

(c) The Catholic Church possesses the authority to determine whether or not a book is divinely inspired. In the early Christian centuries there were certain books which some believed to be inspired writings, but the Church decided they were not. These are called apocryphal writings.

(d) Catholics are bound in conscience to accept the interpretations of the Bible officially given by the Church.

Q. 23i. What is Divine Tradition?

Divine Tradition is the unwritten word of God -- that is, truths revealed by God, though not written in the Bible, and given to the Church through word of mouth by Jesus Christ or by the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

(a) The Bible itself tells us that it does not contain all that God has revealed.

(b) The word "tradition" can also be understood in a wider sense, namely, as all the truths which the Church received in the beginning to be handed down (the word "tradition" means "handing down") throughout all ages. Some of these truths were later written under inspiration (the Bible), others were not (tradition as described in the answer above). The Church continues to hand down these truths, and this exercise of her teaching authority, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, is sometimes known as "active tradition". The utterances of persons who preserve and preach these truths, especially the Pope, are also sometimes called Tradition.

Q. 23j. Has Divine Tradition ever been committed to writing?

Divine Tradition has been committed to writing, especially by saintly writers called Fathers, who lived in the early centuries but were not inspired, as were those who wrote the Bible.

(a) The writings of the Fathers are very helpful toward the understanding of the true sense of Sacred Scripture and Divine Tradition.

(b) The Church has granted the title of Doctor to certain holy and learned men, whose writings have been very beneficial to religion. Some of these are also Fathers, others who lived in later centuries are simply Doctors.

Q. 23k. Has Divine Tradition the same force as the Bible?

Yes; Divine Tradition has the same force as the Bible, since it too contains God's revelation to men.

(a) Besides Divine Tradition, there is also ecclesiastical tradition, made up of historical narratives and customs that date from the early days of the Church but were not revealed by God. This type of tradition is not accepted with divine faith, but it belongs to the Church to pass judgment on its reliability.