

REVELATION: SCRIPTURE AND FAITH

Definition:

Revelation is God's Self-Disclosure (Self-Communication) to us.
"no one has ever seen God" (John 1:18).
Yet we talk *about* God and *in the name* of God all the time.

Questions:

Where do we get our "information" about God?
How does God "communicate" with us?
Under what conditions and circumstances does this communication occur?
How can we be sure that we have, in fact, been "in touch with" God rather than
with our own wish-projections and imaginings?
Is the *form* of divine self-disclosure verbal, dramatic, mystical, historical, social,
political, natural, cosmic or what?

These are the same questions concerning belief and unbelief.

Revelation in the Old Testament:

"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" (*Divine Revelation*, no. 2).

At the heart of the faith of Israel in the Old Testament are the conviction and affirmation that God has intervened in history, modifying the course of Israel's historical experience and the lives of individuals within Israel.

Master Story of the Old Testament:

The Exodus story of the Passover from slavery to freedom through the Saving God is repeated.

"Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation great, strong and numerous. When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O Lord, have given me.' And having set them before the Lord, your God, you shall bow down in his presence" (Dt. 26: 5-10).

Revelation in the New Testament:

“It is common knowledge that among all the inspired writings, including those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special place, and rightly so, because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our Savior” (*Divine Revelation*, no. 18).

At the heart of the faith of disciples in the New Testament is the conviction that Christ is the summit and fullness of revelation.

Master Story of the New Testament:

The Passion Narratives of the Passover from death to the resurrection of Jesus through the Saving God is repeated in all four Gospels.

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Jesus and the Word of God:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-2; 14).

Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is the Word incarnate. The person of Jesus himself is the message of God, the definitive revelation of God.

God and Humans as Co-authors:

“Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the apostles, holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:15-16) they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. 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 acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation” (*Divine Revelation*, no. 11).

Inspiration and Interpretation:

“Moreover, we possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Know this first of all, that there is no prophesy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God” (2 Peter 1:19-21).

The Bible is God’s Word in human words.

Word in the Old Testament is Dabar (Word is dynamic deed, not just a concept)

Word in the New Testament is Logos (Word is the person of Jesus in the flesh)

Interpretation of the Bible depends on the sense intended by the Divine and human authors. The Church insists that we must “carefully investigate the meaning the sacred writers intended” (*Divine Revelation*, no. 12).

Fundamentalist believers overemphasize the divinity of the biblical text to such an extent that they deny the text’s real human character.

Foundational believers emphasize a balanced approach that considers the literary form and culture of the human word as well as the revelation of the divinely inspired word.

Formation of the Bible:

The Bible is a library of books with various literary genres written at different times in history by various human authors, all under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Both the Old and New Testaments began as Oral Traditions.

Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament:

The Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament) was written between 900 BC and 50 BC. Although its authors write of pre-recorded times such as creation, the dominant historical period of the Old Testament spans two millennia from 2000 BC to the birth of Christ. Most of the Old Testament texts were composed gradually, often over centuries, by generations of authors who committed to writing, and revised repeatedly, material they first encountered in Oral Tradition or as liturgical traditions. The Old Testament was first written in Hebrew or Aramaic and it originally contained 39 Books categorized as the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The New Testament simply calls it the “The Law and the Prophets.”

Greek Old Testament:

After the Babylonian Exile, many Jews lived in the Diaspora outside of Palestine and Greek was their first language. In c. 250 BC some 70-72 Greek speaking Jewish scholars at Alexandria in Egypt translated the Hebrew Bible into the Greek Septuagint (LXX) that included 7 additional books with a Greek flavor: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, and 1 & 2 Maccabees

plus additions to Esther and Daniel. Therefore, this Alexandrian usage of the Old Testament included 46 Books instead of the traditional 39 Books. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD Talmudic Rabbis of the Pharisee tradition had settled in Jamnia, on the boarder of Judah near the Mediterranean. In 100 AD they had gathered in council and established the Jamnian canon of 39 Books as the standard for the Old Testament. However, by the time of Jesus, two editions of the Old Testament were in use and had a bilingual form: Hebrew and Greek.

Transition from Christian Jews to Jewish Christians:

The Christian Jews had been going to the synagogue on Saturdays to hear the written scriptures of the Old Testament proclaimed and then they gathered in their home churches on Sunday to celebrate the “Breaking of the Bread.”

Greek New Testament:

The Christian Scripture (New Testament) was written between 50 and 150 AD. The early Christians for two decades between Jesus’ Ascension in 30 AD and the first writings of the New Testament in the 50’s AD relied on the Oral Tradition of retelling the story of Jesus, his preaching and his teaching at their gatherings.

St. Paul begins to put the Oral Tradition of Jesus into writing in the early 50’s with his first letter to the Thessalonians and continues to write the rest of his letters into the mid 60’s when he is martyred in Rome. Some other letters continued to be written by other authors for the next 50 years until 150 AD.

The Church Matures through the Holy Spirit:

As the “New Way” in the Acts of the Apostles continued to grow and converts were first called Christians, the Church was in need of a Catechism for the new Catechumens and a Handbook for the itinerant preachers who were missionaries and were establishing new home churches. It was assumed that St. Mark wrote his Gospel for the Gentiles, especially those in Rome, in the 70’s, St. Matthew for Jewish Christians in the 80’s, and St. Luke for Greeks in the 80’s, and St. John for peoples of Asia Minor in the 90’s. More recent research indicates that the Gospels were more likely written by Mark, Matthew and Luke in the 50’s - 60’s, before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. Nevertheless, the Gospels always reflect three layers: the preaching of Jesus, the perspective of the Evangelist writing, and the situation of the community for whom the Evangelist is writing.

At Jamnia in 100 AD, the Rabbis also expelled Christian Jews from entering the Jewish synagogue and therefore the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist were combined and both were celebrated on Sunday in their home churches. Therefore, the Oral Tradition preceded the Written Tradition and the Church preceded the New Testament. The Gospels are truly the “Book of the Church.” The Oral Tradition continued to organically develop in the Church after the New Testament was in use. By the time of St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in Syria who was martyred in 107 AD, Christians were already known

as “Catholic” and the hierarchy of the Church was clearly defined in his letters as the deacon, priest, and bishop with primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.

Latin Old and New Testament:

In the 100 years that it took to write the New Testament, many writings were compiled from the Oral Tradition. Since Greek was the common language of the early Church and the international language of the Roman Empire, the New Testament was originally written in Greek. However, in 325 AD with the advent of Constantine (306-337 AD) and the spread of Christianity, Latin became the common language of the Greco-Roman Empire. In 384 AD, St. Jerome, the secretary to Pope Damasus, translated the 39 Books of Old Testament from the original Hebrew and Aramaic as well as the 7 Alexandrian Greek Books of the Septuagint (LXX) in addition to the 27 Books of the New Testament from their original Greek into one complete Bible called the Latin Vulgate. Therefore, by the end of the fourth century the New Testament had a bilingual form: Greek and Latin. In 397 AD at the Council of Carthage the Catholic Church fixed the New Testament canon of 27 Books that were in use to be authoritative.

First One Thousand Years of Tradition:

The Latin Vulgate contains the complete 46 Books of the Old Testament and the 27 Books of the New Testament for a total of 73 Books that has been used by the Catholic Church to this day. It was not until the 16th century, at the time of the Protestant Reformation, that Martin Luther omitted from the Bible the 7 Greek Alexandrian Books of the Septuagint (LXX) in the Old Testament and some of New Testament writings, such as the Letter of James. Therefore, the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546 officially closed the canon of Scripture and continued the Written Tradition that she had maintained for a thousand years. Subsequently, in 1700 the Protestant Churches formulated their own canon by restoring all 27 Books of the New Testament and also including the disputed 7 Greek Books of the Old Testament in a separate section called the “Apocrypha,” which the Catholic Bibles refer to as “Deuterocanonical.”