Introduction

The Bible is the Word of God.

God revealed himself to humanity through the patriarchs, prophets, and historical events of the people of Israel and finally through his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. This self-expression is attributed to the second Person of the Trinity, referred to in the Bible as the Word (Jn 1).

The Holy Scriptures are also referred to as the Word of God, for two reasons. First, it is the primary witness of the activity of the Word; second, God still speaks to us through the pages of Scripture: "In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them. And such is the force and power of the word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting source of spiritual life (CCC, 104)."

The Bible is a library.

The Bible is not one book, but a collection of seventy-three which represent a variety of literary genres or forms: history, myth, parable, personal letters, imaginative fiction, poetry and song, prophecy, proverb, moral exhortation, law, folklore, narrative, gospel, and so forth. The word "Bible" is derived from the Greek ta biblia: "the books."

The books of the Bible were produced over several centuries: the latest date from the last years of the first century, or perhaps even later; the earliest date from about 900 BC. Oral traditions standing behind certain portions of the Bible are much older still: some Old Testament poems are perhaps 3200 years old.
The first section of the Bible, consisting of forty-six books, is referred to as the *Old Testament*. It recounts God’s establishment of a covenant with the people of Israel and the prophetic preparation for the coming of Christ.

The *New Testament*, the Bible’s second section, has twenty-seven books. Written by early Christians, they set forth the life and teachings of Jesus and the good news he proclaimed.

The Catholic Old Testament contains forty-six books, while that of Protestant Churches has thirty-nine. This inconsistency has roots in Jewish history. In about 150 BC, scholarly Jews of Alexandria, Egypt, produced a Greek translation of the Old Testament, the *Septuagint (LXX)*, which contained forty-six books. However, at some point during the first century, Palestinian Jewish authorities established a collection of thirty-nine books. Subsequently, this Palestinian collection became normative for all Jews.

Throughout her history, the Catholic Church has used the forty-six books of the Alexandrian Jews in her liturgy and preaching. Accordingly, in 1546, the fathers of the Council of Trent included all of these books in the Catholic canon. Protestant leaders excluded the seven specifically Alexandrian books, however, from their bibles. They refer to them as the *Apocrypha*, meaning "things that are hidden." Catholics, on the other hand, refer to them as the *Deuterocanonical* (Greek for "second canon") works. They are 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Sirach, Wisdom, Baruch, and portions of Esther and Daniel.

**God and humans as Co-authors of the Bible.**

The books of the Bible were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore in a real sense God is their primary author. God made use of human authors in the composition of the Bible, these human authors functioned as “true authors.”

The human authors, who gave us the writings contained in the Bible, were not unthinking instruments of the Holy Spirit, like a guitar is the unthinking instrument of the one who plays it. Nor did the human authors of Scripture merely write down words dictated by the Holy Spirit. No, the human authors of Scripture wrote as true authors. For example, they may have done careful research before they began to write. Lk tells us that he “investigated everything carefully from the beginning” before he began to write his “orderly account” of the gospel events (see Lk 1:3). They also wrote for different audiences.

The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors to write in such a way that the differing needs of their audiences were met. And that is the mystery of the inspiration of Scripture: at the same time both God and humans were its authors. Neither reality of authorship diminishes the other.

**The Bible is inerrant.**

As the Bible is the Word of the all-knowing God, it follows that it is without error. However, Catholic insistence upon biblical inerrancy is easily misunderstood. Does this mean that Catholics are "fundamentalists" who seek historical and scientific facts on every page? No. The inerrant truth of the Bible pertains to matters of salvation: "The books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that
truth which God willed to be put down in the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation (CCC, 106).

Thus a Catholic isn't surprised to discover passages in Scripture which reflect an ignorance of modern science.

The Church does recognize that the Bible has a historical character. Descriptions of events and people in the recounting of salvation history would be meaningless if not rooted in historical reality. However, it's important to recall, when examining pertinent texts, that history as a scientific discipline was unknown in biblical times. Biblical authors, using modes of writing different from those used today, were often more interested in the religious significance of events than in providing accurate factual records of them. They arranged materials for religious purposes; chronology was sometimes of secondary importance.

**Biblical Scholarship.**

In coming to terms with the inerrancy of Scripture, it is important to identify author's or editor's intent in producing a particular biblical work. For instance, take the book of Jonah, in which the main character survives several days in the belly of a giant fish. Was it the intent of Jonah's author to write literal history, or instead to compose a work of imaginative fiction? Consider too the creation stories of Genesis. Did the authors and editors wish to set forth a scientific account of the beginnings of the universe, of which surely they could know very little? Or were they trying to convey an awareness of the goodness of creation and humanity's estrangement from God? To answer such questions, which pertain to the literal sense of Scripture, biblical scholars employ a variety of tools which we will use in our course:

* **Form Criticism** is an endeavor to identify the literary genre, or form of a particular biblical passage.
* **Historical Criticism** involves the use of archaeology, scientific dating techniques, and contemporary non-biblical evidence to answer such questions as "Was there really a flood of the magnitude described in Genesis?"
* **Source Criticism** seeks to uncover the origin of biblical materials. In the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, scholars have identified what they believe are four different schools of thought which contributed to the completed work.
* **Redaction Criticism** (from redaktor, German for "editor") attempts to reveal an editor's intents in omitting, incorporating, revising, or glossing (adding explanatory notes) a particular text.
* **Textual Criticism** compares ancient manuscripts to trace a particular text's transmission through history and perhaps reconstruct the wording of the original.

**Hermeneutics and Exegesis.**

Hermeneutics (from hermeneuo, Greek for "interpret") is the philosophy of biblical interpretation. It asks: "How can we understand the Bible?" In attempting to answer this question, scholars have devised the "tools" described above and have identified the "senses" described below. The application of hermeneutical principles
is called exegesis (from exegeomai, Greek for "explain"). Exegesis is encountered in homilies and commentaries on biblical texts.

**Rules for Interpretation.**

It's sometimes thought that the Catholic Church has an official interpretation of every verse in the Bible, but this is not so. Catholic freedom in interpreting the Bible does follow a few rules, however:

**A)** Scriptures form a whole, and should be interpreted as such. No particular verse or passage should be considered "out of context."

**B)** The Bible should be read "within the living Tradition of the whole Church (CCC, 113)." Tradition, of course, is the Church's transmission of revelation through history as guided by the Holy Spirit. The Bible springs from Tradition. The implications of this are two-fold: first, one must seek the Spirit's guidance when engaging in biblical interpretation; second, one must take into account how the Bible has been interpreted in preceding generations.

**C)** Truth is one, and thus all Catholic doctrine forms a coherent whole. One must be attentive to this "analogy of faith" when interpreting Scripture; accepted truths cannot be contradicted by a given interpretation.

**Holy Scripture and Tradition.**

Jesus, to our knowledge, did not leave us any writings. Consequently, revelation was orally passed on to the first Christians. Only later, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did the first Christian literature appear: "The New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living tradition (CCC, 83)." Scripture is the Church's primary witness to the revelation of God in Jesus. As all Catholic teachings form a harmonious whole (the "analogy of faith"), many Catholic scholars assert that all revelation is at least implicitly or seminally contained in Scripture.

Scripture sprang from tradition and should be interpreted in accordance with it. Accordingly, "Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence (CCC, 82)."

**Overview of the history of the Chosen People:**

**Exodus** (1300-1250)

- **Exodus**: Greek word meaning “a going out.”
- The man chosen to lead the Israelites out of slavery was **Moses**.
- Read Exodus 3:1-10 (Burning bush)
  - **Yahweh** (Hebrew) “I am who I am.”
  - **Adonai** (Hebrew) “Lord, Lord, Lord Master.” (aka. Lord of Lords)
- The **Passover**, involved a sacrifice and a meal (Exodus 11-12).
  - The Passover is connected to the tenth and final plague that God sent to convince Pharaoh to let the people go. In this plague God's messenger (angel of death) killed the firstborn of every Egyptian family and livestock.
- To be spared, every Israelite family had to kill a young lamb (called the **Passover** or **Paschal Lamb**) and smear its blood over their doorway. Then the
angel of death would "pass over" their household, and their oldest son would live.
- They cooked the lamb and serve it with unleavened bread, as their final meal in Egypt. Passover meal celebration became the memorial of deliverance from slavery through God’s divine power.

- **Covenant on Mount Sinai.** Event that brought together and unified them as the **People of God** or **Chosen People**.
- **Ark of the Covenant** symbol of God’s protection and presence; a portable throne where God reclined while reigning over Israel.
- The Israelites continued to wander the desert for 40 more years due to their lack of trust in YHWH.

**The Promised Land** (1250-1020)
- After the death of Moses, the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Canaan) led by Joshua. (Book of Joshua - wishful thinking)
- They had to fight many wars before they were able to take possession of the land.
- The conquests took place under the leadership of a series of charismatic military leaders know as the **Judges**.
- The tribes needed a strong leader to defeat the Philistines, so they appointed their first king: **Saul**.
  - Saul
  - He was a warrior king, but a very troubled man.
  - When Saul became king, the 12 tribes of Israel were divided into 2 groups. The ten tribes that lived north of Jerusalem kept the name Israel, the two tribes living south of Jerusalem were named **Judah**.

**The United Monarchy** (1020-930)
- Upon the death of Saul, David became king. He unified the 12 tribes.
- Jerusalem is conquered by David. He makes Jerusalem his capital and relocated the Ark of the Covenant here.
- Jerusalem became the center for political and religious life!
  - **Solomon**
  - David’s son Solomon became the successor and he rule for 40 years.
  - Israel was at the height of its power during the reign of Solomon
  - He is responsible for the building of the **Temple (1st Temple)** when the Ark on the Covenant was kept.

**The Kingdom Divided: Israel and Judah** (930-722)
- Under Solomon's successor’s, the kingdom of Israel split into northern kingdom (Israel) and southern kingdom (Judah)
  - The people began to fall into the sin of idolatry.

**The Time of the Prophets**
- It was during this period of the division of kingdoms that **prophets**
arose preaching against pagan worshiping and to try to bring
the people back to the Covenant.
- In 721 B.C. the Assyrians conquered the kingdom of Israel and exiled the people.
- In 586 B.C. the Babylonians captured Jerusalem (Judah), destroyed the Temple and
deported many of the people to Babylon.
- Many people that were not captured left the country for places along the
  Mediterranean Sea. These people became known as the Diaspora
  (dispersion).

  **ELOHIST (E) 850?**
  **DEUTERONOMIST (D) 620?**

**Babylonian Exile** (585-539)

**Renewal of the Covenant Community**
- Because of the exile, many people were lead to a renewed
  appreciation of their faith in God (faithful remnant).
- Babylonian Exile caused the Jewish religion to emerge in a new way and significant
  portions of the Old Testament were composed during that time.

**A Prophet’s Promise**
- In 538 B.C. the Persians, under the leadership of Cyrus the Great
  conquered the Babylonians. He permitted Jews in Babylon to
  return to Judah.
- Some Jews had prospered in Babylon and decided to stay and other left.

**The Return to Judah**
- In 515 B.C. many exiled Jews returned to Judah and rebuild the
  Temple in Jerusalem (2nd Temple)
- The Jews were no longer united under a king, but by a high priest. Because these
  people were the remnant of the south kingdom (Judah), it is at this point we use
  the word Judaism and refer to them as Jews.
- Gradually two main classes of leaders developed:
  - **the priests**- responsible for offering sacrifices in the
    Temple
  - **the Scribes**- responsible for teaching the Laws of Moses.

**The Postexilic Period** (539-332)

Judah remains a very small state of the land immediately around Jerusalem.
It no longer has any independence but is ruled by Persian governors and guided by
the high priests of the Temple. Ezra (458-390) and Nehemiah (445-420) begin the
religious reform that leads to the canonization of the Scriptures and the religious
practices based on the Torah.

**PRIEST (P) 500?**

**The Hellenistic Period** (332-175)

Alexander the Great conquers the Near East and the influence of Greek
culture and philosophy on Jewish culture begins. The Jews are first governed
by Ptolemies (Egypt) and then after the battle of Paneas in 198 BC, by the Seleucids
(Syria)

**The Maccabees (175-63)**

The Maccabees fight for independence and wins a limited freedom for Judah.
Rise of the major Jewish sects: Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes.

**PENTATEUCH**

The term Pentateuch means “five containers”, indicating the written leather or papyrus rolls that were kept in containers. In this case the five rolls are the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Together they constitute the Law (Torah), which originally meant “teaching”.

**Who Wrote the Pentateuch?**

The question of who wrote the first five books of the Bible has fascinated scholars for the past two centuries. Traditional belief credited Moses with writing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Ancient rabbis and early Christians believed this. Even the New Testament assumes that Moses authored the Law. For example, Jesus explicitly calls the Pentateuch "the book of Moses" (Mk 12:26).

Today, however, we recognize that the Pentateuch took its final form only after centuries of telling, retelling, adapting, and reinterpreting the many stories of Yahweh’s dealings with the Chosen People. Moses is certainly the central figure of the Pentateuch. The Israelites would naturally look to him as the source of the laws and traditions recorded in the Torah. But Moses certainly could not have written everything in these first books. For example, Deuteronomy 34:5- 12 chronicles Moses’ death! Scholarly analysis has come up with many different theories to explain the authorship of the Pentateuch.

The most popular theory suggests there were at least four major *sources* that went into the composition of the Pentateuch. The final edition of this composite work was probably completed during the life of the priest Ezra who lived between 460-400 BC. Ezra was a leader in making the Torah a binding force in the life of all his people. Later authors and editors did not try to reconcile all the differences in the stories and traditions that were handed down to them. They simply included their stories right after the previous author’s.
| YAHWIST  
  (J)     | ELOHIST  
  (E)     | PRIESTLY  
  (P)     | DEUTERONOMIST  
  (D)     |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>calls God Yahweh</td>
<td>calls God Elohim</td>
<td>calls God Elohim</td>
<td>calls God Yahweh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sees God as walking and talking with us</td>
<td>sees God as speaking in dreams, and so on</td>
<td>has a cultic approach to God</td>
<td>has a moralistic approach to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stresses blessing</td>
<td>stresses fear of the Lord</td>
<td>stresses obedience of the law</td>
<td>stresses Mosaic obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses earthy speech about God</td>
<td>uses refined speech about God</td>
<td>uses majestic speech about God</td>
<td>uses speech recalling God’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stresses the leaders</td>
<td>stresses the prophetic</td>
<td>stresses the cultic</td>
<td>stresses fidelity to Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses narrative and stories</td>
<td>uses narrative and warnings</td>
<td>uses dry lists and schemata</td>
<td>uses long homiletic speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stresses Judah</td>
<td>stresses northern Israel</td>
<td>stresses Judah</td>
<td>stresses the whole land of Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses the term “Sinai”</td>
<td>uses the term “Horeb”</td>
<td>uses genealogy lists</td>
<td>uses military imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calls natives “Canaanites”</td>
<td>calls natives “Amorites”</td>
<td></td>
<td>has many fixed phrases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>