

# The Bible is a Catholic Book: Tradition, Apostolic Authority, and Scripture

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## Jesus as the Fullness of Divine Revelation

No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, *he has made him known*. (John 1:18).

## Jesus Teaches the Disciples

And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, <sup>10</sup> he said, “To you it has been given to know *the secrets of the kingdom of God*; but for others they are in parables. . .” (Luke 8:9–10)

“To [the apostles] he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

“. . . while they were all marveling at everything he did, he said to his disciples, <sup>44</sup> “Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men.” <sup>45</sup> But *they did not understand this saying . . . and they were afraid to ask him about this saying.*” (Luke 9:43–45)

Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep.” <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” <sup>13</sup> Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. . .” (John 11:11–14)

## The Spirit’s Role

These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *he will teach you all things*, and *bring to your remembrance* all that I have said to you. (John 14:25)

<sup>12</sup> “I have yet many things to say to you, *but you cannot bear them now.* <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, *he will guide you into all the truth.* . . (John 16:12–13)

## Jesus Commissions the Apostles to Teach in His Name

*He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.* (Luke 10:16)

“And Jesus came and said to them. . . <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*” (Mt 28:18–20)

“I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them. . . <sup>20</sup> I do not pray for these only, *but also for those who believe in me through their word,* <sup>21</sup> *that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us,* so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17:14–21)

Jesus came to [to the eleven] and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;* and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matt 28:18-20)

But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that *the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.* (John 21:35)

“In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, ‘*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*’” (Acts 20:35)

## Teaching through Letters *and* Oral Tradition

“I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you...” (1 Corinthians 10:2)

“So then, brethren, stand firm and *hold to the traditions* which you were taught by us, either *by word of mouth* or *by letter*.” (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

“Though I have much to write to you, *I would rather not use paper and ink*, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.” (2 John 12)

## Wasn't Jesus Against Tradition?

“And why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup>For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die.’ <sup>5</sup>But you say, ‘If any one tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, he need not honor his father.’ <sup>6</sup>So, *for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God.* <sup>7</sup>You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: <sup>8</sup>‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup>in vain do they worship me, *teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.*” (Matthew 15:1–9)

## Jesus Teaching on Authority

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; <sup>3</sup>*so practice and observe whatever they tell you*, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. (Matthew 23:2)

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*” (Matthew 16:18–19)<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' words to Peter (Matthew 16)	Jesus' Condemnation of the Pharisees (Matthew 23)
“Whatever you <i>bind</i> [ <i>deō</i> ] on earth <i>will be bound</i> (Gk <i>dedemenon</i> ) in heaven” (v. 19)	“They <i>bind</i> [ <i>deō</i> ] heavy burdens on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them” (v. 4)
Jesus said to Peter: “I give to you [sg.] <i>the keys</i> [ <i>kleidas</i> ] <i>of the kingdom of heaven.</i> ” (v. 19)	“... <i>you key shut</i> [ <i>kleiete</i> ] <i>the kingdom of heaven</i> against people” (v. 13)

Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, “Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household, and say to him: . . .

<sup>19</sup>I will thrust you from *your office*, and you will be cast down from *your station*. <sup>20</sup>In that day I will call my servant Eli'akim the son of Hilki'ah, <sup>21</sup>and I will clothe him with *your robe* [*kâthoneth*], and will bind *your girdle* [*'abnet*] on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a *father* to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. <sup>22</sup>And I will place on his shoulder *the key* of the house of David; *he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open*. And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house. <sup>24</sup>And they will hang on him the whole weight of his father's house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons. (Isaiah 22:18, 19–22) <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That Matthew 16 draws on Isaiah 22 is recognized by virtually all scholars who write on Matthew's Gospel, including non-Catholic writers. H. Benedict Green (*Matthew, Poet of the Beatitudes* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 135), explains that “a reference to Isa. 22:22 . . . is inescapable.” See also, e.g., J. A. Emerton, “Binding and Loosing—Forgiving and Retaining,” *JTS* 13 (1962): 325–31; W. D. Allison and D. C. Davies, *Matthew 8–18* (ICC: London: T & T Clark, 1991), 640; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 625; Donald Hagner, *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33a-b; Dallas: Word, 1993–1995), 2:472.

<sup>2</sup> The language identifies Shebna as high priest. He wears robe and girdle—garments worn together only by the high priest (Exod 28:4; 39–40; 29:5–9; 39:27–29; Lev 8:7; 16:4). The rabbis recognized that Isaiah here described the high priest (e.g., *Lev. Rab.* 5.5). For a fuller treatment, see Michael Barber, “The Historical Jesus and Cultic Restoration Eschatology” (Ph.D. diss; Ann Arbor: UMI, 2010). The appearance of the

## The Authority of the Church

“If he refuses to listen to them, *tell it to the church*; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*” (Matthew 18:17–18)

“Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed *to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.* . . . <sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup> *And after there had been much debate*, Peter rose and said to them, ‘Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe... <sup>11</sup> But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.’ <sup>12</sup> *And all the assembly kept silence. . .*” (Acts 15:2, 6–12)

“As [Paul and Timothy] went on their way through the cities, *they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem.*” (Acts 16:4)

## Apostolic Succession

“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and *what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*” (2 Timothy 2:1–2)

In those days Peter stood up among the brethren . . . and said, <sup>16</sup> “Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas. . . <sup>17</sup> For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. . . <sup>20</sup> For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘*His office let another take.*’ . . .” <sup>23</sup> And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup> And they prayed and said, “Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen <sup>25</sup> *to take the place in this ministry and apostleship* from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place.” <sup>26</sup> And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and *he was enrolled with the eleven apostles.* (Acts 1:15–26)

## Early Church Fathers

The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ has done so from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labours], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe. . . Our Apostles too were given to understand by our Lord Jesus Christ that the office of the bishop would give rise to intrigues. For this reason, equipped as they were with perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the men shall succeed to their sacred ministry. Thus, we deem it an injustice to eject from the sacred ministry the persons who were appointed by them, or later, with the consent of the whole Church, by other men in high repute” —Clement, *Letter to the Corinthians*, 42:1–4; 44:1–3 (A.D. 96).

“It is possible, then, for everyone in every church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors to our own times—men who neither knew nor taught anything like these heretics rave about. But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the successions of all the churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the

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keys also points to Shebna’s priestly identity; keys were used by the priests in the temple (cf. 1 Chr 9:27; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.108; *m. Mid.* 1:8–9; *A’bot R. Nat. A.* 4:5; *b. Ta’an.* 29a).

successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. With this church, because of its superior origin, all churches must agree—that is, all the faithful in the whole world—and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition".—Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3:3:1–2 (c. A.D. 189)

"Although there are many who believe that they themselves hold to the teachings of Christ, there are yet some among them who think differently from their predecessors. The teaching of the Church has indeed been handed down through an order of succession from the apostles and remains in the churches even to the present time. That alone is to be believed as the truth which is in no way at variance with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition."—Origen, *The Fundamental Doctrines* 1:2 (A.D. 225)

### **The Councils That Put the Bible Together**

1. Rome (380)
2. Hippo (393)
3. Carthage III (397)

*"Let this be sent to our brother and fellow bishop, Boniface, and to the other bishops of those parts, that they may confirm this canon, for these are the things which we have received from our fathers to be read in church."*

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