

The Authority of Scripture

1. What does the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) believe and teach about Scripture and Authority?

- 1) “Supernatural revelation...is contained in written books and unwritten traditions.”¹
 - Both proceed from God, and together through the Church result in God’s revelation²
 - Both “form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the church.”³
 - Note, the phrase “word of God” does not mean just the written Scriptures but both Scripture and tradition.
- 2) God’s revelation was given through the written Scriptures by divine inspiration
 - The 39 books of the OT and 7 Apocryphal books
 - The 27 books of the NT
 - These are considered canonical because God is their author and they were given to the Church.⁴
 - Any who do not accept the Catholic canon of Scripture are condemned.⁵
- 3) God’s revelation was and is given through unwritten tradition. As Sacred Scripture is lived out through the Church, the full purity of the Word is preserved, explained, and made known.⁶
 - “This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it.”⁷
 - While “Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.”⁸

¹ First Vatican Council, “Chapter 2: On Revelation,” paragraph 5.

² Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 8, paragraph 9.

³ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 10. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 97.

⁴ First Vatican Council, “Chapter 2: On Revelation,” paragraph 7.

⁵ “But if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately condemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema.”

<http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch4.htm>, accessed 6 October 2016.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 8, paragraph 9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 79.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 78.

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 66.

- 4) In order to guarantee that God’s revelation “in its full integrity” would “be handed on to all generations” the Apostles’ authority was handed over to bishops as their successors with “the authority to teach in their own place.”⁹
 - This applies particularly to “sacred tradition” and also to “Sacred Scripture.”¹⁰
 - This is based on the NT command for Christians to hold fast to the verbal and written traditions they learned from the Apostles (2 Thess 2:15). Before the NT was completed Christians relied on the Apostles teaching.¹¹
- 5) The Holy Spirit enables the Church to grow and gain a better understanding of divine revelation given through Sacred Scripture and sacred tradition.¹²
 - The specific channels are the “contemplation and study” of believers, growing understanding in personal experience, and the preaching of those “who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth.”¹³
 - God’s revelation is known ultimately through the Church.¹⁴
- 6) The Bible is not the only basis for faith and morals (practice). Both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are necessary.
 - Scripture is written more “in the Church’s heart than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God’s Word.”¹⁵
 - “It is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.”¹⁶
 - “Sacred theology rests on the written Word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation.”¹⁷
 - “The Christian faith is not a ‘religion of the book.’ Christianity is the religion of the ‘Word’ of God, ‘not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living.’”¹⁸

⁹ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” sections 7–9.

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 8, paragraph 1.

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 83.

¹² Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 8, paragraph 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 8, paragraph 3.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 113.

¹⁶ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 9.

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 6: Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church,” section 24.

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 108.

- 7) Only the Roman Catholic Church can give the “true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures.”¹⁹
 - “It devolves on sacred bishops ‘who have the apostolic teaching’ to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the Gospels.”²⁰
 - Only “the living, teaching office of the Church”—through the bishops together with the Pope—has the authority to give “authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition.”²¹ This office is called the Magisterium.
 - The Church is infallible in the exercise of this authority.²²
- 8) Thus God’s revelation is made known by the Spirit through “sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church.” These “are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the other.”²³
- 9) While individual Catholics can read and study their Bibles, their interpretation on matters of faith and morals must adhere to official Church interpretation.²⁴
 - This is necessary to restrain unbridled interpretation that would distort the Scriptures.
 - They must “receive with docility” what the Church teaches they should believe.²⁵
 - They are obliged “to an irrevocable adherence of faith.”²⁶

¹⁹ <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch4.htm>, accessed 6 October 2016. First Vatican Council, “Chapter 2: On Revelation,” paragraph 8. Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 10, paragraph 2; “Chapter 3: Sacred Scripture, Its Inspiration and Divine Interpretation,” section 12, paragraph 3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 100.

²⁰ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 6: Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church,” section 25, paragraph 2.

²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 85.

²² “The whole body of the faithful...cannot err in matters of belief,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 92, 93.

²³ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter 2: Handing on Divine Revelation,” section 10, paragraph 3.

²⁴ <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch4.htm>, accessed 6 October 2016. First Vatican Council, “Chapter 2: On Revelation,” paragraph 8.

²⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 87.

²⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 88.

2. Roman Catholic Belief about Scripture and Authority in Light of Scripture

- 1) The only rule of faith and practice is the written Word of God, the Christian Scriptures, the Protestant canon (Isa 8:20; 2 Tim 3:16–17). This is *sola scriptura*.
- 2) The Roman Catholic Church adds to God’s revelation in Scripture seven Apocryphal books, “sacred tradition,” and the Magisterium. God condemns this (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Rev 22:18–19).
- 3) Only Scripture can infallibly interpret Scripture (Acts 17:11).
- 4) Only the written Scriptures are the infallible Word of God (John 10:35). “Tradition” in the RCC sense is of sinful, fallible men (Mark 7:1–13).
- 5) God’s provision for new churches before the completion of the NT was through the apostles and prophets. These were the foundation of the church. What they authoritatively taught (translated “tradition,” 2 Thess 2:15) was to be followed by the church. This teaching authority was of the NT apostles and prophets alone and does not continue today. Apostolic teaching is preserved for Christians today in the NT.
- 6) The authoritative teacher of the Word is the Holy Spirit, not the Magisterium (1 John 2:20, 27).
- 7) Scripture must be interpreted according to the biblical author’s meaning, not according to the Magisterium (2 Pet 3:16).
- 8) The Christian faith is delivered to the entire church, including every Christian, not merely church leadership (Jude 3).
- 9) Every Christian is able to correctly understand and interpret the Scriptures by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit and the accurate handling of Scripture (1 Cor 2:12–16; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 John 2:20, 27).
- 10) Far from faithfully giving the Word of God, Catholic tradition is not of God but of men and twists the true Word, corrupting the Christian faith (Col 2:8). While having a form and veneer of Christianity it is apostasy, rejecting the gospel’s essence and denying its true power (2 Tim 3:5).

A helpful reference on Catholicism:

James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995).