

On Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture.

16. How is divine revelation spread among men and preserved in the true Church?

By two channels--holy tradition and holy Scripture.

17. What is meant by the name *holy tradition*?

By the name holy tradition is meant the doctrine of the faith, the law of God, the sacraments, and the ritual as handed down by the true believers and worshipers of God by word and example from one to another, and from generation to generation.

18. Is there any sure repository of holy tradition?

All true believers united by the holy tradition of the faith, collectively and successively, by the will of God, compose the Church; and she is the sure repository of holy tradition, or, as St. Paul expresses it, *The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.* [1 Tim. iii. 15.](#)

St. Irenæus writes thus:

We ought not to seek among others the truth, which we may have for asking from the Church; for in her, as in a rich treasure-house, the Apostles have laid up in its fullness all that pertains to the truth, so that whosoever seeketh may receive from her the food of life. She is the door of life. (Adv. Hæres. lib. iii. c. 4.)

19. What is that which you call *holy Scripture*?

Certain books written by the Spirit of God through men sanctified by God, called Prophets and Apostles. These books are commonly termed the Bible.

20. What does the word *Bible* mean?

It is Greek, and means *the books*. The name signifies that the sacred books deserve attention before all others.

21. Which is the more ancient, holy tradition or holy Scripture?

The most ancient and original instrument for spreading divine revelation is holy tradition. From Adam to Moses there were no sacred books. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself delivered his divine doctrine and ordinances to his Disciples by word and example, but not by writing. The same method was followed by the Apostles also at first, when they spread abroad the faith and

established the Church of Christ. The necessity of tradition is further evident from this, that books can be available only to a small part of mankind, but tradition to all.

22. Why, then, was holy Scripture given?

To this end, that divine revelation might be preserved more exactly and unchangeably. In holy Scripture we read the words of the Prophets and Apostles precisely as if we were living with them and listening to them, although the latest of the sacred books were written a thousand and some hundred years before our time.

23. Must we follow holy tradition, even when we possess holy Scripture?

We must follow that tradition which agrees with the divine revelation and with holy Scripture, as is taught us by holy Scripture itself. The Apostle Paul writes: *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.* [2 Thess. ii. 15.](#)

24. Why is tradition necessary even now?

As a guide to the right understanding of holy Scripture, for the right ministration of the sacraments, and the preservation of sacred rites and ceremonies in the purity of their original institution.

St. Basil the Great says of this as follows:

Of the doctrines and injunctions kept by the Church, some we have from written instruction. but some we have received from, apostolical tradition, by succession in private. Both the former and the latter have one and the same force for piety, and this will be contradicted by no one who has ever so little knowledge in the ordinances of the Church; for were we to dare to reject unwritten customs, as if they had no great importance, we should insensibly mutilate the Gospel, even in the most essential points, or, rather, for the teaching of the Apostles leave but an empty name. For instance, let us mention before all else the very first and commonest act of Christians, that they who trust in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ should sign themselves with the sign of the cross--who hath taught this by writing? To turn to the east in prayer--what Scripture have we for this? The words of invocation in the change of the Eucharistic bread and of the Cup of blessing--by which of the Saints have they been left us in writing? for we are not content with those words which the Apostle or the Gospel records, but both before them and after them, we pronounce others also, which we hold to be of great force for the sacrament, though we have received them from unwritten

teaching. By what Scripture is it, in like manner, that we bless the water of baptism, the oil of unction, and the person himself who is baptized? Is it not by a silent and secret tradition? What more? The very practice itself of anointing with oil--what written word have we for it? Whence is the rule of trine immersion? and the rest of the ceremonies at baptism, the renunciation of Satan and his angels?--from what Scripture are they taken? Are they not all from this unpublished and private teaching, which our Fathers kept under a reserve inaccessible to curiosity and profane disquisition, having been taught as a first principle to guard by silence the sanctity of the mysteries? for how were it fit to publish in writing the doctrine of those things, on which the unbaptized may not so much as look? (Can. xcvi. De Spir. Sanct. c. xxvii.)