

An Introduction to  
Sacred Scripture



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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, 2020

ISBN 9781637940266

Publisher:

Christ the King Books, Inc.

25150 Oregon Trail Road

St Marys, KS 66536

[www.ckbooks.org](http://www.ckbooks.org)

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# Lesson 1 Revelation: Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture

## What is Revelation and Why Do We Need It?

### *Truths beyond human reason*

**Divine Revelation** is the term for the truths that God has revealed to man about Himself over the course of time. Strictly speaking, Divine Revelation consists only of those truths which not even the brightest men could have come to on their own. Such truths include: “God is a Trinity”, “The Second Person of that Trinity became man”, “The Blessed Virgin Mary was immaculately conceived”, and many others. The entirety of Revelation is also called the **Deposit of Faith**, which is the entire ‘deposit’ of truths given to man by God.

### *Truths provable by human reason*

In another way, and speaking more loosely, men often extend the term “Divine Revelation” to include even certain truths which are in themselves capable of proof through human reason. Examples of such truths are these: “God exists”, “God is eternal”, “God is unchanging”, and many others. It may surprise you to hear that human reason can *prove* such truths.

- You may be thinking, “Well, OF COURSE, God exists! Only the fool says there is no God. We do not need to *prove* it.” To this, St. Thomas Aquinas would say, “Well, be very, very careful about the difference between *believing* and *knowing*. Knowing, *strictly speaking*, is when we can prove something with a very strict proof, a proof which cannot be denied. If we cannot do that, then we probably do not really *know*, but merely believe. And in this case, to believe is a very good thing! That is what the virtue of Faith is for.”
- Or, perhaps on the other hand, you are thinking just the opposite: “Nobody *can* prove God exists. We just *believe* such things without a proof.” Again, St. Thomas would answer that, believe it or not, such truths as “God exists” and “God is good” are indeed strictly provable by human reason. In fact, even the great non-Catholic philosopher Aristotle even proved such things<sup>1</sup> over three hundred years before Our Lord became a man! St. Thomas, some 1,500 years later (he lived in the 1200s), developed and expanded these proofs of Aristotle in his famous “Five Ways” (five proofs for the existence of God using human reason alone). He gives these proofs near the beginning of his beautiful masterpiece, the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>2</sup>

### ***God, in His mercy, has told us both kinds of truths – those knowable and unknowable by human reason!***

BUT: Just because many truths about God are indeed knowable (provable) by human reason itself, this does not mean every human being can follow or understand such proofs. No! In fact, the blunt truth of the matter is that *very few* people have the brilliance and persistence of Aristotle. In that same *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas points out that one would have to spend his whole life studying and contemplating the ultimate questions, as the philosophers did, in order to uncover a great deal of the truths which are knowable by reason (like “God exists”). Most people do not have the intelligence, time, interest, or education to dedicate themselves to this effort. Thus, St. Thomas says in a different work, “Those who wish to undergo such a labor [of study and investigation] for the mere love of knowledge are few [in number], even though God has inserted into the minds of men a natural appetite for knowledge.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the saint warns that the situation is even more bleak. He adds that even those few bright men who can and do

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<sup>1</sup> In his *Metaphysics*, Book 12, Chapters 6 to 10

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Qu 2, Article 3

<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, 1.4.3.

give their whole lives to study still end up with a great number of errors mixed in with the truths they come to.<sup>4</sup> (St. Thomas would, however, be the first to admit that Aristotle was an *extremely rare exception* – he had very few errors in his conclusions.)

**In other words, *practically speaking* (not theoretically speaking), it is impossible for men *on their own* to come to know even the most basic humanly knowable truths about God.**

***Since the vast majority of men cannot even attain to the most basic truths about God, how do we get out of this bind?***

Since then, *practically speaking*, the vast majority of men cannot even prove there is a God (and many other truths which are in themselves provable by human reason), and further, if even the very few bright men that make the attempt end up with a mixture of truth and error, then how can man possibly come to know the ultra-important truths that God wants man to know? How can man possibly know, love, and serve his Creator, and save his immortal soul?

Divine Revelation comes to the rescue! God not only has revealed those things that no man could ever possibly figure out (again, such truths as “God is a Trinity”), but has also given us to know even the things that *are* within the reach of human reason (God exists. He is from eternity. He is unchanging.)

Now that we know the two types of truths that God makes known to us, we can ask, “But where do we FIND these truths? How are they made known to us?”

## The Two Sources of Divine Revelation

Divine Revelation has come to us through two divine wellsprings: **Sacred Tradition** and **Sacred Scripture**, both of which are equal in importance and authority. Scripture and Tradition are “two sides of the same coin”; the whole of Revelation is contained therein. Most Catholics are aware that Sacred Scripture contains God’s word. Many, however, are not very familiar with the meaning and sources of Sacred Tradition.

### ***First Source of Divine Revelation: Sacred Tradition***

#### What is Sacred Tradition?

While Sacred Scripture is the Word of God contained in the Bible, Sacred Tradition refers to the truths which have been verbally passed down from Christ through the Apostles, but which are not directly in Scripture. Jesus commanded His Apostles *to preach* (and not just to write) what they heard from Him, saying, “He that heareth you, heareth Me.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Apostles spoke with Divine Authority, and their teachings were delivered to the faithful *by preaching*, guided by the Holy Ghost. Jesus also instructed the Apostles to carry out the actions – what we most commonly think of when referring to *traditions* – which He instituted. This includes the Sacraments such as Baptism: “Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>6</sup>

You may know that Sacred Scripture is the living Word of God made known to man, preserved from error by the Holy Ghost. Sacred Tradition is also, like Sacred Scripture, preserved from error by the same gift of the Holy Ghost as it is passed down across generations. Protestantism rejects Sacred Tradition, wrongly claiming that Sacred Scripture is the only source of Revelation. Because we live in times which are ever shadowed and tainted by the errors of the Protestant Revolt (which falsely claims a deposit of faith in “Scripture alone”), many Catholics are unfortunately influenced by these Protestant heresies. We must understand how essential Sacred Tradition is to the Faith, and how it is the Holy Ghost Who,

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<sup>4</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Qu 1, Article 1*

<sup>5</sup> Luke 10:16 Douay Rheims

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 28:19 Douay Rheims

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Linus and Claudia, and all the brethren, salute thee. The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you.  
Amen.

Having completed what he needed to tell them in the Epistle, Saint Paul signs off much in the way we may sign off a letter today. It cannot be said that *his intention* was to write and “publish” a formal document of Church teaching. Nonetheless, by the hand of Providence working in the lives of the Apostles, that is what we have!

## Above all, Scripture is True

You may have noticed that in modern times, certain skeptics who may be atheists, Protestants, or even Catholics have tried to re-interpret the truths contained in Scripture as mere *symbols, opinions, myths, misunderstandings* (historical, scientific, etc.), or some combination of these. (This attempt at twisting Sacred Scripture is not new; we have already shown what Luther and Calvin did. Also, thinkers of the ‘enlightenment’ including Thomas Jefferson, one of America’s “Founding Fathers”, promoted these false ideas, and what we see now is the impact.) For example, in order to push a theory of evolution (which, as you will see if you study biology with us, is not only theologically but scientifically baseless), they will say that the events in Genesis are something like a useful fable which is not to be taken literally. Or to bolster a sense of materialism (the idea that only sensible things matter), they will introduce doubts as to whether the many miracles of God recorded in Scripture *really* happened, or whether some other natural explanation could be found. Likewise, they will over-emphasize the humanity of the individual Apostles or other authors in order to propose that their limited knowledge (or that of their culture) implies a limitation on the accuracy of Scripture itself.

What can we say to all of this? Ultimately, it demonstrates a grave lack of trust in God and the power of His Providence! Of course, it is true that Scripture contains a rich variety of different elements. There is a difference between history (for example, the Books of Kings) and poetry (the Book of Psalms), parables (such as those told by Christ) and records (such as the genealogy of Christ). And as we have discussed, it is a gift to the Church that the diverse histories and perspectives of the inspired human writers of Scripture have been united into one enduring testimony. But this does nothing to diminish the fact that Scripture is entirely *true and reliable* through the activity of the Holy Ghost in the lives of the authors to safeguard them from error even while contributing their own personal voices. We ought to trust completely that the truths contained within the contents – the facts in a history, the persons in a genealogy, the moral of a parable – are perpetually true where they are properly understood and interpreted. This responsibility, as we will discuss shortly, ultimately resides with the Magisterium of the Church.

## The Magisterium and the Bible

The period of formal, public Divine Revelation ended with the death of the last Evangelist, Saint John. By that time (about 100 A.D.), the Church had received all that is contained in the Deposit of Faith. Although many doctrines and teachings of the Faith have been *expounded* and *promulgated* since this time – for example, through the many Church Councils across history – this is not new Revelation, but rather a continuous interpretation and realization of the truths already given to the Church within the Deposit of Faith.

The Bible as we know it today has two parts: The **Old Testament**, composed of 45 books, and the **New Testament**, which is composed of 27 books. All together there are 40 identified authors of these books, who wrote each in their own style, using their own intellect, but always were inspired by the Holy Ghost to write the Word of God perfectly and without error. The timeline of the writing of Scripture covers 4100 years from the **Pentateuch** of Moses (first five books of the Bible) to St. John the Evangelist. But why 45 books in the Old Testament? Why not 32 or 134? Why 27 books in the New? Let us answer such questions now.

### *Who decided what books were inspired by the Holy Ghost? That is, who put the Bible together?*

You might be wondering, if many of these books were originally addressed to particular communities, how did they become part of one universally recognized Bible? This was the responsibility of the teaching authority of the Church, called the **Magisterium**. The Catholic Church decided what books are included in the canon of Sacred Scripture. This

was done in **393 A.D. by the Catholic Council of Hippo**. Once the formal list was made at the Council, no books could be added to the Bible nor taken away. (This term *canon*, by the way, is used by the Church when declaring that some people are saints. This is because those names are then listed in the *canon* of Saints; their names are added to a formal list of known saints.)

### ***Why did the Church need to do this?***

The importance of the Council of Hippo becomes very clear when one considers that by the end of the first century, there were many other books and letters circulating around the Church which were of very questionable orthodoxy, or, even if they seemed orthodox, the most important question remained: were these books *inspired by the Holy Ghost*?

These were three classes of books/letters at the time:

1. the books ‘acknowledged’ as Canonical (certainly inspired by God)
2. books ‘disputed’ or ‘controverted’ (men were not sure)
3. books declared ‘spurious’<sup>14</sup> (definitely not inspired by God).

Of the middle category, there were some that were later decided to be inspired, and others that were excluded by the Council of Hippo. Remember, just because a book was decided *not to have been inspired*, does not mean that it was evil. In fact, some of these books are good and edifying works, which we still have today.

The third category was full of some works that were superstitious, foolish, puerile, or which were impious in their writings; these were, of course, not included among works declared inspired. Some of these writings still exist, but most have perished.

The Council of Hippo was convened due to the great need for the books of Scripture to be listed. In the early Church, as persecution raged in Rome, many emperors would try to make Christians give the texts of the Bible to the authorities. To do so would be, in effect, to deliver the sacred writings to be destroyed. Thus, there were many martyrs who laid down their life rather than hand over the sacred texts. This was a worthy cause for which to die – but it was even more important to ensure what books were actually part of Scripture, and which were not!

There were two more Councils that followed:

- The Council of Carthage, in 397 A.D., which confirmed and approved the decrees of Hippo, re-affirming the canon of Sacred Scripture once and for all;
- and another Council of Carthage in 419 A.D., over which Saint Augustine presided. This Council sent the list of Scriptural books to the Bishop of Rome, Pope Boniface, to be confirmed. This was the final conclusion of the discussion of which books were included, and which were excluded, from Scripture – and thank God for the security this brought to the Church!

This is important to remember as we will see (in a later lesson) that certain books were later impiously removed from the Bible by Protestant heresiarchs. While the Church has wisely helped to confirm *which* books belong to Scripture, the text of Scripture itself is perfect and not to be changed by human hands:

For the doctrine of the faith which God has revealed is put forward not as some philosophical discovery capable of being perfected by human intelligence, but as a divine deposit committed to the spouse of Christ [the Church] to be faithfully protected and infallibly promulgated. Hence, too, that meaning of the sacred dogmas is ever to be

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<sup>14</sup> **spurious:** fake or false

maintained which has once been declared by holy mother church, and there must never be any abandonment of this sense under the pretext or in the name of a more profound understanding.<sup>15</sup>

## Protestants and Their “Bibles”

Today there is a false notion that the Bible is something that Catholics may use or read, but which is firstly “Protestant”. Nothing could be farther from the truth! This false belief may come from the fact that Protestants believe the only divine revelation available to man is the Bible – not Sacred Tradition. In addition, this teaching comes from Luther’s heresy of “Scripture alone” (Sola Scriptura). Protestants actually have nothing but their so-called “bibles.” (We put “bible” in quotes because what Protestants today wrongly call “the bible” is not the bible at all. Their “bibles” have many books missing, and the texts of the books which remain are badly corrupted!)

Protestants cling to their “bibles” and feel that without a bible they could not be saved. In fact, most Protestants do not believe in the necessity (or existence) of an *authoritative* teaching Church structure (such as the hierarchy of the Catholic Church). “The bible and the bible alone” is what saves, according to these heretics. What they call their “churches” are more of socially organized support structures; they do not really look upon their “pastors” as having any real authority.

But if Protestants were really correct in their claims that men really need a bible to be saved, **and not an authoritative teaching church**, then we ask Protestants these questions:

- How did men save their souls during the first three centuries after Christ – that is, during the centuries before the Church decided exactly which books constituted the Bible? If salvation is really from the bible, *how could men save their souls when the Bible did not yet even exist?*
- Even after the question of “which books were inspired” was definitively answered by the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D., there were twelve additional centuries before printing was invented in the 1500s. Thus, for 1,500 years after Christ, most people had no access to printed books! *How then, could men save their souls when they had no access to the Bible?*
- But the situation is even worse, for even beyond the 1500s, the average person could not read! Thus, even if there had been one bible in every home, *how could men save their souls when they could not read?* Or what about a large percentage of the world (for example, the Native Americans) who still had no bible translated into their native language?

Clearly then, Protestants are wrong in their claims that salvation primarily comes from reading and self-interpreting the bible. So what is the answer? Did God abandon those children who did not have a Bible and could not memorize or read Scripture themselves? By no means! St. Paul teaches that faith “*comes from hearing*” (Romans 10:17). It is the living, teaching voice of the *authoritative Church* which helps men save their souls. Sermons, plays, the sacred liturgies, processions, stories, stained glass windows, catechism classes: these are some of the many valid and beautiful means by which the Church teaches the whole community of the faithful.

## Only the Catholic Church Can Authoritatively Interpret Scripture

As we have already seen, the Bible is a Catholic book. Further, not only did the Catholic Church definitively decide which books constitute the canon of Sacred Scripture, but also the Church is the **ONLY AUTHORITY** on earth which can decide what the text of Scripture means. Countless arguments and fights have arisen through the centuries about the meanings of texts. The Protestants set out to interpret the texts themselves – *each man for himself*. This results in what one would expect: literally millions of different private interpretations, giving rise to hundreds of thousands of Protestant “churches” or denominations.

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<sup>15</sup> (Council Fathers, 1868)

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## Different levels of meanings in Scripture

### The literal meaning; the figurative meaning

When reading Scriptures, **it is important to distinguish between figurative and literal passages.** Consider, for example, these two:

- “And God made the two great *lights*, the greater *light* to rule the day, and the lesser *light* to rule the night.” (Genesis 1:16)
- “Again Jesus spoke to them saying, ‘I am the *light* of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the *light* of life.’” (John 8:12)

In the first passage, God creates the sun and the moon, which literally bring light to the world, insofar as they allow man’s physical eyes to take in his surroundings. In the second passage, Christ calls Himself the light of the world. Now, he does not mean *light* in the same way the Genesis passage uses the word *light*. Christ does not cause men to see with their physical eyes in the manner connotated by the word *light*.

Further, He uses the word *light* to suggest an idea which mirrors the idea brought to mind by the actual word *light*. Just as men cannot get to their destination if they cannot see because it is dark, so man cannot arrive at God while shrouded in the darkness of sin. **Christ calls Himself the light in a figurative way**, since He destroys the darkness of sin, just as literal light destroys the darkness of night.

The first passage is an example of literal language, because the word light is meant to bring to mind the definition of the word, while the second passage is an example of what is called figurative language, because it is meant to bring to mind something which is not first and foremost what the word means, but rather, something which is similar to and represented by that thing; that is, *a figure of the thing that would be first and foremost meant*.

As you can probably already see, it is very important that we be able to tell the difference between literal and figurative language when trying to interpret the Holy Scriptures.

## Distinguishing between Figurative and Literal Language

### The rule of charity helps us discern

Again, the first rule when trying to interpret the Holy Scriptures is the rule of charity, as stated above. **If a word or phrase does not literally promote or demonstrate love of God and neighbor, or condemn the opposite, or violates the Faith, it must be taken figuratively.**

For example, in the book of Genesis, we read, “And God seeing that the wickedness of men was great on the earth, and that all the thought of their heart was bent upon evil at all times, it repented him that he had made man on the earth. And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said: ‘I will destroy man, whom I have created...’” (Gen. 6:5-7) If this verse is taken literally, it would appear that God does not love man unconditionally, which goes against the law of charity, and also that God can make mistakes and even change His mind – both of which goes against the law of faith. Therefore, this verse must be considered as figurative.

### Current culture can distort our understanding of Scripture

When reading the Bible, it is important to remember that one’s culture can affect what one sees as right and wrong. Our culture today sees many things as right or wrong that previous cultures saw as the opposite. Again, this is why we must rely on the eternal authority of the Church to solve those disputes. Sometimes, the ancient people were in the wrong.

Sometimes we moderns are. Regardless, if we read Scripture only through our own culture's lens of good and evil, we may take read some commands as merely figurative, whereas they are meant to be literal, and thus put our souls in danger of eternal death.

## Historical events with symbolic meanings: going beyond the literal meaning

While distinguishing between figurative and literal language (particularly in the Old Testament), we must also keep in mind that the passage may be relating a *literal historical event* which has *figurative connotations*.

For example, in the Old Testament book of Osee, the prophet Osee was commanded by God to marry a very impure woman and to have children with her. This command from God and this marriage should be taken as actual historical events which occurred. However, we should read the connotation (the lesson and meaning) from these events are merely figurative. The impure woman represented the unfaithfulness of the Israelites to God, while Osee the loving husband represented God, who dearly loved the Israelites. If we were to naively read this whole episode merely *literally*, we might wrongly infer God is also commanding us to purposely look for bad spouses. But obviously, the virtue of Charity and the Catholic Faith warn us that we could damn ourselves (and our children) by doing so. Thus, in this episode, **we should go beyond the literal meaning, and also see the figure underneath the events and learn from that message.**

Another example of this is the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was an actual object which existed and was a truly holy thing. However, it prefigured/symbolized the Catholic tabernacles which today house the Body of Jesus in the form of the Eucharist. The Ark of the Covenant also prefigured the Blessed Virgin Mary, who held Jesus Christ, the Holy One, in her womb, just as the Ark carried the holiest items of the Jewish religion.

## Ambiguities in literal signs

If you have think a passage is to be taken literally, not figuratively, but it is still unclear what the meaning is, St. Augustine offers several paths to take. We should ask ourselves questions.

### “Do I have the correct historical context?”

First, you should check to make sure you have all possible meanings of the word, both modern, and historical. The gospel of St Mark 3:31-35 reads, “And his mother and his brethren came; and standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him; and they say to him: Behold thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And answering them, he said: Who is my mother and my brethren? And looking round about on them who sat about him, he saith: Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of God, he is my brother, and my sister, and mother.”

Many Protestants like to imagine these verses provide evidence for their blasphemous claims that the Blessed Virgin Mary was not a perpetual virgin, that she gave birth to other children, and that thus Christ had blood brothers and/or sisters. The use of the word *brother* or *brethren* in no way indicates this, as in ancient days, *brother* was a word that meant any kind of close relation, such as a cousin. The historical context easily clears up this ambiguity.

### “Do I understand the context of the verse?”

If the ambiguity still remains, rereading the context surrounding the verse may be helpful. Often a command or statement which is confusing when taken alone, is clarified given everything else said in the book or chapter.

For example, the letter to the Galatians, St. Paul writes, “But knowing that man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; we also believe in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: because by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (Gal. 2:16) Here again, many Protestants

go wrong and misread this verse. They take it out of context to make the heretical claim that ‘faith’<sup>34</sup> alone is sufficient for salvation, without also needing to follow the law. However, merely examining the context of this verse makes it clear that this is not the claim that Paul is making. Paul, in writing this letter, is responding to a crisis in the Church at that time, in which it was unclear what was required in order to become Christians: Did the Gentile<sup>35</sup> converts have to follow the precepts of the old Jewish Law, such as circumcision? (The answer would be answered definitively by the Church with a resounding ‘No!’) St. Paul is also warning against those who think they can attain heaven by themselves, without God’s grace, merely by following a set of rules. His admonition that Faith saves us does not, however, mean that anyone is exempt from also having to follow the dictates of the Natural Law, the Divine Law, and Church Law.

### *Sometimes the true and complete context is spread across multiple books!*

Sometimes the answer to the question, “What is the complete context of this verse?” is to be found only by consulting various books of Scripture. This is because one inspired author of Scripture may focus on one issue, while another author may find a different issue more pressing. St. Paul was addressing the issue of conversion to Judaism before conversion to Christ. But St. James, in his epistle, focuses on just the opposite issue: the need to also perform good works according to one’s faith, as we read here: “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith, apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder.” (James 2:17-19) This verse from St. James clears up any ambiguity and confusion in one’s mind that may arise from reading the above-mentioned verse from St. Paul. **It is important to remember that the Bible is one continuous whole. The books cannot be taken in isolation. One book fills in the places other books lack.**

### **“What if I have done all the above and am still not sure of the meaning?”**

If one has gone through all the above steps recommended by St. Augustine, and there is still an ambiguity about the meaning of a verse, he states that it is permissible to take the verse in any of the understandings that remain.

## **Ambiguities in Figurative signs**

Again, any interpretations of figurative language must be tested by the rules of charity and faith. If, when faced with a figurative sign or verse, the reader can see several possible understandings, none of which go against charity or faith, then St. Augustine also has some recommendations for finding the author’s meaning in figurative language.

The first thing to keep in mind is that figurative language is used because the two things (the thing to be represented and the thing which represents it), share some similar trait. Let us consider a few examples of this situation below.

“And again he said: Whereunto shall I esteem the kingdom of God to be like? It is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

There are several things referred to here: the ‘kingdom of God,’ ‘leaven,’ and ‘meal.’ We can consult any dictionary to learn that leaven is any ingredient (either biological such as yeast, or merely chemical such as baking powder) added to dough used to produce a gas that lightens the dough. Thinking deeply about this, we see that both leaven and the Church have the common property of increasing things. The leaven increases the volume and quality of the bread, while the

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<sup>34</sup> We will read in an upcoming lesson what a twisted meaning of ‘faith’ most Protestants have, anyway. Their version of ‘faith’ (which turns out to be more of a vice of presumption) resembles almost in no way the true definition of the virtue of Faith: “Faith is the theological virtue by which we firmly believe all that God has revealed on the authority of God revealing it.” (Baltimore Catechism)

<sup>35</sup> **Gentile** – in this case, it refers to men who are neither Catholics nor Jews, such as the pagan Greeks.

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inaccurately label this essential counter-attack by the Church as the “Counter-Reformation.” But nothing was “re-formed” in the Protestant revolt, but much was destroyed. Thus, we should call the Church’s response the “Counter-Attack.”

God always brings good out of great evil. Thus, although this time in the Church was a very difficult one, a great good came from it: the great Council of Trent, one of the most needed and *truly* re-forming Councils of the Church. Let us see the beautiful truths that were clarified by this important Church Council.

## The Council of Trent



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The Council of Trent was held between 1545 and 1563 in Trent, a city in northern Italy. It was the 19th ecumenical council of the Catholic Church and was convoked by Pope Paul III. The greatest reason for this Council was to refute the terrible heresies of the widespread Protestant Revolt. The Council was the main bastion of the Church’s counter-attack efforts.

Focusing on the very issues which Luther, Calvin, and the others attacked or rejected, the Council issued many clear and direct condemnations and anathemas of the Protestant heresies. For example, the Council:

- reaffirmed that the Church is the ultimate interpreter of Scripture (and not the **private judgment** of individuals, as the heretics taught);
- reaffirmed that the Bible and Church Tradition were equally and independently authoritative (not “**sola scriptura**” – “**scripture alone**” – as the heresiarchs pretended);
- reaffirmed that that faith and works are both necessary for salvation (not “**sola fides**” – “**faith alone**” – as the so-called “reformers” claimed);
- defended and clarified the ages-old Catholic teachings on indulgences, pilgrimages, the veneration of saints and relics, and the veneration of the Virgin Mary;

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