

Sacred Tradition

Sacred Tradition, also known as **Tradition** with a capital “T”, is defined in Catechism of the Catholic Church¹ (§76, 77) and represents the oral Apostolic teaching of the Church, handed down from the Apostles, who handed on the Gospel both orally and in written form. It is unchanging; it is those elements of the truth handed on to us that cannot be abandoned and are binding on all Catholics.

Divine Revelation consists of three parts, of which **Tradition** is but one; the other two parts are **Scripture** and the **Magisterium**, or teaching authority of the Church (CCC §85). Some examples of Tradition are the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, the Canon of the Bible, and Purgatory. The Vatican II document *Dei Verbum*² (DV §8) expresses Tradition in the following manner:

... Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes. ... The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. ...

The above is referenced in the Catechism (CCC §78) in its description of Tradition. Further in the same article, CCC §83-1 elaborates on Apostolic Tradition:

The Tradition here in question comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus’ teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition.

Sacred Tradition differs from **tradition** with a small “t”. The latter is more akin to custom or practice, which can change for one culture or time to another. Examples are wearing a prayer shawl, praying a novena on a certain occasion, or when to kneel and stand in a church. CCC §83-2 contrasts the two:

Tradition is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time. These are the particular forms, adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church’s Magisterium.

What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations, until Christ returns in glory.

These ideas are summarized (CCC §96-100) as:

- “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God” (DV §10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches.
- “The Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes” (DV §8-1).
- Thanks to its supernatural sense of faith, the People of God as a whole never ceases to welcome, to penetrate more deeply and to live more fully from the gift of divine Revelation.
- The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him.

¹ URL http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/pls1c2a2.htm

² URL http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html and <http://www.cin.org/v2revel.html>