

Church History: Biblical Foundations



Ministry Formation - Diocese of Rockford

A Prayer Before Study

St. Thomas Aquinas

O God, Creator of all things, true source of light and wisdom, graciously let a ray of your light penetrate the darkness of my understanding. Give me a keen intellect, a retentive memory, and the ability to grasp things correctly and fundamentally. Give me the talent of being exact in my explanations and the ability to express myself with thoroughness and charm. Point out the beginning, direct the progress, and perfect my work. We ask you this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Great Story - Salvation History

- The story of history is the story of **God's revelation of himself** in his creation
 - **Our first parents** were created by God in a state of blessedness, sustained in goodness and in a right relationship with God
 - When humans began to multiply on the earth and sin was rampant, God flooded the world and started over with a single family, that of **Noah**
- God chose to create a universe, rooted in him and yet distinct from him, through which he could manifest his own perfections and glory
 - They chose to rebel against God and declare independence.
 - Would this solve the problem of sin? No. Noah and his family brought the problem with them.

The Great Story, contd.

- God chose a man named **Abraham** and promised to bring salvation to the earth through him and his descendants
 - A promise arises of a kingly line stemming from **David**
 - In the New Testament, we read the story of the coming of this promised **King**
- God gave them his moral law through **Moses**, and brought them into their own land. But they continually slid back into sin, and their sin led to terrible consequences
 - This line would culminate in a King who would be "God with us", who would save us from our enemies by suffering for our sins, who would save his people Israel but would also be a light to the Gentiles and bring peace to all the earth
 - God himself became man, taking upon himself a human nature in addition to his divine nature--one Person with two natures. As both fully human and fully divine, Jesus Christ could do something no one else could do.

The Church and Her Authority

- ★ Jesus came to earth in order to live a life of righteousness, die for our sins, and rise from the dead for our salvation. But he also came to found a community
 - ★ Jesus' influence in this world continues through the people who come to be called the Body of Christ
 - ★ This Church will have both a spiritual and a temporal/tangible component. It will be both invisible and visible. It will be an organic union held together by the grace of God, and also a tangible, formal community in the world
- As we are in him, the community of the saved are, in a sense, an extension of his incarnation
 - The called-out ones--the Ecclesia in Greek, "Church" in English
 - It will be the locus of salvation in the world, possessing grace and the gospel of grace. But it will also be a hospital for sinners.

The Church and Her Authority, Contd.

- ★ Jesus appointed men who would lead the Church under him, after he had risen from the dead and ascended to the Father.
 - ★ The apostles were not to let the Church die with them.
 - ★ The Church, as the Body of Christ on the earth, was commissioned by Christ to be the means of the conveyance of God's grace and divine life to the people of the world, as well as to be the official guardian, interpreter, transmitter, and applier of God's revelation.
- He called these men "apostles"--"those who are sent." He gave them authority to shepherd the people in his name--to teach, to rule, and to guide.
 - They were to form local churches in various places as the gospel spread and appoint elders or bishops to rule over those churches.
 - She was given the authority and ability to do these things through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Transmission of Divine Revelation

- God had given revelation to his people from the beginning. This revelation came down to the Church through the Jewish Scriptures--the Old Testament--and the Jewish Tradition which provided the context for those Scriptures.
 - The culmination of revelation came in Jesus Christ.
 - The Word of God was written in the Scriptures; it has also been passed down through the Church's teaching, preaching, liturgy and worship, actions, and in everything else the Church does and teaches.
- The priests were the authoritative interpreters of the revelation of God.
 - Jesus revealed the fullness of the Word of God to humankind and gave it into the charge of the Church.
 - This second way by which the Church conveys down through the centuries the divine revelation is called Tradition. The word "tradition" simply means "something handed down."



SCRIPTURE

TRADITION

MAGISTERIUM

The Council of Jerusalem

Acts 15

- ❑ Should not the Gentiles be circumcised first according to the Law of Moses so they could be properly integrated into the Christian community by becoming Jews?
 - ❑ The Church called a council of Church leaders, consisting of the apostles and the elders/bishops.
 - ❑ Guided by the Holy Spirit, they came to a conclusion which was then binding on the churches.
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The role of St. Peter and his successors in the bishops of Rome:

- ❖ When Jesus gave authority to the apostles, he singled out Peter to give him a special authority.
- ❖ All the apostles were given the authority to bind and to loose, but to Peter in a singular and special way the keys of the kingdom of heaven were given.
- ❖ Peter became the guarantor of the unity and orthodoxy of the Church.



Infallibility of the Church - protection from error in her teaching

- The teaching authority of the Catholic Church resides in the Magisterium, which is simply the body of bishops who govern the Church in communion with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.
 - This gift is not given to individual bishops acting alone, but only to the body of bishops as a whole.
 - The Pope, as the head of the church, has the gift of reliability given to him in his own unique office as well, so that he can never teach error when he is exercising his teaching office.
- God has given the gift of reliability to the teachers of the Church, so that what they teach in terms of the doctrine of the church (whether of "faith" or "morals") is accurate and does not lead into error.
 - It is possible that individual bishops, or even bishops in groups smaller than the whole of the body of bishops, might teach error, but the body of bishops as a whole can never do so.
 - The Pope might teach a doctrine definitively either by formally defining a doctrine as a dogma (this is the famed *ex cathedra* declaration) or simply by affirming that a doctrine is the definitive teaching of the Church.

The Roman World

- The Church was born into a world that was a mix of many different cultures.
 - During the hundred years preceding the birth of Christ, the Romans had conquered the land of the Jews, and they had created a cosmopolitan empire
 - The unity of the Roman Empire also created an opportunity for the spread of the gospel that was unique in the ancient world.
- The Church grew immediately out of Judaism. But the Jews at this time were not independent. They had been conquered by the Greeks (Hellenism)
 - The unity brought by the Roman Empire created an international, pluralistic society not unlike the world we inhabit today in many ways. The Church would be influenced and challenged by all three of these cultures--Jewish, Greek, and Roman--and eventually by many others as well.
 - The sort of missionary journeys we read about in the Book of Acts would have been very different and much harder without the international infrastructure in place due to the Roman Empire.