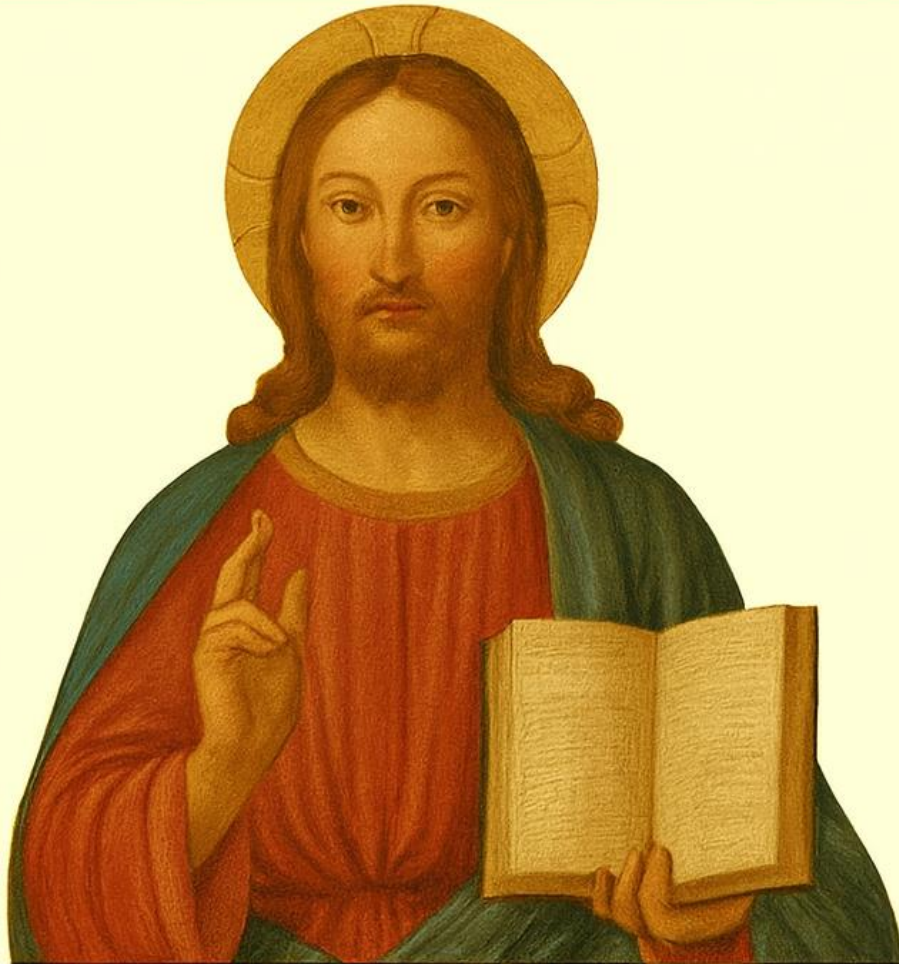


# THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Short reflections, eternal truths



## HOW GOD SPEAKS

Scripture, Tradition  
and the Pope

FR LUKE GOYMOUR



**“Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions  
that you were taught by us, either by word of  
mouth or by our letter.”**

***2 Thessalonians 2.15***

## **Introduction**

Christians often speak with great confidence about the Bible. We quote it in conversation, turn to it in prayer, and rely on it for guidance. Yet many believers have never paused to ask a simple but important question.

*Where did the Bible come from, and how do we know which books belong in it?* These are not academic curiosities. They touch the very heart of how God speaks to his people. If Scripture is God's Word, then understanding how it was formed helps us understand how God continues to guide his Church today.

From the earliest days of the faith, Christians have relied on three inseparable gifts. Scripture, which gives us the written Word of God. Tradition, which carries the living faith of the apostles. And the teaching authority of the Church, which safeguards both so that the voice we hear is truly the voice of Christ. To appreciate how these three work together, we need to look back to the world before Christ, to the Jewish people scattered across the ancient world, and to the Greek translation of the Scriptures known as the Septuagint. This history shaped the Bible Jesus and the apostles used, and it shaped the canon the early Church received and handed on.

What follows is not a scholarly lecture but a guided journey. It will help us see how God works through real people, real languages and real communities to reveal his truth. It will also show why Catholics read the

Bible with the Church, not apart from it. By the end, we will see that Scripture, Tradition and the Church's teaching authority are not competing voices. They are the harmonious way God ensures his people can hear him clearly in every age.

## **Scripture, Tradition and the Pope: How God Speaks to His Church**

Many of us have heard the phrase, “The Bible says...”. It appears in conversations among Christians, in debates with non believers, and even from those who have drifted from the faith. People often reach for a verse to prove a point or defend a position. Yet this familiar phrase hides a deeper truth. The Bible does not actually “say” anything on its own. It is a book. It teaches, inspires, challenges and consoles, but it does not speak by itself.

Before anyone prepares the stake to burn me as a heretic, it is worth pausing to explore what this really means, because understanding *how* God speaks through Scripture opens the door to understanding *how* he speaks through the Church.

### **The Bible: God's Word Through Human Hands**

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. God is its divine author, yet he chose to work through many human writers. Their personalities, cultures and languages are woven into the text, yet God guides the whole work. Think of St Paul's Cathedral. We say Christopher Wren built it, although he never laid a brick. He provided the vision and the design. Others carried out the work. Scripture is similar. God is the architect. Human writers are the craftsmen. Together they give us the written Word of God. Once we see this partnership between God and human beings, we begin to understand why Scripture needs to be read, prayed and interpreted within the community that first received it.

## **Why Scripture Matters So Deeply**

Every Christian should own a Bible, read it, and pray with it. Scripture tells the story of God's love for his people. When we read with an open heart, a verse can suddenly pierce us with clarity or comfort. God truly speaks through Scripture.

St Jerome said that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. He was right. To neglect the Bible is to neglect the One who stands at its centre. This is why Scripture fills our Catholic worship. At every Mass we hear the Old Testament, the psalm, the New Testament and the Gospel. The prayers of the Mass are soaked in biblical language. Scripture shapes our sacraments, our liturgical year and our identity. A Catholic has Scripture in the bloodstream. Yet the more we immerse ourselves in Scripture, the more we realise that it does not stand alone. It comes to us within a living community of faith.

## **The Bible Did Not Fall From the Sky**

Here is the heart of the matter. The Bible does not interpret itself. It did not drop from heaven. It is the Church's book. The early Church prayed, discerned and debated which writings were truly inspired. This was a human process guided by the Holy Spirit. God works through real people. That is his way.

The canon of Scripture was not fixed until the fifth century. The Protestant list of 66 books was not standardised until much later. The

Catholic Bible contains 73 books because that is the canon the early Church recognised and handed on.

The Church came before the Bible. The Bible grew out of the Church's worship and faith. Scripture cannot be understood apart from the living Tradition of the Church. And it is precisely this relationship between Scripture, Tradition and the Church's teaching authority that allows God to continue speaking clearly to his people today.

### **Tradition: The Living Memory of the Church**

If Scripture grew within the life of the early Church, then we must ask how that life was carried forward. The answer is Tradition. Not customs or habits, but the living memory of God's people. Before a single New Testament book was written, the apostles were preaching, celebrating the Eucharist, baptising and forming communities. Their teaching and worship came first. Scripture emerged from this living faith.

Tradition is this apostolic faith handed on in the life of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit guiding the Church to remember what Christ taught, to understand it more deeply, and to apply it faithfully in every age.

Far from competing with Scripture, Tradition is the context that allows Scripture to be understood. Without the living faith of the Church, the Bible becomes a library of ancient texts rather than the living Word of God for today.

## **Why Tradition Matters for Every Christian**

Tradition is not a dusty archive. It is the Church listening to the Holy Spirit across the centuries. It is the saints wrestling with Scripture, the early councils defending the truth about Christ, the liturgy shaping our prayer, and the faithful handing on what they themselves received.

This is why Catholics do not read the Bible in isolation. We read it with the Church. We read it with the saints. We read it with the same Spirit who inspired it.

Tradition protects us from turning Scripture into a private project. It keeps us rooted in the faith of the apostles rather than the opinions of the moment. It ensures that the voice we hear in Scripture is truly the voice of Christ.

## **The Church: The Pillar and Foundation of Truth**

St Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3.15 that the Church is the pillar and foundation of the truth. He does not say that Scripture alone holds this role. Christ entrusted his revelation not to a book but to a community. The apostles did not distribute Bibles. They founded churches. They preached, taught, celebrated the sacraments and appointed successors. They handed on the faith in writing and in lived Tradition.

Scripture is part of that Tradition, but not the whole of it.

## **How the Canon Was Formed and Why the Septuagint Matters**

To understand why Catholics have 73 books in the Bible while most Protestants have 66, we need to look back to the world before Christ. By the second century before Christ, many Jewish communities were living outside the Holy Land. They were dispersed across the Mediterranean, especially in places like Alexandria in Egypt. Greek had become the common language of the ancient world. As a result, many Jews no longer spoke Hebrew well enough to understand the Scriptures in their original form.

To meet this need, Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. According to ancient tradition, seventy scholars undertook this work, which is why the translation became known as the *Septuagint*, meaning “the Seventy”. This Greek translation included 46 Old Testament books. Among them were the books later called *Deuterocanonical*, a word that simply means “belonging to the second canon”. These are books recognised by the early Church as inspired, but which were later disputed during the Reformation. They include Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and the additional sections of Daniel and Esther.

At this point it helps to define a key term. The word *canon* means “rule” or “measuring rod”. When we speak of the canon of Scripture, we mean the official list of books the Church recognises as inspired by God. The Septuagint was the canon used by Jesus, the apostles and the earliest Christians. It was the Bible of the early Church.

This matters because the New Testament writers overwhelmingly quote from the Septuagint rather than the later Hebrew Masoretic text. Scholars estimate that around two thirds of all Old Testament quotations in the New Testament follow the Septuagint wording. In other words, when the apostles reached for Scripture, they reached for the Greek translation used in the synagogues of the diaspora.

The early Church therefore inherited the Septuagint as its Old Testament. When the canon was formally recognised in the fourth and fifth centuries, the Church confirmed the books that had already been used in its worship, teaching and preaching from the beginning. This is why the Catholic Old Testament contains 46 books. The shorter Protestant canon emerged much later, in the sixteenth century, when the Reformers chose to follow the later Jewish Masoretic list rather than the Septuagint.

### **Examples of the New Testament Quoting the Septuagint<sup>1</sup>**

- Matthew 1.23 quotes Isaiah 7.14 using the Septuagint's "virgin", not the Hebrew "young woman".
- Matthew 12.21 quotes Isaiah 42.4 following the Septuagint's hope for the Gentiles.
- Matthew 15.9 and Mark 7.7 quote Isaiah 29.13 with the Septuagint's stronger wording.
- Luke 4.18 includes "sight to the blind", a line found in the Septuagint but not in the Hebrew.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scripturecatholic.com/septuagint-quotes-new-testament/> 14/1/2026  
cf. <https://www.kalvesmaki.com/LXX/NTChart.htm>

- Acts 7.14 follows the Septuagint's number seventy five, not the Hebrew seventy.
- Hebrews 10.5 quotes Psalm 40.6 using the Septuagint's "a body you have prepared for me".
- Romans 3.12 to 18 uses the longer Septuagint form of Psalm 14.
- Hebrews 1.6 quotes a line from Deuteronomy 32.43 that appears only in the Septuagint.

### **Early Church Councils and the Canon**

The Church gradually discerned the canon. Key moments include the Council of Rome in AD 382, the Councils of Hippo in AD 393 and Carthage in AD 397, the letter of Pope Innocent I in AD 405, the Second Council of Nicaea in AD 787, and the Council of Trent in AD 1546 which reaffirmed the same canon. The Catholic canon of 73 books was held from the earliest centuries.

### **Did Catholics Add Books?**

During the Reformation, Martin Luther removed seven Old Testament books. These books supported Catholic teachings such as praying for the dead in 2 Maccabees 12. Protestant Bibles were not universally fixed at 66 books until the British and Foreign Bible Society decided against including the deuterocanonical books as an 'apocrypha' in 1825. Historically, therefore, Catholics did not add books. Protestant Christians

removed books that had been part of the Christian Bible for more than 1,500 years.

### **What This Shows:**

- Jesus and the apostles used the Septuagint.
- The Septuagint includes the Deuterocanonical books.
- The early Church accepted the wider canon.
- The claim from Christians from the Protestant Reformation that the Hebrew canon is the original Christian canon does not match history.

### **Scripture and Tradition: Two Lungs of One Body**

God's revelation comes to us through Scripture and Sacred Tradition. These are not rivals. They are two expressions of the one Word of God. Scripture is the written Word. Tradition is the living transmission of the faith.

And here we come to the Magisterium, the teaching office of the Church. The Magisterium does not stand above the Word of God. It serves the Word. It protects the apostolic faith and ensures that Scripture is read in continuity with the early Church. Within this Magisterium, the Pope has a unique role.

## **The Pope: A Shepherd for Unity and Truth**

If Scripture is the Word of God and Tradition is the living memory of the Church, then the question naturally arises. Who safeguards this memory? Who ensures that the Church remains faithful to the voice of Christ rather than drifting into confusion? This is where the Pope enters the picture. From the beginning, the Church recognised Peter as the one called to strengthen his brothers and hold the community together. His successors continue that ministry. The Pope is not an alternative to Scripture or Tradition. He is their servant. His task is to guard the deposit of faith, to confirm the Church in truth, and to ensure unity among believers. When the Pope teaches definitively, he is not inventing new doctrines. He is protecting what has been handed down. He is a visible sign that Christ has not left his Church to navigate the storms alone.

## **The First Pope and the early Church**

From the beginning, Jesus established a Church with real leadership. The New Testament shows a Church that teaches with authority, a Church built on the apostles, a Church with bishops, priests and deacons. The apostles knew their ministry had to continue after their deaths. They appointed successors and passed on their authority.

Among the apostles, Peter stands out. Jesus gives him the name Rock. Jesus gives him the keys of the kingdom. Jesus asks him to strengthen the others. Jesus makes him shepherd of the whole flock. Peter leads the early

Church in Acts. At the Council of Jerusalem, Peter gives the decisive teaching.

The early Christians recognised this. They knew Peter had ministered and died in Rome. Writers like Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus testify that Peter and Paul founded the Roman Church and handed on their authority to its bishop. The tomb beneath St Peter's Basilica confirms this ancient memory.

The Bishop of Rome exercised real authority very early. This is where the Orthodox claim collapses. Long before Constantine, long before any imperial influence, the Bishop of Rome acted with real authority and other churches accepted it.

Clement of Rome, writing around AD 96, intervened in a dispute in Corinth. Corinth obeyed him, even though he was not their bishop. Clement even warns that disobedience to him brings "no small danger". Ignatius of Antioch calls the Roman Church the one that "presides in love" and teaches the others. Pope Soter's letters were read in churches as if they were Scripture. Pope Victor, in AD 190, excommunicated entire regions over the Easter controversy. Irenaeus thought the decision unwise, but he never questioned Victor's authority to do it. Irenaeus also writes that every Church must agree with Rome because of its preeminent authority.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>c.f. <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/defending-the-papacy> 12/1/2026

All of this takes place one to two centuries before Christianity was legal. This means the papacy cannot be explained as a later political invention. It was already part of the life of the early Church.

This is why the Pope is part of the Magisterium. He is not an optional extra. He is the successor of Peter and the visible sign of unity for the whole Church. His ministry protects the faith handed down from the apostles and helps keep Christians united in charity and truth.

### **Why Sola Scriptura Falls Short**

If Scripture alone were the foundation of truth, St Paul would have said so. Instead, he points to the Church. Without the Church, Scripture becomes vulnerable to endless private interpretations. This is exactly what has happened since the Reformation. Thousands of groups now claim to follow “what the Bible says”, yet they disagree on essential matters.

Truth is not protected by private interpretation. Truth is safeguarded by the Church, guided by the bishops, and held in unity by the successor of Peter.

### **When the Bible Becomes an Idol**

Some Christians speak with deep sincerity about “the Bible alone”. Their desire is usually good. They want to honour God’s Word and remain faithful to it. Yet this approach can unintentionally lead to confusion. Without the steady light of Tradition and the teaching authority of the

Church, Scripture can be stretched to support almost anything. When that happens, even the Bible can be treated as an idol. An idol is anything that takes the place of God. The Bible is not God. It is the inspired Word of God, given to lead us to him. And the Word of God, in its fullness, is not a text but a Person.

### **The Word Made Flesh**

Christianity is not a religion centred on a book. It is centred on a living relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the Word made flesh, God's self-revelation in human form. Scripture points to him, prepares for him and reflects on him. And Christ cannot be separated from his Body, the Church. Scripture belongs within the life of the Church, the community that received it, cherished it and handed it on. It is within this living family of faith that Scripture speaks with its fullest, clearest voice.

### **So, What Does the Bible Say**

When Scripture is read privately, apart from the Church, it can be made to say almost anything. In that sense, it says nothing with certainty. But when Scripture is read within the living Body of Christ, the Church that preserved it and proclaims it, then God speaks with clarity and tenderness. He speaks through Scripture, through the Tradition that surrounds it and through the Magisterium that safeguards both. He speaks through the successor of Peter who strengthens his brothers and holds the Church in unity. Above all, he speaks his Eternal Word. He speaks Jesus Christ.

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## How does God speak to his Church today?

Many Christians say, “The Bible says...” - but Scripture alone cannot interpret itself. In this accessible and engaging reflection, Fr Luke Goymour explores how God speaks through Scripture, Tradition, and the living teaching authority of the Church.

Drawing on biblical foundations, early Church history, and the witness of the apostles, this booklet shows how the canon of Scripture was formed, why Catholics trust the wider biblical canon, and how the Pope serves as a visible sign of unity and truth. From the Septuagint to the successor of Peter, this is a clear and prayerful guide to how God continues to speak through his Church.

Whether you are new to the faith or seeking deeper clarity, this short reflection offers a rooted, reliable path into the heart of Catholic teaching.

*“The Shepherd’s Voice”, pamphlets, booklets and devotional resources from  
Fr Luke Goymour*

**Fr Luke Goymour** was ordained to the priesthood in 2010. He completed his studies at St Mary’s College, Oscott, earning a Bachelor’s degree in Applied Theology with Catholic Philosophy from Birmingham University, as well as a *Sacrae Theologiae Baccalaureum* (STB) in Catholic Theology from the *Université Catholique de Louvain*. Following ordination, he furthered his education at Heythrop College, obtaining a Master’s degree in Pastoral Theology from the University of London. He currently serves as Parish Priest of St Mark’s with Holy Family Brantham and St Mary Magdalen, Ipswich. He is dedicated to teaching and preaching the gospel, with a strong commitment to helping others come to know Jesus Christ in the fullness of the Catholic Faith.