

A Bit about the Bible:

Try explaining to some of our Protestant brothers and sisters (or Non-Denominational) about almost any belief of the Catholic faith and they will want to know exactly where that teaching is found in the Bible -- because they hold dear the idea of only following what is in the Bible. However, not every belief in Protestant or Non-Denominational churches is to be found word-for-word in Sacred Scripture.

(for example) The Holy Trinity is one of the teachings of almost every Protestant or Non-Denominational community that is not specifically in the Bible. Nowhere in the Bible is the doctrine of the One God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit — coeternal and co-equal — found in the Bible.

But, in the "Assemblies of God" denomination, they have what they call the "16 Fundamental Truths" and the Trinity is in that list. In the words of the AoG, they say that the Trinity is "in harmony with Scripture."

Well, this is exactly what Catholics use as the ultimate criterion in judging what is right in the Tradition of the Catholic Church: Exactly.

AND, the Doctrine of the Trinity was FIRST OFFICIALLY PUT FORTH by a COUNCIL OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (a gathering of bishops) back in the 300's AD, right after the Church was legalized, and so could pull off a public meeting of all it's leaders. This was the COUNCIL OF NICEA.

So, members of the Assembly of God community will allow doctrines “not (explicitly) found in the Scriptures” -- just like Catholics do.

A bit more on the Bible: The first canon of (list of books in) the NT was promulgated in A.D. 397 at the Council of Orange in Africa. Some Protestants claim that the canon was only put forth at the Council of Trent (held from 1545 1563); however, this is incorrect. It was not promulgated then but re-iterated....after Martin Luther had decided to take out the Letter to the Hebrews, the Letter of James, the Book of Revelation and the Letter of Jude.....

The difference with the Protestant Old Testament and the Catholic one is about which version was used in the time of Jesus. While some Protestants believe that

the Catholic Church "added" books to the Bible, here is a description of what happened: About 300 years before Jesus' time, Israel was conquered by Alexander the Great, who spoke Greek. Soon, and for 300 years in the Middle East, Greek became the language of learned society, and so the later books of the Bible (those written between 300BC and the time of Jesus). After the new Christian community fell out of favor with mainstream Judaism (around A.D. 100), the Jewish community then decided to accept only the books of the Bible (what we would now call the Old Testament) originally written in Hebrew as their accepted books. But Jesus himself, in his own time, used ALL the books -- those written in Greek or Hebrew originally.

Catholics say that "Jesus used these books in his time" and so they are acceptable, rather than removing them because, two generations after Jesus, the larger Jewish community removed them.

The seven books, originally written in Greek, which were removed around 100AD from use within the Jewish community, by the way, are: Judith, Tobit, Baruch, Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus), the Wisdom of Solomon, First and Second Maccabees, the two Books of Esdras, additions to the Book of Esther, additions to the Book of Daniel, and the Prayer of Manasseh.

As for Sacred Tradition (not tradition w/small "t"), it is another way of handing on the faith—the Latin, "Traditio" means "to hand on". That the early Christian community would have had a "guide" to help people in their understanding of the faith, and not just a sense of each person "turning to their Bible" is surely how things progressed in that time. Think of how Jesus appointed the apostles to lead the Church and Peter to be the rock. Think of how, when there was a disagreement within the Church over how to handle converts, all gathered in Jerusalem for a Council so that they could pray together and ALL would come to accept the same teaching together as a Church.

Indeed, back in the early Church, there was no such thing, of course of anyone having his/her own copy of the Bible to look things up. Indeed, one could quote St. Paul in 2 Thes. 2:15, where he tells his readers to "stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours" — with no mention of checking facts in the Bible. In 1 Cor. 11:2 Paul praises the church "because you...hold fast to the traditions, just as I handed them on to you" - no mention of the Bible.

In fact, Paul's instruction on the celebration of the Eucharist itself (1 Cor. 11:23-26) pre-dates any of the gospels. Paul then goes still further and tells the young bishop Timothy to entrust to faithful people that which he (Timothy) heard from Paul even by way of "many witnesses" (2 Tim. 2:2).

For a good article explaining still more about Tradition, go to this site:<http://www.catholic.com/tracts/scripture-and-tradition>

How are we to use Scripture then as Catholics? Certainly it is the word of God, and certainly we are to focus on Scripture and to make it the center of our Spiritual formation (let's remember that God has used our Protestant brothers and sisters to remind us of the importance of Scripture in our lives.) Indeed, there are Catholics who focus on the writings of saints or certain prayers and don't open up their Bibles much: And this is not a good thing. As St. Jerome wrote in the 4th century: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." We need to be, in a sense, "CathoBaptists" -- men and women who embrace the Church the Eucharist, the Sacraments, and love of neighbor, but who also love the Bible.

So, Catholics need to respond to a modern call to RETURN TO LOVE OF THE SCRIPTURES, but we do so as part of a larger Church. We don't have every person interpreting Scripture only based on their own heart and feelings and maybe a bit of reading, but with the help of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit. And so we have theologians and members of the Church who discuss these issues, and ultimately, we have the Teaching Office of the Church: We call this the Magisterium.

The Magisterium is the interpreter of both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition just as the U.S. Supreme Court is the guardian and interpreter of the Constitution.

As a thought on this, because the average American recoils, naturally, from the idea that there is some authority figure or group to "tell them what to do" -- there is a history to all of this. In the early Church they were rocked by dissension and disagreements that went to the heart of the faith. And these experiences helped the early Christians to appreciate the value of having some kind of authority in their community to say "this is what we believe."

We don't ever want to persecute or to mistreat any person who disagrees with the "official" teaching, and there might be times when a person struggles with an "official" interpretation, but it is good to have a place where "the buck stops." Indeed, back in the 1970's and 80's there was a highly-placed bishop in a U.S.-based Protestant denomination that publically wrote that Jesus never physically rose from

the dead -- and nothing was done about it by the leaders of his denomination. This man served as bishop of a major diocese for many years after he continued to make this statement that Jesus never physically rose from the dead.

Indeed, I am glad that we, in our Church, have an authority to turn to if a local Catholic leader gets off track. I am glad that we won't see our Catholic leaders get away with telling people on tv that if they give a donation to their ministry that the viewer will experience health and wealth and a blessed life.

Personally, I remember when I was assigned to a parish in Walkersville, MD, our next-door neighbors split 2 times while I was there -- and one time they kicked out the pastor. This was all over disagreements over interpretations of Scripture. To say that one is "free" of "authority" in a non-Catholic faith community would, then, I would say, be inaccurate: Because instead of "getting rid" of "the Pope" or the "authority of the Church," we just create a scenario where SOMEONE ELSE takes on that authority role -- and often without the wisdom and the sense of history that the Catholic Church has.

So, if each of us is our own "Pope" or each denomination takes on that role, I believe we can get off-track. Take, for example, the teaching, in some Protestant circles, of "The Rapture": The belief that, at the end of time, some people will be beamed up into heaven and some will not. Well, the FIRST TIME this belief surfaced AT ALL in the Christian world was in the 1700's, and it did not become well-known until the 20th. Meanwhile, Catholics have held on to the teachings that come out of Jesus' own words on the end of time: that He will return in glory and that there will be a physical resurrection of the Just ON EARTH and that God will be with his People ON EARTH in the New Jerusalem.

So, the Church is not perfect, but it does help us stay on-track in our beliefs and our interpretations of Scripture. Let's try to appreciate that, even coming from our individualistic American world: Because sometimes having an authority to guide us is a good thing.

Let's continue to pray and to let the Holy Spirit guide us in our daily lives and in our lives as active Catholics using Scripture, confident that we have a 2,000-year-old Church to help us and others in our Church stay on-course.

March 4, 2014 Fr.
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