

SACRED TRADITION

- *"So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter". (2 Thessalonians 2:15)*
- The Catholic Church teaches that the Word of God is handed on to us both orally and in writing. Sacred Tradition is the oral transmission of his Word, and Sacred Scripture is his written Word. Both are to be accepted by the Catholic Church with equal devotion and respect.
- When Jesus left the earth after his Resurrection, he did not leave the Bible in the hands of his apostles; instead he gave them a mandate to go and teach all nations (see Mt 28:20).
- The term apostolic Tradition refers to all the teaching that the apostles received from Jesus and, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, handed on to others through their preaching, example and the institutions which they established.
- The early Church guarded this apostolic teaching and passed it down to the next generation. St. Paul admonishes Timothy to carefully guard it and rebukes the Galatians for "turning to a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6). The apostles' preaching was faithful to Christ and his Gospel.
- In order that their preaching or Tradition would be preserved, the apostles set aside other men to succeed them as bishops, giving to them the same authority and mandate they had received from Christ.
- Eventually, much of this Apostolic Tradition was written down, thereby giving us the New Testament.
- The sacred writers of the New Testament were inspired to preserve not only what Jesus taught and did but also the

early Church's lived experience and interpretation of his Word. Sacred Tradition, then, came before the New Testament.

- The New Testament, while being the primary source for all that God revealed in Christ, is itself a product of Tradition.
- Tradition is a living and active process which the Church hands on from one age to the next. The Holy Spirit guides the Church in this process and guarantees that Tradition will be an authentic expression of God's Word for each generation.
- The Church in each generation, through prayer, study, and contemplation, reflects on God's Word in Scripture and gives fresh interpretation to it while never altering the divine message it contains.

Excerpts from Sacred Tradition

- Tradition has helped to shape the Church's teachings and institutions. In the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch who lived in the first century, early forms of the ministries of bishop and priest begin to develop. They become part of the church's tradition which was passed on to future generations and is still with us today.
- Another example from Tradition comes from the writings of St. Irenaeus. He was a bishop in Lyons, France from the years 177 to 202 AD. He writes about the importance of unity of doctrine throughout the whole Church.
- He also gives us one of our earliest expressions of what later will be called the "Apostles' Creed": The church's doctrines and creeds are part of the Church's living 'tradition'

- This Creed is not only a summation of what we believe but also “the Rule of Faith” as called by St. Augustine, who was another early bishop of the Church from North Africa. He was bishop in Hippo for nearly 35 years (AD 395-430).
- He teaches us that the doctrines contained in the Creed are scattered throughout the Bible. They are brought together in this simple formula to make it easier for even the most uneducated minds to memorize and so adhere to the saving truths revealed in Christ.
- Tradition aids the Church in understanding and developing its institutions like the priesthood, its sacraments, the Eucharist. Quite simply, Tradition could be defined as the living interpretation of Scripture.

What about '*Sola Scriptura*'?

- The teaching that the Bible is the one and only source and authority for God’s Revelation is called *sola scriptura*, which is Latin for “Scripture alone.” But this is erroneous.
- Martin Luther, and the other Protestant reformers, broke from the Church, and so proposed this doctrine that cut off the Bible from both the authority and living Tradition of the Church.
- The first problem is that *sola scriptura* simply is not found in the Bible. Defenders of *sola scriptura* usually turn to 2 Tim. 3:16-17: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”.
- They claim that Paul here is showing that the Bible alone is sufficient to make a man or woman a complete and upright Christian.

- This line of reasoning does violence to both the meaning and context of this passage and runs contrary to what we find elsewhere in Paul’s letters. In (2 Tim 3:14)
- Paul is exhorting Timothy to hold fast to the oral teaching and preaching which Paul himself had given him. At the end of his First Letter to Timothy, Paul exhorts him to diligently guard what has been entrusted to him (see 1 Tim. 6:20). This is another reference to the importance of the oral Tradition that Paul had handed over to Timothy (see also 2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Cor. 11:2).
- A second problem is the witness and example of Jesus. If the Bible alone was all we needed, then we would expect Jesus to have written it.
- But he did not; instead he instituted the Church (see Matt. 16:18) and left it with the authority to interpret and to teach everything that he had taught (see Matt. 28:20). He also told his disciples, when he sent them out to preach in his name, “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16).
- Finally, in principle, *sola scriptura* is illogical because it was only in the fourth century that the canon of the New Testament was finally decided by the Catholic Church. Well, there was no other Church around.
- The Bible did not come floating down from Heaven ready-made. The Church, beginning with the Council of Carthage (397 AD), drew up the first list or canon of inspired books for the New Testament. There were other books which were rejected and not included in the 'canon' The Old Testament Canon was already in place around 100BC.
- Accepting this we see that Luther's '*sola scriptura*' doesn't hold water.