

The Vatican II Constitution Dei Verbum

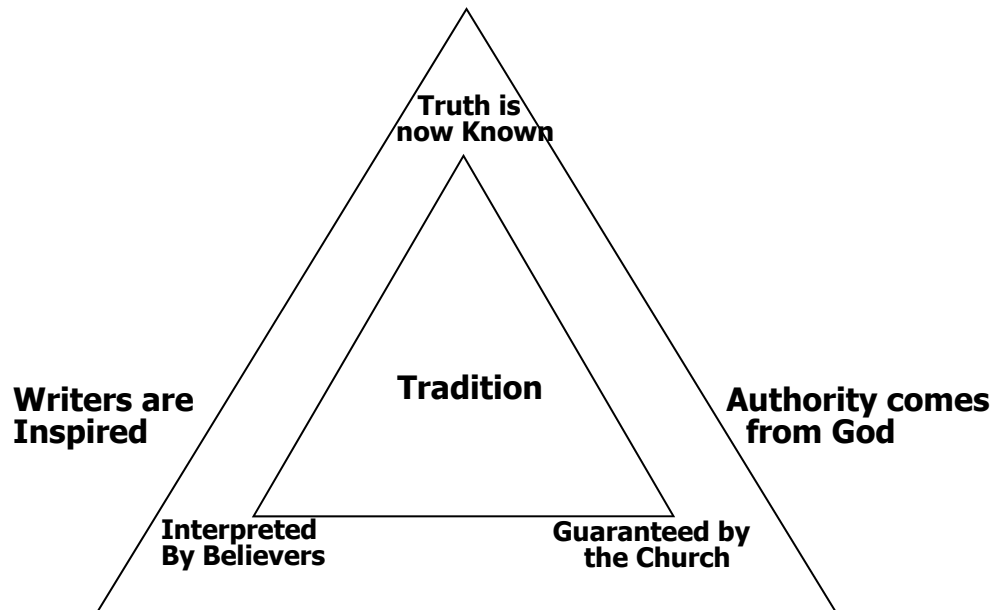
Prior to Vatican II, a literal interpretation of the Bible tended to be adopted. However, in 1965, the Vatican Council issued the document Dei Verbum (The Word of God) on how the Bible should be read and interpreted.

In particular, **article 11** now recognised that the biblical writers functioned as human writers, on the one hand inspired to reveal spiritual truths but, on the other, writing with normal human frailties, whilst **article 12** allowed a more critical analysis of the Bible on the lines of the literary criticism described above.

Although there is now extensive scope for individuals to read the Bible in a new light with scope for individual interpretation, on matters of core beliefs the Church's Magisterium must be accepted as the final arbiter of truth.

The Word of God is Given To Us

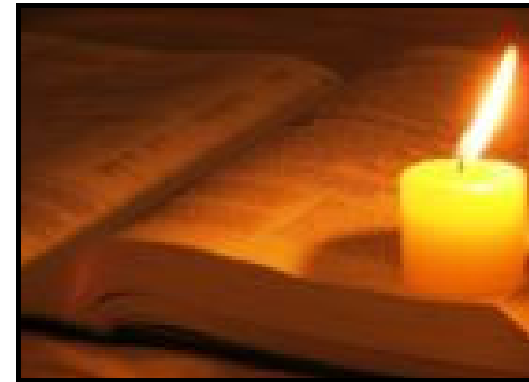
Truth about God, about Us, and about our Salvation are Revealed



Understanding The Bible and Our Faith

2. The Word of God or The Words of People?

Understanding the sense in which the Bible contains both God's Word and Man's



Questions for Reflection

1. Were biblical writers in a trance or hearing voices?
2. If the Bible is the Word of God must it not all be literally true?
3. Why does the Bible contain so many contradictions?
4. Can I put my own interpretation on the Bible?

Reading Newspapers

Reading the Bible

We all have our own favourite newspapers. In general, we tend to like those that represent our particular world-views. We know that other newspapers may have a different slant on given topics.



The different attitudes presented by newspapers depend on the direction wanted by the owner (say, Rupert Murdoch with the Times and Sun), and is delivered on a daily basis by a like-minded editor and journalists. A similar principle often applies to the writing of books and production of films and television programmes.

To understand why a publication takes a particular view, we need to ask ourselves who is the author, why is (s)he writing, how does her/his cultural background affect the way the message is presented, and what genre or type of writing is being used to spread the message? This is the way historians examine texts in order to interpret them accurately.

Imagine a book about Tony Blair, written by one of his closest supporters, being discovered in a thousand years time. People may conclude that here was a great leader. Then, say twenty years later, another book is found about him, written by an opponent like George Galloway, criticising his policies on Iraq. Wouldn't this new book cause opinions about him to be changed or, at least, lead to reservations about previous views about him?

The Bible as a Newspaper

For Christians, God is the driving force behind the Bible. In it God reveals Himself to us (otherwise we could never hope to know his love for us). God can be compared to the newspaper owner who sets down the direction to be taken but then relies on his editors and journalists to deliver the type of publication he wants.

What Inspires a Writer?

Any good journalist loves her/his subject, learns as much about it as

possible and enjoys expressing pertinent views on it to an interested audience. We say a good writer is inspired to write. By this we really mean that the writer has the special ability provide insights into a subject and has a skill using words that actually speak to and stimulate the reader.



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Biblical writers should be regarded in the same way, but their special ability is provided by the Holy Spirit, to give them their insights into the eternal truths God wished to reveal.

Nevertheless, God uses the normal skills and faculties of the writer to convey His intended message. They do not write as God's robots.

How is God the Author of the Bible?

Although using the skills and frailties of human writers, God can rightly be regarded as the overall author of the Bible because the insights about God and our salvation have come through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Tradition and Interpreting the Bible

Because the Bible was written by human authors, in order to understand God's message we must examine the genre or literary form of the writing. Truth in the Bible is expressed in different ways in different writing styles: poetry, history, laws, stories, to name but a few. In particular, the writings are based on the known 'facts' and knowledge of the time, in the context of prevalent cultural attitudes. These 'facts' may be wrong or the cultural attitudes may be deemed archaic or even immoral by today's standards. However, this should not detract from the Bible's essential message — after all, eternal truths are still truths even if framed in an imperfect way.

But the Bible does not stand as a book in isolation. It is supplemented by the Church's Tradition, the way the early Church leaders and Fathers understood and interpreted its writings. Scripture and Tradition are intertwined.