

Module 2

# REVELATION

**Thesis Statement:**

Theology depends completely on God freely revealing himself and his saving will. Revelation, realized through words and deeds, having an inner unity proclaimed by in Scripture and whose credibility is communicated in the living Tradition and human experience of the Church, call for a free personal and communal response called faith.



## Section 1: Revelation

### Section 1A - What is Revelation?

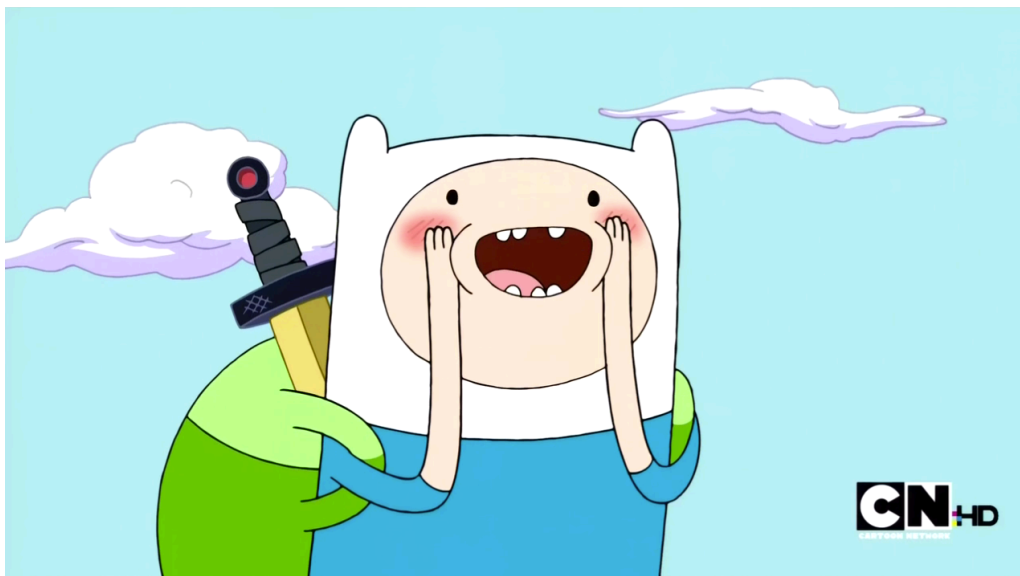
The word revelation (Latin *revelatio*, Greek *apocalypsis*) means literally “the removal of a veil” (Latin *velum*, Greek *kalymma*). Hence, disclosure.

“*Re-velare* is quite specific in concept: it means to take away the velum, or veil or cover. It means to make known, to reveal openly: what was previously covered and invisible is now ‘lifted up’ into sight. When *revelare* is predicated of God, it assumes that God is a hidden God; the meaning is that God’s concealment and invisibility are unveiled and manifested. For in the act of revealing, some things or some one is always made manifest. Thus revelation includes two things in one: the act and faculty of revealing and what is revealed in the act.”<sup>1</sup>

Revelation underscores the fact that God, who did not have any reason to disclose himself, did so out of love. This loving self-disclosure indicates a God who wants to establish a relationship with his people. Relationship is at the heart of revelation. The best example of this would be the relationship we have with our friends. We reach out and maintain this relationship in various ways, and we do not want to lose touch of such relationship, so we do various things to keep the relationship intact. The same with our relationship with God. As God reaches out, so too God awaits an eager and active response from us, which is faith.

*Why do we need to study revelation?*

1. It is the starting point of Christian life: Walter Kasper defines revelation as “the final presupposition, basis, means, and norm of everything that purports to be Christian.” Therefore, it can be said that there is a significant relationship between the Christian faith and the Christian revelation. “Without a prior revelation on God’s part faith would be impossible, for it would have no basis and no object. And without faith, the whole edifice of Christian existence would collapse.”<sup>2</sup> Faith without revelation is impossible, even dangerous. Revelation without faith is pointless.
2. It is the starting point of theology: “Theology is the *science* of faith. It is the conscious and methodical explanation and explication of the divine revelation received and grasped in faith.



<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Fries, *Revelation: Mystrium Salutis* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Avery Dulles, “Faith and Revelation,” in *Systematic Theology* Volume 1, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 92.

Let us take a look at some preliminary notions on revelation:

Catholic Teaching on Revelation	Erroneous/ Faulty Positions
Revelation is the free and gratuitous self-disclosure of a personal God to his elect people	Revelation is a necessary phase in the evolution of the human consciousness, and that God can be known through natural reason. (eg. Hegelians)
It begins with the preliminary revelation to Israel; thus Christian revelation validates yet completes the OT	Christian revelation supersedes OT revelation in the sense that the latter came <i>not</i> from the God and Father of Jesus Christ. (eg. Manichaeans)
The revelation completed by Jesus Christ is God's definitive self-manifestation to humankind in history.	Christ is <i>not</i> the fullness of revelation. Hence, Christianity is no more a privileged locus of revelation as any other revealed religion. (eg. Montanists)
Christian revelation is valid for all people, and directed to the entire human race.	Christian revelation is <i>not</i> addressed to nor intended for all humanity. (eg. Ernst Troeltsch)
Revelation occurs in an intrinsically and mutually ordered combination of deed and word.	Revelation occurs mainly (or only) in words (eg. Orthodox Protestants of the 17th century). Others hold it occurs mainly (or only) in deeds (some 20th century Protestant theologians).

To summarize, the Judaeo-Christian revelation, as it comes to human beings in this life, consists in the free and gracious action by which God addresses his elect people. This revelation, given inchoately to Israel through the prophets of the OT, is perfected and made universal through Christ and his apostles. It is communicated by a combination of words and deeds.

The Church Teaching on Divine Revelation is found in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, known more widely as “**Dei Verbum**.” In Dei Verbum, the concept of revelation is discussed in greater detail, as well as giving insight into the sources of the faith. Let us take a look at Dei Verbum 2, or DV 2:

“In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> DV2.

## Section 1B - Types of Revelation

Revelation can be delineated into many types or categories.<sup>4</sup> For instance:

### \* active vs objective revelation

*Active* revelation is the process of God's self-disclosure to his people, a gradual process that comes through extended periods of history, often times in the form of events. The root word of active is ACT, which denotes "how" God is being revealed.

*Objective* revelation is the fund or deposit of knowledge resulting from the event of revelation. The root word of objective is OBJECT, denoting "what" is being revealed, namely, God and his saving will.

### \* immediate vs. mediate revelation

Revelation is said to be *immediate* in the case of people who receive it directly from God. Examples of these would include (1) the prophets (in the time of the Old Testament), who receive revelation directly from visions and auditions given by God; (2) the apostles (in the time of the New Testament), who receive revelation by listening to the teachings and discourses of Jesus.

On the other hand, revelation is said to be *mediate* when passed on from the direct recipient to other believers. A good example would be how the apostles spread out to the gentile (non-Jewish) lands after the death and resurrection of Christ, and imparted the knowledge of the Kingdom to the people. Another good example would be modern day Christians, who have not encountered the historical Christ, but know of his teachings from centuries of Tradition handed on to them by the Church's magisterium, or teaching office.

### \* Natural vs. Historical

*Natural* revelation means the self-manifestation of God through the regular order of nature, as described for instance in Paul's sermon in Lystra (Acts 14:15-17). God is in the rain from heaven, in the fruitful seasons, in the earth, in the sea. God is in all things, as the Ignatian spirituality might suggest. In nature we see God truly alive, and in its beauty and intricacy, our belief in God is made stronger.

*Historical* revelation, by contrast, is made to particular individuals or groups through particular events that occur in special times or places. An example of this can be the Transfiguration of Jesus (cf. Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8 and Luke 9:28-36), a particular event which happens in Mount Tabor/Hermon during Jesus' public ministry where the knowledge of Christ, being the perfection of the laws and the prophets, is revealed. There is a specific space and time which the revelation occurs, and thus is said to be historical in nature.

### \* public vs. private revelation

*Public* revelation is the revelation that is given by God to the whole human race as the people of God of the new covenant. It is the revelation that is necessary for salvation. Public revelation must be communicable to all members of society and must be certified by signs that make it generally credible. Public revelation is all revelation found in the primary sources of Scripture and Tradition.

*Private* revelation, on the other hand, is revelation which which may occur on occasion to one or several individuals for some special reason. This can be, for instance, in the form of the apparitions of Mary. Examples of these would include Mary's apparition as Our Lady of Guadalupe in Tepeyac, Mexico, in 1531 to Saint Juan Diego; her apparition in Lourdes, France, in 1858 to Saint Bernadette Soubirous; or her appearance to three shepherd children (Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco) of Fatima, Portugal, in 1917

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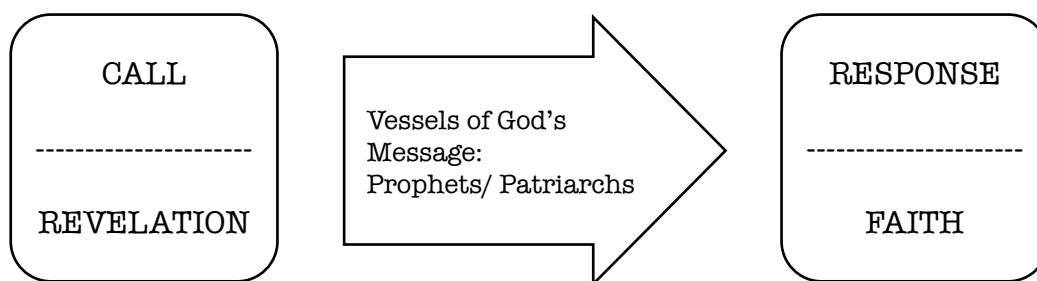
<sup>4</sup> Cf. Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology Volume I*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Calvin eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 93-5.

## Section 2: Examples of Revelation in Biblical Narratives

### Section 2A - Old Testament: Call of Abraham

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him... (Gen 12:1-4)*

In Jewish tradition, Abraham is hailed as the first to be addressed by the Word, and the first to respond to it in faith. Theologically, this address-response marks the beginning of salvation history as such, because for the first time God's personal act of revelation is reciprocated by an equally personal reception, the divine call met by the human response of "Here am I" (Gen 22:1). Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard used the example of Abraham on Mount Moriah to give biblical grounding to his views on the relations between reason and faith, ethics and religion.<sup>5</sup>



### Section 2B - Old Testament: The Prophetic Tradition

Etymologically, the term prophet comes from the Greek *prophētēs*, the term means "one who speaks for another." The significance of prophecy lies not in those who perceive it but in those *to whom the word is to be transmitted*. The prophet knows a two-fold necessity: that of receiving and experiencing God's word, *and* that of announcing and proclaiming it.

There are various stages in the prophetic word-event. It begins with a moment of a revelatory state of minds. The "word of Yahweh" (in Hebrew *dabar YHWH*) comes into the prophet from the outside. These may take the form of visions, auditions, inspirations, inner promptings or symbolic perceptions. Afterwards, there will be an interpretation of the experience of the prophet, often times having an intelligible expression and elaboration in poetic form.

Although many prophets spoke many different words, it must be affirmed that *there is only one Word coming from the one God*. It is a word of salvation, of redemption, of ultimate victory for God's people and their safe and joyful return to him. Louis Bouyer makes an analogy to music: there may be different harmonies, but they comprise one musical theme.

Among the prophets, Amos' announcement of God's *justice* was swiftly followed by Hosea's insistence on God's *mercy*. Isaiah's idea of God's *holiness* was richly complimented by Jeremiah's insight into God's tender *compassion*, culminating in Ezekiel's vision of God dwelling with his people wherever they may be, even (and most especially) in exile.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1954), 64.

## Section 2C - New Testament: Paul

The New Testament continues the Old Testament tradition of revelation. The apostles take the place of the prophets as the primary heralds and recipients of the Word. Paul the Apostle, for instance, gives us the best and most succinct expression of revelation in Scripture, found in the Letter to the Hebrews:

*“In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers through the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”* (Hebrews 1:1-2)

We can gain insight about revelation in the Pauline corpus. Revelation for Paul is the unveiling of the *mysterion*, the mystery of Christ. This *mysterion* is the hidden plan of God for the salvation of all men in Christ.

*“For God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”* (Ephesians 1:9-10)

For Paul, this unveiling of the *mysterion* is an act of God which:

- \* Began in the past
- \* Is realized in the event of Jesus Christ, in his life and death and especially in the resurrection (Rom 1:1-4)
- \* Is made known to the apostles, including Paul as the “least of the apostles” (1 Cor 15:8-9)
- \* Continues to occur in the preaching of the Gospel (Rom 1:16)
- \* All of these are aspects of one unified occurrence

*“All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him”* (Matthew 11:27)

## Section 2D - New Testament: Jesus Christ

We affirm that it is Jesus Christ where we receive revelation definitively and most fully. He is both the agent and content of revelation.

Agent, because this revelation is still done through a combination of words and deeds. In Christ, word and deed approach identity. He is the *verbum visibile*. Content, because Christ reveals God himself. Christ reveals the Trinity, and is the generated Son, incarnated into the world so that the Father may be made known to the world, in the Holy Spirit

Later on once we reach the Christology portion of the class, the definitiveness of the revelation in Christ will be discussed in greater detail.

### Section 3: Christian Revelation and Other World Religions

The multitude of religions creates a real, intellectual difficulty for many people today. How is this religious diversity to be interpreted?

- a) **Religious nihilism** - the rejection of all religions
- b) **Relativistic pluralism** - “there are many ways to the same truth”
- c) **Pure symbolism** - religion simply arouse emotion or express subjective states of consciousness

What is the Christian claim? We must claim that Christian revelation is definitive and unsurpassable.

*“Christianity understands itself as the religion which is intended for all men, the absolute religion, which can recognize no other alongside as equally authorized.”<sup>6</sup>*

*“Christianity is God’s one ultimate self-disclosure, completely valid for all men in whatever age they may be living, essentially definitive, never to be superseded... The claim is not advanced on behalf of a particular religious body, but on behalf of the gospel of grace.”<sup>7</sup>*

This claim to uniqueness, universality and (in some sense) absoluteness can be made from either an exclusivist or an inclusivist point of view.

- 1. **Exclusivist:** Since Christianity is God’s way for all humanity, there is no truth, no genuine relation to God outside the Christian faith. Other religions must be false.
- 2. **Inclusivist:** Acknowledges the truth to be found in other religions, but insists that everything true in these religions finds its deepest meaning and perfect completion in Christ.

#### Seven theses about Christianity vis-à-vis other world religions:

- 1. Not everything in other world religions is true and good. Because of fallen human nature, they will contain error and perversion.
- 2. There is much that is naturally good in these religions. They inculcate virtues such as prayer, self-denial, love of neighbor, and so forth.
- 3. In addition, they may bear traces of the supernatural. These religions are nevertheless made by men who live in a supernatural order, in a “graced world.”
- 4. They may also serve as means of grace for their followers. We can justify this by appealing to the incarnational structure of grace. God’s grace encounters people “where they are,” in their particular experiences, culture and ways of life.
- 5. These religions may also contain revelation. This is obviously true of faiths which derive from, or have been influenced by Judaism or Christianity (i.e. Islam).
- 6. Some theologians therefore speak of “anonymous Christians” (Rahner) or “latent Christians” (Tillich).
- 7. However, at its very heart, we must insist that Christianity is the fulfillment of all that is valid in other religions. Even apologetically, the statement is not condescending and gratuitous. Innumerable converts from other religions attest that they have experienced the thrill of finding in christianity what they previously adhered to it “in shadowy form.” They feel that they have passed from images into truth.

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. V, 118.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Kasper, “Absoluteness of Christianity,” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 1, 311.

As a final point:

- \* Revelation is the invitation of God for people to understand Him and His will, to establish friendship, common life and relationship between Him and His people. (DV 2)
- \* Revelation is realized by deeds and words. (DV 2)
- \* Christ is both the mediator [agent] and the fullness [content] of all revelation. (DV 2)
- \* God reveals inchoately [initially] to the patriarchs and the prophets in the Old Testament. (DV 3)
- \* Christ is the definitive revelation of God in the New Testament. (DV 4)
- \* Although we, as Christians, proclaim that Christ is the way, the truth and the life, there are rays of this way, truth and life, found in some form in other religions. (NA 2)
- \* The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions. (NA 2)
- \* The Church rejects any discrimination or harassment to people of any race, color, condition of life, or religion. (NA 5)

#### **Section 4: Sources of the Faith**

##### **Section 4A - What are the Sources?**

Revelation, the mystery of Christ, the divine self-gift of God, is communicated in different ways. Primarily, it is communicated in two ways: through **Sacred Scripture** and **Sacred Tradition**. Secondly, it also reveals itself in **Human Experience**, the Christian witness and culture that exist among human beings. Together, these three sources come from the same origin (God) and unite in one goal: the proclamation of revelation in Christ.

The Church looks to God's revelation in the Scripture and Tradition as the only authentic and complete source for our knowledge about God and God's will for the whole human race. It is the responsibility of the Church, through her teaching (doctrines), her sacraments (worship) and her ministries (morals), to transmit to every new generation all that God has revealed. As the successors of the Apostles, it is the particular and exclusive responsibility of the bishops in union with the Pope – who are also the Magisterium – to faithfully teach, interpret, and preserve the Scriptures and Tradition for all believers until Christ returns in glory.

Scripture and Tradition are integrally related, proceeding as they do from one Word of God, but they are not identical. Within the life of the Church, Scripture offers a kind of fixed point, a finite set of normative texts that grounds Christian faith in a set of ancient testimonies to foundational events. Scripture does not change, and will never be changed, but the understanding and interpretation of Scripture will change depending on the signs of the times.

This is where Tradition comes in. Tradition always embraces the scriptural testimony, but also and more importantly, goes beyond it. Tradition brings Scripture into critical dialogue with the life of the Church and the world from generation to generation.

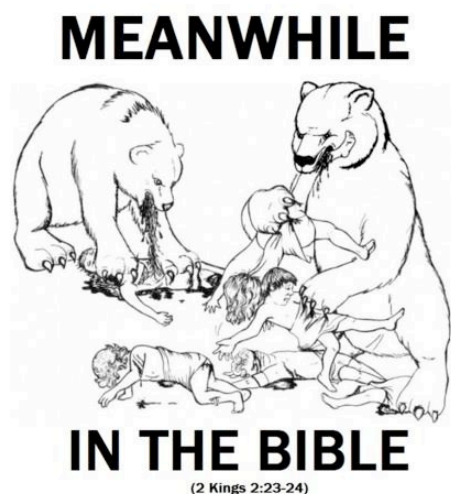


## Section 4B - Against Sola Scriptura

*Sola Scriptura* means “Scripture alone,” and it was a rallying cry of some of the Protestant reformers who broke away from the Catholic Church in the 1500s. They felt that by appealing to Tradition, Catholic religious leaders were exercising biased control over the Church, and the only true objective source of God’s revelation was the Bible. So they rejected Tradition as a source of Revelation and tried to make their case for the Scripture alone. This disagreement over the source of Revelation continues to be a major difference between Catholic Christians and many Protestant Christians yet today. But through patient dialogue, the different Christian churches are more tolerant and appreciative of one another than they have been in centuries.<sup>8</sup>

Sola Scriptura is the doctrine that all knowledge that is necessary can be found in Scripture. To a certain degree, this is true. All that is necessary for faith has been delivered through Christ, the ultimate definitive revelation. There is no further new public revelation after Christ. However, Christ taught many things that are not found in the Bible.<sup>9</sup> These teachings and practices have been passed on through the apostles and the living magisterium, and are thus also necessary (Thus the necessity for Tradition).

Sola Scriptura is a dangerous dogma, because it says that every individual is inspired by the Holy Spirit when reading Scripture. In other words, it affirms that every person is infallible, which is false, given the fallen nature of man. This can be seen in the countless contradictions between Protestant denominations, and other non-Catholic Christians interpretations of the Bible. Would the Holy Spirit contradict Himself? Sola Scriptura can lead to harmful interpretation of the Bible. (Look at fundamentalists who consider the story of Adam and Eve to have occurred in history, as compared to seeing it as a Biblical story of mythic value. This will be discussed further in a later discussion)



Revelation in the context of a living Tradition involves a developing process of clarifying and actualizing God’s Word by being articulated through different human insights and cultures.<sup>10</sup> “There is growth and insight into the realities and words that are being passed on... the Holy Scriptures themselves are more thoroughly understood and constantly actualized in the Church.”<sup>11</sup>

However, this does not mean that reading Scripture is dangerous. It is a good thing to read the Bible and allow it to have an effect on us when we read (as with the useful exercise like *Lectio Divina*). We must find the meaning of Scripture for ourselves as well, with the assistance of both Tradition and Human Experience. Scripture can never be isolated. It is through the help of the other sources of the faith that it acquires its perfect interpretation.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Singer-Towns, “Knowing God: Reason and Revelation” in *The Catholic Faith Handbook* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s, 2004), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Mark 4:2, 6:34; Acts 1:2-3.

<sup>10</sup> *NCDP* 143.

<sup>11</sup> *DV* 8.

## Section 4C - Against Traditionalism

*"Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."*<sup>12</sup>

*"A dead thing can go with the stream, a living thing can go against it."*<sup>13</sup>

Tradition is important, yes. But an exaggeration on it becomes dangerous. Certain people view Tradition as primarily *preservative* in function. However, there are things that Tradition cannot encompass fully. It is our job, as part of the living faith, to purify Tradition, by actively involving ourselves with Scripture and the faith. Human experience helps direct the faith to proper understanding. My favorite pope, John XXIII, once said: "the Church is not an archaeological museum, but is alive, tireless, and life-giving; and it makes its way forward, often in unexpected ways." (Some important issues that can be discussed with regard to Traditionalism can include the non-ordination of women<sup>14</sup> and the ban of gay males from admission into seminaries<sup>15</sup>). Tradition must move with the times, otherwise, it will die, getting caught in the river of history.

## Section 5: Tradition

### Section 5A - What is Tradition?

Tradition (from the Latin verb *tradere*, meaning "to pass or hand something on") refers to both:

- 1) the living heritage, the content that is handed on, (may refer to doctrine, account or custom) transmitted from one generation to another [the *what* of tradition]. (Examples: Jesus being born on December 25, or on the road to Calvary, a pious woman washed the face of Jesus).
- 2) the actual process of handing on the faith. Tradition thus refers to the organ or mode of transmission of said doctrine, account or custom [the *how* of tradition]. The official organ of tradition is known as the magisterium, the teaching authority, the teaching office of the Church.

Tradition is concerned with the continuity of the Church. Tradition is the preservation of the essential identity and mission of the Church. However, Tradition is living and growing, making progress in the Church through insight and deeper interiorization within the heart of the faithful. Tradition is not static or simply preservative. It develops dynamically.

If we are to accept the dynamic character of Tradition, we must see it as more than simply the preservation or development of the "old" but also the openness to what appears as novel, provocative and prophetic. Authentic Catholic Tradition is never merely concerned with memory; it is also oriented towards the future. There is place in Tradition for new insights, practices and perspectives for as long as they serve to continue reinvigorating and reorienting the faith to novel ways towards the constant goal of bringing the Kingdom of God on earth.

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<sup>12</sup> Quote by Jaroslav Pelikan.

<sup>13</sup> Quote by G.K. Chesterton.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* of John Paul II.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. "Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders". November 4, 2005. A counter argument to this Instruction can be found in an article by Rev. Gerard Thomas, "A Letter to Benedict the XVI by a Gay Priest."

Tradition is not only doctrine, but also includes all the Catholic Christian practices - the study, preaching, social action, witness and life of the Church in her belief and in her prayer.<sup>16</sup>

Also, there is a difference between Tradition (singular and uppercase, referring to the collective of all beliefs of the Church) and traditions (lower case, referring to the individual practices, accounts and customs of the Church).

### Section 5B - Magisterium

One of the most important tasks of the hierarchy is to keep the Church in the truth of the Gospel by proclaiming sound doctrine and condemning doctrinal deviations. In this function, the hierarchy constitutes the Church's Magisterium.

The word *magisterium* means, literally, the authority of the master (*magister*) or teacher. In the modern church, the term refers both to 1) the unique teaching authority of the bishops, and 2) the bishops themselves, which consists of College of Bishops, under the headship of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. *Dei Verbum* has some affirmations regarding the Magisterium:

“The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, (8) has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, (9) whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.”<sup>17</sup>

### Section 5C - The Exercise of the Magisterium and Infallibility<sup>18</sup>

On Saturday you get up to see that Facebook has exploded over a pastoral letter issued by your local bishop on matters regarding contraception. A week later, you are watching the evening news and learn that the pope has released a new encyclical, *Laudato Si*. Another week goes by and you receive a link to an online article that reports that some Vatican congregation has issued a new document on the recruitment and training of seminarians. A few weeks later, your parish priest mentions in his homily a recent letter from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on devotion to Mary and the saints. Each of these represents, in some sense, an official exercise of the Church's teaching authority. This presents a practical problem. How do Catholics assess the significance of these different documents? Surely they are not all equally authoritative?

An elaborate set of distinctions regarding the exercise of the magisterium has emerged out of the two-thousand year history of the Catholic Church. At the most general level we can distinguish between three distinct modes in which the Church's teaching office exercises its authority:

- 1) the *ORDINARY MAGISTERIUM* refers to the more common exercises of the pope and bishops' teaching authority when they teach either individually or in groups.
- 2) the *EXTRAORDINARY MAGISTERIUM* refers to the more rare exercise of the Church's teaching office in the form of a solemn definition by either the pope or an ecumenical council
- 3) the *ORDINARY UNIVERSAL MAGISTERIUM* refers to the common judgment of the whole college of bishops (in union with the bishop of Rome) that a teaching is to be held definitive.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *DV* 8.

<sup>17</sup> *DV* 10.

<sup>18</sup> Adapted from Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 74-89.

Mode of Magisterium	Who Exercises this mode?	Infallible or not?	Example
Ordinary Magisterium	Individual Bishop	Non-Infallible	When a bishop gives a talk regarding the distribution of contraceptive devices by the government
	A Group of Bishops	Non-Infallible	Synods and episcopal conferences
	The Bishop of Rome (Pope)	Non-Infallible	1) <b>Encyclical Letter:</b> Documents addressed to the whole college of bishops, the whole Church or the whole world. 2) <b>Apostolic Letters:</b> Papal letters sent to some particular category of persons, like a group of bishops, or the youth 3) <b>Apostolic Exhortations:</b> Documents issued by the pope in response to the deliberations of an episcopal synod 4) <b>Occasional Papal Addresses:</b> Speeches given to various groups who are received by the Pope in the Vatican, as well as speeches given during his travels
Extraordinary Magisterium	The College of Bishops Issuing a Solemn Definition While Gathered in an Ecumenical Council	Infallible	Vatican I: in documents, every instance of the words “we teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma” precede an infallible solemn definition
	The Bishop of Rome (Pope), as Head of the College of Bishops, Issuing a Solemn Definition <i>Ex Cathedra</i>	Infallible	1) Benedict XII’s teaching on the beatific vision in <i>Benedictus Deus</i> [1336] 2) Pius IX’s definition of the Immaculate Conception in <i>Ineffabilis Deus</i> [1854] 3) Pius XII’s definition of the Assumption of Mary in <i>Munificentissimus Deus</i> [1950]
Ordinary Universal Magisterium	Whole College of Bishops Dispersed Throughout the World When United in Judgment that a Teaching is to Be Held as Definitive	Depends on situation	Pope John Paul II’s apostolic letter <i>Ordinatio Sacerdotalis</i> on reserving priestly ordination to men alone.  However, many eminent theologians have disputed that it is truly infallible.
Sense of the Faithful	<i>Consensus fidelium</i> , when all the faithful are united in their belief, manifesting a true consensus.	Infallible	Immaculate Conception, pre-1854

One of the most controversial, and frankly, misunderstood teaching in Roman Catholicism is its teaching on infallibility.

In order to grasp this teaching we need to go all the way back to Jesus' parting promise to his followers that "I am with you always until the end of the age" (Matt 28:30). Christians have relied on that promise for the past two millennia, believing that Jesus would never abandon the Church. We celebrate the feast of Pentecost as a commemoration of Jesus offering his Spirit to the Church to guide and direct the community of faith across the centuries. It is the Holy Spirit whom we believe works to keep the Church faithful to the Gospel. This fundamental conviction of Catholicism, that through the power of the Spirit, Christ will not abandon his Church, is often referred to as the **indefectibility** of the Church. "The whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one cannot be mistaken in belief" (LG 12).

The early Church recognized that while the Holy Spirit animated the whole Church, the bishops were given a particular gift, "a charism of truth," that would enable them to faithfully proclaim the apostolic faith. By the end of the first millennium, it was commonly held that when all the bishops gathered in an ecumenical council to teach on faith and morals, and their teaching was received by all the churches, that teaching was protected from error and normative for belief. This is the infallibility given to solemn definitions of ecumenical councils.

Another kind of infallibility is given to the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, and this is papal infallibility. In this regard, the Pope enjoys the charism of infallibility in his office as teacher. As the First Vatican Council defined: "We teach and define it to be a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when acting in his office as pastor and teacher of all Christians, by his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, through the divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, he enjoys that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to be endowed in defining doctrine concerning faith and morals; and therefore such definitions of the said Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church." Remember, not all statements of the Pope are infallible. Only statements that are done *ex cathedra*.

FYI: An *ex cathedra* (trans. "from the chair") definition is one in which the Pope employs the fullness of his apostolic authority to make a final and irrevocable decision on a question of faith or morals, with the clear intention of binding all the faithful to its acceptance. There are seven *ex cathedra* pronouncements in the history of the Church.

#### *Final point for reflection:*

Over the span of two millennia, the papacy moved from being a court of final appeal that only rarely pronounced on doctrinal matters, to a situation today, in which the Pope is viewed as the chief theologian of the Catholic Church. Some would say that this is an altogether necessary and appropriate development required by the complex demands of a global Church in the modern world. They would point out that the Pope stands today as a unique moral voice that speaks with unparalleled spiritual authority. Others worry that the practice of Popes writing frequent encyclicals that offer in-depth theological explorations of doctrinal questions makes it difficult to distinguish between normative doctrinal pronouncements and papal theological reflection with which the theologians might legitimately differ. They also wonder whether a strong papal teaching authority risks obscuring the teaching role of the bishops who are often better situated to address questions of local or regional import.

## Section 6: Human Experience

Human experience is a place where the gospel is grounded, embodied, interpreted and lived out. It is an interpretative context which raises new questions, offers challenges and demands answers of the gospel which are not always obvious when it is reflected solely as abstraction. Human experience, therefore, concretizes the faith into the actual daily life of the believer.<sup>19</sup>

Human experience becomes both source for things that need to be reflected and acted upon (these will include personal relationships, family, society) as well as examples of Christian commitment (catechists, teachers, Christian volunteers, and many more). It can also come from the actual experience of society, in its struggles, in its culture, and in its context.

### *Human experience as Christian witness:*

“Besides the Church’s doctrine, moral teachings and liturgy, another basic source for catechesis is the concrete moral witness of countless simple Filipino Catholic women and men, whose lives of generous service and sacrifice provide indispensable examples and living “proofs” of authentic, mature Christian faith. In personal relationships, in family and community service, in the testimony of upright lives amidst numerous hardships and obstacles, these men and women show the Christian message to be credible and practical in the concrete conditions of the average Filipino’s daily life. They encourage and inspire others to deeper personal Christian commitment and greater fidelity to Christ. Catechists throughout the Christian centuries have used the faithful witness of holy women and men to make Christ vividly present to their contemporaries.”<sup>20</sup>

### *Human experience as context:*

“A final source for catechesis in the Philippines is simply the created realities and culture of the Filipino people. Nothing is profane for those who have the eyes of Faith to see and whose vision is grounded in God’s continuous act of creating, on the Eternal Son’s Incarnation in Jesus Christ and on the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost... Catechesis, as flowing from and exercised in faith, develops the capacity to discern in the events, needs and longings of Filipinos today, genuine signs of the presence and purpose of God, who speaks ‘according to the culture proper to each age,’ In the Philippine context, among such desires would be the workers’ aspirations for greater justice, women’s search for greater participation in public life and equal recognition, and the Third World’s thrust for independence and autonomy.”<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

*Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. For the Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology.*

-Dei Verbum 24

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 4-5.

<sup>20</sup> NCDP 155.

<sup>21</sup> NCDP 157.