

How God Reveals Himself through the Bible

Let's start with the fundamental question. What is the Bible?

Inspiration

2 Tim 3:16

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16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

The operative phrase in this verse is "given by inspiration of God." It is the compound Greek word "Theopneustos" "**Theo**" meaning God; "**pneustos**" from "**pneuma**" meaning spirit or breath.

Literally it should be translated ---- "God-breathed." In fact, the verse could easily be translated God breathed into all scripture... or God put His Spirit in all Scripture ...

Where else do we see imagery like this?

Gen 2:7

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Therefore the Bible is not simply a collection of moral teaching and religious stories. It is the Living Word of God, because the breath of God gives life.

The Catechism puts it this way:

[108] ... 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".

How does inspiration exactly work?

There are 2 extreme approaches to be leery of:

Fundamentalism:

Some take the approach that God dictated the bible and that the human authors were simply secretaries or some kind of biological word processors. Therefore, those that take this approach argue that the bible is an authoritative teacher of science and history, as well as the rule of faith.

Rationalism:

On the other extreme, we have those that would say that bible is a collection of "*inspiring*" stories. They insist that the scientific and historical inaccuracies call into question matters of faith or any supernatural events recorded in scripture. Hence, the bible is reduced to loose moral code.

Both approaches fail because they inextricably link historical and scientific accuracy with matters of faith. If one is questionable, all is questionable.

The Church's approach:

The Church however, teaches us that God as the primary author of scripture, conveyed His Word by allowing each human author to use expressions, literary constructs, and modes of speech customary to the author and relevant to the immediate audience he was writing to.

Therefore, **the revelation is found in the meaning.**

Once again quoting the catechism:

[106]... "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."

[101] ... "Indeed the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men."

In essence, with this last statement Holy Mother Church tells us that the nature of inspiration is comparable to Incarnation. Therefore when we say the Word of God is in the words of men, we can't say that some parts of the bible are inspired and other parts are simply extraneous material, which strictly expresses the human authors opinion. The whole bible is inspired, yet the human authors chose the words to express the mind of God.

Does the Church then believe the bible contains errors?

The Second Vatican affirms the following regarding the inerrancy of scripture:

*"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 **for the sake of salvation.**"* (Dei Verbum- Dogmatic Constitution On Divine Revelation)

Therefore, the Church asserts that the bible is free from doctrinal error. At the same time, She recognizes that the bible is not a science textbook; nor is it a history textbook.

The Bible does, however, record **"Salvation History."** In the process, it does contain historical data. But we always must remember that the authors' purpose was not to record history as we would today. Rather, inspired by the Holy Spirit, they wrote historical narratives that reveal God's plan for our Salvation.

Let's look at a couple of examples to further illustrate the Church's approach.

The first one is pretty obvious.

Psalm 113: 3 *"From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is worthy of praise."*

The psalmist's statement reflects the common scientific observations of the day. People saw the sun go up and they saw it go down. From that, they deduced that the sun traveled around the earth.

But the psalmist is not making a dogmatic statement about cosmology. He is saying that, every waking hour and everywhere the sun ever shines; the name of God is worthy of praise. God is the Lord of time and space.

The second example is little tougher.

Genesis 1 records God creating everything in 6 days. Genesis 2 begins by telling us that God rested on the 7th day.

Fundamentalists would argue that every detail including the times frames are inerrant. They would therefore insist it happened exactly as it was recorded.

Rationalists would completely dismiss the details as a primitive attempt by a scientifically ignorant society to explain creation.

Both of these approaches miss the boat. The details found in the 6 days of creation have a beautiful symmetry that we don't have time to explore now. However, the most important detail is the 7th day or the Sabbath.

You see the Hebrew word for 7 is the exact same word for Oath. Oaths were the essential elements of Covenants. In fact, the Hebrew word for 7 can also be translated covenant. In Latin the word is Sacramentum or the English equivalent, Sacrament.

So the Hebrew audience would have immediately understood that God, from the beginning, was establishing a Covenant with His Creation.

Both the fundamentalist approach, which seeks to prove scientific and historical inerrancy, and the rationalist approach, which dismisses details completely, miss what the Holy Spirit is telling us through the human authors.

The Structure of the Bible:

The bible consists of what we commonly refer to as an Old Testament and New Testament. Although that is somewhat misleading, because it implies that the New somehow negates the Old.

In actuality, those books which make up the Old Testament all point to Jesus Christ. The books that make up the New Testament fulfill and illuminate the Old. It has been said that the New Testament is hidden in the Old; while the Old Testament is explained and manifested in the New.

The Old Testament:

The Old Testament consists of 46 books divided according to their literary purpose. The first 5 books are known as the Pentateuch, "**the Law**", or as our Jewish brothers would say: the Torah.

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus

Numbers
Deuteronomy.

Then there are what are loosely called "**Historical books**". A better term might be narrative books, because they narrate the History of Salvation. As we've discussed, these books do contain history, but they don't always record history in the same manner we would record history today.

Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1st Samuel
2nd Samuel
1st kings

2nd Kings
1st Chronicles
2nd Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Tobit

Judith
Esther
1st Maccabees
2nd Maccabees

The third category is known as **“Wisdom literature”**. These texts express the human experience, humanity’s relationship with God, and God’s Wisdom: all as an aid to understanding and solving life’s problems. In doing so, the human authors employ contemporary literary forms such as lyrics, poetry, dialogue, and plays.

Job	Ecclesiastes	Wisdom
Psalms	Song of Solomon	Sirach
Proverbs		

The rest of the Books are commonly referred to as **“The Prophets.”** Prophets, unlike Kings and Priests, were not always part of the institutional system. God called these men directly to exhort His People, rebuke their leadership and invite both to turn back to God.

Isaiah	Hosea	Nahum
Jeremiah	Joel	Habakkuk
Lamentations	Amos	Zephaniah
Baruch	Obadiah	Haggai
Ezekiel	Jonah	Zechariah
Daniel	Micah	Malachi

Difference between the Catholic and Protestant Old Testament

The Old Testament found in Protestant Bibles does not include the following books: Tobit, Judith, 1st and 2nd Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, & Baruch. It also excludes parts of Esther and Daniel.

During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther rejected these books because some of them teach doctrines such as prayer for dead and the intercession of Saints. As a pretext, Luther argued that Jews did not accept these books as part of their Bible.

While it is true that the Jewish canon doesn’t include these books, the Jews still accept both the aforementioned doctrines the Protestants reject. The Jews excluded these books primarily because the available manuscripts were written in Greek and not Hebrew.

The New Testament

The New Testament consists of 27 Books. The first four books are the Gospels according to **Matthew**, **Mark**, **Luke** and **John**. All 4 record Christ's life and ministry, each from a different perspective. Each was written to a different audience, therefore each human author emphasized or highlighted different truths.

The Gospels are immediately followed by the **book of Acts**, which has traditionally been attributed to Luke. This book records the earliest history of an infant Church. Led by Holy Spirit, the Apostles preach the Gospel, discern doctrine, make decisions, and pass down the faith; first to Israel and eventually to Gentiles.

The next section of the Old Testament is a collection of letter or **"Epistles."** For the most part, these were written to Churches or people in various locations and deal with their specific doctrinal issues and pastoral challenges. Of course they are relevant to us today because they lay down a written foundation for the doctrines and pastoral principles held and applied by the Church throughout the ages.

Romans	1 st Thessalonians	James
1 st Corinthians	2 nd Thessalonians	1 st Peter
2 nd Corinthians	1 st Timothy	2 nd Peter
Galatians	2 nd Timothy	1 st John
Ephesians	Titus	2 nd John
Philippians	Philemon	3 rd John
Colossians	Hebrews	Jude

The final book in the New Testament is the **book of Revelation**. While many people today look to this book as strictly a prophecy of the end times, Revelation actually reveals the Divine Liturgy taking place in heaven and which we enter into at every Mass.

"Salvation History revealed in the Bible"

Salvation can be defined as nothing less than entering and participating in the life of God. St. Peter in his second epistle called it "partaking in the Divine nature."

As we've been discussing. Our God is God that reveals Himself. From Scripture and Tradition we know that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or the Blessed Trinity.

Pope John Paul II, speaking of the Trinity said: "God in His deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since He has in Himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of family which is love."

This paints a picture of total self-giving. The father eternally gives Himself to the Son and the Son gives Himself to the Father, both in the Love of the Holy Spirit. This total giving of self is what we call a covenant. And throughout Sacred Scripture, God repeatedly reveals Himself by establishing a series covenants with mankind.

The Covenants which reveal God & Salvation History

<u>Mediator</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Form</u>	<u>Sign</u>
<u>Adam</u>	Husband	Marriage	Sabbath
<u>Noah</u>	Father	Household	Rainbow
<u>Abraham</u>	Chieftain	Tribe	Circumcision
<u>Moses</u>	Lawgiver	Nation	Passover
<u>David</u>	King	Kingdom	Throne
<u>Jesus</u>	<u>Royal High Priest</u>	<u>Catholic Church</u>	<u>Cross/Eucharist</u>

Beginning in the first verses of Genesis and ending with the last verse recorded in Revelation, the story is the same. God gives Himself to Man. All the while, He is inviting man to give himself back to God. This relationship is summed up and best described with the word Covenant.

The Bible and the Church

While the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, it does not stand alone as the 'sole rule of faith', as some would profess. In fact, the Bible itself teaches quite the contrary.

Matthew 16:18-19 *"And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

1 Tim 3:15 *"But if I should be delayed, you should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth."*

2 Peter 1:2 *"Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation,"*

These are just a few of many biblical texts that clearly indicate Christ vested His Church with nothing less than His own authority to preach and safeguard doctrine.

How did we get the bible?

From the birth of the Church in 33 AD to the present, the Church has acted in the authority granted by Christ to first Apostles. These Apostles had and still have successors. We call them Bishops. All of the Bishops, in union with the Pope, (the Bishop of Rome and the successor of Peter) constitute what is called the **"Magisterium"** or "teaching authority" of the Church.

From the beginning, starting with the first Apostles to present times, the Teachings of Christ have been handed down to each successor. This is called **"Sacred Tradition"**.

Eventually, the Teachings of our Lord were written in the form of the Gospels. As well, many letters of exhortations were written to various Churches and people.

During this period, there were also many fraudulent and heretical texts written and circulated.

For several centuries various such writings were circulated amongst the Churches throughout the Christian world. As these writings made their way from Church to Church, they were first presented to the local bishop, who would weigh the content against the Teaching he had been handed down by his predecessor. If the texts were consistent with the Apostolic Teaching he had received the texts were allowed to circulate and be read during the Liturgy.

By the end of the 4th century the Holy Spirit led the Church to finally define which books were to be considered inspired, which books were to be considered beneficial but not inspired, and which books were to be completely rejected.

To do so, the Church convened a series of Councils. These Councils took place in Rome, Hippo, and Carthage. These Councils gave us a list (or canon) of 27 books of the New Testament and 46 books in the Old Testaments. Both Testaments together make up the bible or **“Sacred Scripture”**

So, the Bible, as we know it, didn't just drop out of the sky. It is not just a random collection of books. Rather, the Magisterium relying on Sacred Tradition, discerned which books to accept or reject.

Hence, Word of God is revealed through Scripture and Sacred Tradition. From these sources, the Magisterium discerns and develops doctrines; applying God's revelation in every age and every circumstance.

Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the **Magisterium** are like three legs of a stool. They work together. If you remove one leg, the stool collapses.

Vatican II puts it this way (again quoting Dei Verbum)

“Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread and in prayers, so that holding to, practicing and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort”

“It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”

Conclusion

I will conclude with 2 additional quotes from the Catechism, which summarize Sacred Scripture.

[102] “Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely.”

You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time.

[134] “All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, “because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ”

