

From the Desk of Father George Kuforiji Doctrine and Dogma in the Catholic Church

Doctrine is all the teachings of the Church in matters of faith and morals. Dogma is more narrowly defined as that part of doctrine which has been divinely revealed and which the Church has formally defined and declared to be believed as revealed.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains,

The Church's magisterium exercises the authority it holds from Christ to the fullest extent when it defines dogmas, that is, when it proposes, in a form obliging the Christian people to an irrevocable adherence of faith, truths contained in divine Revelation or also when it proposes, in a definitive way, truths having a necessary connection with these. (CCC 88)

The question is, where did the doctrine of the Catholic Church come from? Catholic doctrines, or teachings on faith and morals, are based on what is termed as the "three-legged stool;" Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium.

When we look at Scriptures, we notice that it includes both the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament and the New Testament.

Tradition can be looked at as what was practiced by Christians before the Bible (especially the New Testament) was put together. The first book of the New Testament by Paul was not written until nearly 30 years after the Crucifixion, and the last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, was not put into writing until nearly 80 years after the Crucifixion. None of the authors of the books in the Bible would have thought their books would be in the Bible, because the Bible did not exist during their time.

All the teachings of the apostles are "traditional" teachings, not "written." The Bible is the written portion of Tradition. John, at the very end of his Gospel, wrote, "There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written." This implies that in no way can the Bible be taken as the complete record of everything Jesus did, said, or taught. We must remember that Jesus, when sending His Apostles out, in Matthew 28:19-20 wrote, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

After the Bible was put together, the Church continued the use of the Oral Tradition as well as the written Tradition (Bible) to spread the Gospel of Jesus. It is a common knowledge among the Jews that there is a "Written Torah" and "Oral Torah."

The Sadducees who did not believe in the Resurrection missed the mark because they relied only on the written Torah. They did not believe in anything outside the five books of the Torah. If they did, they would have found out about resurrection in the second book of Maccabees 7:9b, when one of the brothers said, "You are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to live again forever." This implies belief in resurrection. However, Jesus used Exodus 3:16 as proof of resurrection in

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Matthew 22:23-46 which is part of the written Torah that they believed in. If they had accepted the Book of Maccabees it would have been easier for them to know about the resurrection. Tradition, however longstanding, cannot contradict Scripture. As it is in the Bible, Jesus chose the twelve. He chose the 72, singled out Peter as leader, took only Peter, James, and John with Him on different occasions. By doing this, Jesus established a hierarchy in His Church. The Apostles in Acts also followed this system by having Deacons, Presbyters, and Bishops and Peter as their leader. Since then, the Church has maintained the same system of having a Pope, the College of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Out of the system comes the Magisterium which consists of the Pope and the College of Bishops. In the Acts of the Apostles, the first council that occurred when there was a problem in the Church, the Council of Jerusalem, was made up of Peter and the Apostles.