

Lecture 5: Scripture and Tradition

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Scripture and Tradition

St Gregory of Nyssa: "Let the inspired Scriptures be our umpire [arbiter], and the vote of truth will be given those whose dogmas are found to agree with the divine words" - On the Holy Trinity and of the Godhead of the Holy Spirit

Three distinct ways of looking at Scripture and Tradition:

1. Scripture and Tradition - two sources or means of God's revelation. Roman Catholic sources
2. Scripture alone - Protestant view
3. Scripture within Tradition - old patristic view, well anchored in the apostolic tradition and emblematic of Orthodox Tradition

In Orthodoxy, **Tradition** is conceived as the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. **Scripture** is the Church's pulsating heart, always radiating life and sustenance to the members of the body, challenging it to dialogue with the living Word of God. **Scripture within Tradition**

Formed and Informed: The Church has been formed and informed by Scripture since inception. It is the Church's responsibility to interact with the Scripture to keep the Tradition alive. Scripture has an ecclesial character: Jews and Christians preserved their foundational memories and gradually turned them into liturgical acts.

Traditionalist Readers place a text in the traditional context of their community of faith. Historical critics attempt to analyze a text based on original historical, cultural, religious context. Context is unavoidable, and thus assumptions are unavoidable. There is no fully objective interpretation of Scripture.

Two important events triggered the transition from oral proclamation to written documentation

1. Death of the first apostles (James, Peter and Paul) in 60s AD
2. Destruction of the Temple in 70AD

In the 1st Century, the apostles and their disciples are the interpreters of Scripture. Beginning in the 2nd Century, the bishops are "presiding in the place of God" (Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr). "Be careful, therefore, O bishop, to study the word, that you may be able to explain everything exactly, and that you may copiously nourish your people with much doctrine, and enlighten them with the light of the Law" (Constitutions 2.2.5)

To defend the faith against various forms of Gnosticism, the Orthodox Church appealed to verifiable episcopal succession. It is the bishops' unique role to teach definitively on behalf of the whole Church. It is the entire Church (people of God) that are the tradents of authentic apostolic tradition.

The Church is the only authentic depositary of the apostolic proclamation, so it is the Church that has both the mandate and authority to interpret the Scripture.

The proclamation of the Word of God in Church generates the Tradition that is the life of the Church in the Spirit.

Tradition as Life and Journey of the Church

The two words related to Tradition primarily designate the action of handing over or transmitting the Tradition:

- Paradosis - Greek "to hand over"
- Traditio - Latin "to deliver"

Tradition is a fluid reality, easier to describe than to define. A dynamic process that is still unfolding.

Tradition is the rich, never exhausted life of the Triune God experienced by believers within the Church through:

- Sacraments
- Hymns
- Readings
- Interpretations
- Icons
- Ascetism
- Social Involvement

Phases of Tradition Development

1. Oral Proclamation (kerygma) of the Word of God made flesh
2. Rule of Faith - more normative and better contoured in its content
3. Codification of the Tradition
 - Conciliar statements codified by Justinian in the mid-sixth century AD
 - Process of screening, filtering and compartmentalization of the entire Tradition at various times culminating in the 17th Century

Kerygma: Proclamation or Tradition of the Apostles.

- Apostolic Tradition is earlier than the New Testament. 1 Cor 15 is the first fresh impression handed over both orally and in written form.
- Papias (end of 1st Century AD): "If, then, any one came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders, - what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip or by Thomas or by James or by John or by Matthew or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice." - Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius

Rule of Faith: Statements of faith or creeds that became the norm of right interpretation of the Scripture

- Born in the 2nd Century disputes with Gnostics and other heretics
- The idea of orthodoxy vs Judaizers came about to set a boundary between orthodoxy and heresy
- 2nd Century represents the parting of the ways - Christianity and Judaism

Codification of the Tradition

- Qualifications of Church Tradition cannot be separated
 - Apostolic
 - Patristic or Ecclesiastical
- Transition from apostolic to patristic is from kerygma to dogma - done by necessity of the Church to better articulate the faith of the apostles
 - "Indeed, the teaching of the fathers, and the dogma of the Church, are still the same 'simple message' which has been once delivered and deposited, once for ever, by the apostles..." - Georges Florovsky
- "Not everything within the Church dates from apostolic times. This does not mean that something has been revealed which was 'unknown' to the apostles; nor does it mean that what is of later date is less important and convincing. Everything was given and revealed fully from the beginning. On the day of Pentecost Revelation was completed, and will admit of no further completion till the Day of Judgment and its last fulfillment. Revelation has not been widened, and even knowledge has not increased. The Church knows Christ now no more than it knew Him at the time of the apostles. But it testifies of greater things."

Scripture-Tradition Relationship

- Textbook-Handout Analogy
 - Scripture is like a textbook, with Tradition being a set of explanatory handouts.
 - Scripture (and especially the Old Testament) is an untamable textbook. Holy Tradition in all its avatars - conciliar statements, writings of the Church Fathers, liturgy, iconography, ascetic teaching, etc. functions as its guiding handouts.

- Handouts summarize and explain the salient points of a textbook. The handouts will never be able to exhaustively elucidate all angles of scriptural trove or provide an all-encompassing summary. The handouts depend on a textbook.
 - Centrality of Scripture within Tradition
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