the law and prophecies. There are so many examples throughout the Old Testament that, in retrospect, with all that we now know of Christ, the sacraments, and the Church, we see how perfectly God was preparing his chosen people for his plan of salvation in Christ.

One prime example of typology in the Old Testament can be seen in the story of Adam, the first man God created. He is actually called an anti-type because he would be the symbol of the exact opposite of all that Christ was. Paul writes using this form of typology in his letter to the Romans:

Therefore, just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all... by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many...

For if, by the transgression of one person, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one person Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:12-17)

This typology has been used abundantly in the study of Scripture from before the time of Christ. In this way, we too will study many examples throughout the Old and New Testaments which help us understand more about Christ, Mary, the Church, and the sacraments, etc. Through this we will come to an even deeper understanding of God's plan of salvation in Christ.

Three Parts of the Old Testament

Historical Narrative: Genesis – 2 Maccabees

This collection of books gives the theological history of the Hebrew people. It covers about 4500 years of history, from the early recorded Hebrew accounts of creation to the era of the Maccabean revolt about 100 years before Christ. It is this part of the Old Testament which reveals the series of covenants God made with mankind and how his people continued to be both faithful and unfaithful to them. It also reveals the consequences of their infidelity as well as God's merciful response in offering new and more profound covenants each time. The first five books are called the Pentateuch or the Torah and contain the heart of the Mosaic Law and were considered the most sacred of all the Old Testament writings.

The Wisdom Literature: Job – Sirach

This collection of writings was derived from the Hebrew prayer and spiritual life. They give a deep insight into the spirituality of God's chosen people. These writings are very poetic and very deep, penetrating the heart of their relationship with God and his love for them in return. The Book of Psalms contains 150 Hebrew prayers of an amazing variety of topics. Several of the books of the Wisdom Literature were written by David and his son Solomon, but others were written at various times throughout the history of Israel.

The Prophetic Books: Isaiah – Malachi

These books were written in the later part of the history of Israel, primarily during the time of the divided kingdom as well as the period preceding, during and after Israel's exile into Babylon. The prophets had a two-fold purpose. First, they came to warn Israel about their unfaithfulness to the covenant and the looming consequences.

However, the prophets also came to bring the good news of God's coming salvation in the Messiah. Within these books, there are numerous prophecies of this savior that would be fulfilled by Christ. However, Isaiah was the most explicit prophet concerning Christ's coming, so much so that his book is often called the Fifth Gospel, or the Gospel of the Old Testament. Not only does Isaiah accurately predict Christ's birth, but he also has explicit predictions of Christ's Passion and death. (Isa 53:1-12)

The New Testament

The New Testament records the life and ministry of Jesus, and the activity and teachings of the apostles and the early Church. The New Testament was written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by some of the apostles, or other men closely associated to their ministry. All the books of the New Testament were written between about 50 and 95 A.D.

Four Parts of the New Testament

The Gospels

The **Gospels** of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the inspired stories of the life and ministry of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very similar, while John is an elaboration of the first three. We hold a special reverence for the four Gospels because they record the life and ministry of Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles

The Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke, records the activity of the apostles and the growth of the early Church.

The Epistles

The epistles are a collection of letters written by the apostles or their associates to the early Church communities throughout the ancient world. These letters are important because they clearly show the apostolic teachings and the developing theology of the early

Church. Most of the letters are written by the Apostle Paul, but others are written by other apostles like Peter and John.

Revelation

Written by the Apostle John, the book of Revelation is a highly symbolic book concerning the final victory of Christ, but is largely liturgical in nature. It reveals that we in the earthly liturgy participate in the heavenly liturgy and already participate in the victory over sin won by Christ, the Lamb of God. Revelation also speaks of the end times when Christ will come again and restore in its fullness the kingdom of God.

The Interpretation of Scripture

It is very important to establish the appropriate ways in which the Scriptures are to be interpreted in light of Sacred Tradition and their place within the whole of God's revelation. There are three important criteria that must be observed when interpreting the Bible faithfully.

Three Criteria for Interpretation

Within the context of Sacred Tradition

Scripture must be interpreted in the context of the Sacred Tradition from which it came. Our interpretation of Scripture cannot contradict the living Tradition of the Church, which is the source of the canon of the Bible itself. Since Sacred Scripture is that part of Sacred Tradition committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it can only be accurately interpreted within that same Tradition. There is a unity that exists between Scripture and Tradition, whereby together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and authority of the Magisterium, they transmit in its fullness the entire revealed Word of God.

Content and unity of the whole of Sacred Scripture

The content and unity of the whole of Scripture must be given special attention. Even though there are many different books written by different authors, the Bible must be seen as a unified whole. One

should interpret any passage in the context in which it was written, taking into account the author's intention, literary style, culture and world view of the time, etc. However we must also interpret the passage in light of the unity of the Scriptures. While it is important to really understand the meaning and purpose of an individual passage, it cannot be taken and interpreted in isolation. This is a fundamental error of Protestantism and other movements within Christianity. One cannot build a theology around isolated passages. The Bible was intended to be seen as a unified whole, with all the books working together to form the one message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Any interpretation of the Scriptures must be understood within the content of the whole and cannot truly contradict any other part. It is ultimately a work of the Holy Spirit and God cannot contradict himself.

Analogy of faith

It is also important to pay attention to the **analogy of faith**. The Bible was not written as a history book or a story book, it was written under the **inspiration** of the Holy Spirit to communicate to mankind certain theological truths necessary for salvation. Thus, the Bible has both a literal meaning and also a deeper "analogical" meaning that goes beyond the literal to reveal a more profound theological meaning. This is especially evident in the use of analogy in the Bible. For example, a passage in the New Testament may fulfill or give clarity to passages in the Old Testament, or a passage in the New Testament is given deeper meaning in light of a passage in the Old Testament. Again the Bible works as a unified whole to reveal to us God's loving plan of salvation. This is why St. Augustine states, "The New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New."

In conclusion, we must keep in mind that through Sacred Scripture, God our heavenly Father comes "lovingly to meet his children and talks with them." (DV, 21) He, who desired to reveal himself to us, inspired the writing of the Scriptures and sent the Holy Spirit to guide the Church whom he entrusted with the great responsibility of protecting, interpreting, and handing on the revelation of his Son and the plan of salvation fulfilled in Christ.

The Outline of the Bible

THE OLD TESTAMENT

I. Creation

- A. First Story of Creation (Gen 1-2:3)
- B. The Second Story of Creation (Gen 2:4-25)
- C. The creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-28)
- D. The First Covenant (Gen 1:29-30; 2:15-17)

II. Original Sin: The Fall of Adam and Eve

- A. The Temptation (Gen 3:1-5)
- B. The Fall (Gen 3:6)
- C. The Consequence (Gen 3:7-24)
- D. The Proliferation of Sin
 - 1. Cain and Abel: The World's First Murder (Gen 4:1-16)
 - 2. The wickedness of man was great on the earth (Gen 6:5)

III. Noah and the Flood (FAMILY)

- A. The Call of Noah (Gen 6:11-22)
- B. The Flood (Gen 7-8)
- C. The New Covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1-18)
- D. The Tower of Babel: The Chaos of Sin (Gen 11:1-9)

IV. Abraham: The Father of God's People (TRIBE)

- A. The Covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-9)
- B. The Test of Abraham (Gen 22:1-19)
- C. The Patriarchs: Isaac, Jacob, Joseph (Gen 23-38)
- D. Joseph goes to Egypt (Gen 39-50)

V. Moses: Redemption and Revelation (PEOPLE)

- A. The Israelites are taken into slavery in Egypt (Ex 1)
- B. The Salvation of Moses (Ex 2:1-10)
- C. Moses Flees Egypt (Ex 2:11-25)
- D. The Call of Moses (Ex 3-4)
- E. The Confrontation with Pharaoh and the Nine Plagues (Ex 5-10)
- F. The Tenth Plague: The Passover (Ex 11-13)

- G. The Escape from Egypt and Crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 14-15)
- H. Israel in the Desert: The Unfaithful People and the Mercy of God (Ex 16-18)
- I. The Covenant with Moses: The Ten Commandments (Ex 19-20)
- J. The Laws and Sacrifices of the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy and Leviticus)
- K. The Conquering of the Promised Land (Joshua)
- L. The Cycle of Judges: Disobedience, Judgment, Deliverance, Obedience, Disobedience, etc. (Judges)

VI. David: The Kingdom of Israel (NATION)

The Wisdom Books Written

- A. The Desire for a King (1 Sam 8:1-9)
- B. The Reign and Failure of King Saul (1 Sam 13-15:9)
- C. The Anointing of David (1 Sam 16)
- D. The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:1-29)
- E. The Sin of David (2 Sam 11:1-27)
- F. King Solomon (1 Kings 1-11)

VII. Period of Division and Turmoil

The Prophetic Books Written

(2 Kings-2 Maccabees)

- A. The Kingdom Divides: Israel and Judah
- B. The Judgment of the Northern Kingdom Israel
- C. Exile and Restoration of Judah

THE NEW TESTAMENT

I. The Life and Ministry of Christ: The Gospels

- A. The Synoptic Gospels
 - 1. The Gospel of Matthew
 - 2. The Gospel of Mark
 - 3. The Gospel of Luke
- B. The Gospel of John

II. The Acts of the Apostles: The Growth and Ministry of the Catholic and Apostolic Church (UNIVERSAL CHURCH)

III. The Epistles of Paul and Other Apostles

A. The Letters of Paul or the New Testament Letters

1. Letter to the Romans
2. First Letter to the Corinthians
3. Second Letter to the Corinthians
4. Letter to the Galatians
5. Letter to the Ephesians
6. Letter to the Philippians
7. Letter to the Colossians
8. First Letter to the Thessalonians
9. Second Letter to the Thessalonians
10. First Letter to Timothy
11. Second Letter to Timothy
12. Letter to Titus
13. Letter to Philemon
14. Letter to the Hebrews

B. The Letters of the Apostles or Catholic Letters

1. The Letter of James
2. The First Letter of Peter
3. The Second Letter of Peter
4. The First Letter of John
5. The Second Letter of John
6. The Third Letter of John
7. The Letter of Jude

IV. The Revelation of John: The Heavenly Banquet of the Lamb of God and the Second Coming of Christ

From the Catechism: Key Words to Know

BIBLE: Sacred Scripture: the books which contain the truth of God's Revelation and were composed by human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit (105). The Bible contains both the forty-six books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament (120).

CANON OF SCRIPTURE: The Church's complete list of sacred books of the Bible (120).

COVENANT: A solemn agreement between human beings or between God and a human being involving mutual commitments or guarantees. The Bible refers to God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses as leader of the chosen people, Israel. In the Old Testament or Covenant, God revealed his law through Moses and prepared his people for salvation through the prophets. In the New Testament or Covenant, Christ established a new and eternal covenant through his own sacrificial death and Resurrection. The Christian economy is the new and definitive Covenant which will never pass away, and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (56, 62, 66).

TYOLOGY: The discernment of persons, events, or things in the Old Testament which prefigured, and thus served as a "type" (or prototype) of, the fulfillment of God's plan in the person of Christ. The typology of the Old Testament which is made clear in the New Testament demonstrates the dynamic unity of the divine plan of salvation (128).

GOSPEL: The four Gospels are the books written by the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John which have for their central object Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son: his life, teachings, Passion and glorification, and his Church's beginnings under the Spirit's guidance (124, 514).

ANALOGY OF FAITH: The coherence of the truths of the faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation (114).

BIBLICAL INSPIRATION: The gift of the Holy Spirit which assisted a human author to write a biblical book so that it has God as

its author and teaches faithfully, without error, the saving truth that God has willed to be consigned to us (105).

