Catholic Documents 101: A Theological Librarian’s Guide to Identifying, Locating, and Using the Documents of the Catholic Church

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Catholic Documentation 101

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Objectives

1) To better understand the types of Catholic documents
2) To gain greater knowledge of how much assent a Catholic needs to give to certain types of Catholic teaching
3) To learn features of the various Catholic documents
Origins of the Deposit of Faith
Deposit of Faith

Sacred Scripture + Sacred Tradition = **Deposit of Faith**

*Dei verbum* 10: “Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.”

Assent of faithful required
Sacred Scripture

*Dei verbum* 9 (a.k.a. *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*): “Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit”

Sacred Scripture is a major source from where all Church teachings flow.

Sacred Tradition

Apostolic or Sacred Tradition (Tradition)

Dei verbum 9: “[S]acred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known.”
Doctrine and Dogma

Assent on both is obligatory as they are directly derived from Sacred Scripture and/or Tradition.

Dogma is divinely revealed truth proclaimed by the Magisterium.¹

Doctrine is “a proposition (or set of propositions) taught by the Magisterium of the Church.”²

e.g., Dogma of Christ’s dual natures


Discipline

Church practices outside the realm of dogma and doctrine. Supports but does not define belief. Can change over time and may differ among the Churches.

e.g., Latin Church’s discipline on celibate priesthood. Eastern Churches discipline allow for married men to become priests.
Devotion

“The religious sense of the Christian people” (CCC 1674)

Devotions complement but do not replace liturgical celebrations (CCC 1675)

Examples include: “veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals, etc.” (CCC 1674).

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament considered devotion

Bonus: Private Revelation

Apparitions, locutions, etc., that are outside the boundaries of divine revelation

Assent of faithful not required, even if Church recognizes apparition as valid. If Church declares the apparition does not have supernatural character, faithful cannot assent.

Conciliar, Papal, National, Local - Oh, my!
Hierarchy of Authority

1. **Apostolic constitutions** and decrees issued by popes, such as the Second Vatican Council documents. Along with Code of Canon Laws (1983), binding on entire church.

2. **Papal teaching documents**: encyclicals, apostolic letters, apostolic exhortations, and “*motu proprio*” documents expound or explain existing law.

3. **Instructions**: issued by Congregations, with the approval of the pope.

4. The official documents issued by a **national conference of bishops**, usually called “pastoral letters”.

5. Pastoral letters issued by a **local bishop** for his diocese.

Conciliar or Universal Authority

- Sacred Scriptures
- Dogmatic Constitutions (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, “On Divine Revelation”)
- Apostolic Constitutions (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, “From the Heart of the Church”)
Papal Documents

Most common:

- **Encyclical Letter** - Often known by Latin title; addressed to bishops, and to the faithful at large.
- **Apostolic Letter** - Generally address administrative issues or exhort the faithful on a doctrinal issue.
- **Apostolic Exhortation** - A formal instruction issued to a community urging some specific activity; does not define doctrine
Curial Documents

- **Instruction** - clarify documents issued by Council or decree of pope
- **Recognitio** - acceptance of a document from a local bishops’ conference
- **Replies to dubia** - official response to questions from bishops
Episcopal Documents

National Conferences of Bishops

- Pastoral Letters
- Assorted documents and statements

Local (Diocesan)

- Pastoral Letters
Print and Web Sources
The Catechism of the Catholic Church

- Summary of doctrine for non-specialist audiences
- Two predecessors:
  - Roman Catechism (1566)
  - Baltimore Catechism (1884)
- John Paul II: “This catechism will thus contain both the new and the old, because the faith is always the same yet the source of ever new light.”
The Catechism

- Four sections:
  - The Profession of Faith
    - Follows the Apostle’s Creed
  - The Celebration the Christian Mystery
    - The Seven Sacraments
  - Life in Christ
    - Virtue and Vice, Commandments
  - Christian Prayer
    - Lord’s Prayer
The Catechism

- Numbered paragraphs for easy reference
- Sources: Scripture, Councils, Liturgy, Church Fathers, saints
- Each section concludes with an “in Brief” summary

Jesus substitutes his obedience for our disobedience

615 “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” 443 By his one obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who “makes himself an offering for sins,” when “he bore the sin of many,” and who “shall make many to be accounted righteous,” for “he shall bear their iniquities.” 444 Jesus shared for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father. 445

Jesus consummates his sacrifice on the Cross

616 It is love “to the end” 446 that crowns on Christ’s sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life. 447 Now “the love of Christ compels us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.” 448 No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice for all.

617 The Council of Trent emphasizes the unique character of Christ’s sacrifice as “the source of eternal salvation” 449 and teaches that "his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us." 450 And the Church venerates his cross as it sings: "Hail, O Cross, our only hope." 451

Our participation in Christ’s sacrifice

618 The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the “one mediator between God and men." 452 But because in his incarncate-divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, “the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the..." 453

443 Rom 5:19.
444 1 Pet 3:12.
446 1 Jn 3:13.
448 2 Cor 5:21.
449 Jn 5:5.
450 Council of Trent: DS 1529.
452 1 Tim 2:5.

IN BRIEF

619 “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3).
620 Our salvation flows from God’s initiative of love for us, because "he loved us and sent his Son to be the atonement for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19).
621 Jesus freely offered himself for our salvation. Beforehand, during the Last Supper, he both symbolized this offering and made it really present: “This is my body which is given for you” (Lk 22:19).
622 The redemption won by Christ consists in this, that he came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28), that is, he “loved [his] own to the end” (Jn 13:1), so that they might be "rescued from the futile ways inherited from [their] fathers” (1 Pet 1:18).
623 By his loving obedience to the Father, “unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8), Jesus fulfilled the atoning mission (cf. Is 53:10) of the suffering Servant, who will “make many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities” (Is 53:11; cf. Rom 5:19).

439 CS 22 § 5, cf. § 2.
450 Mt 16:21.
451 Jn 2:23.
452 Cf. Mt 28:20; Col 1:12.
The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church

- Builds on German collection by Josef Neuner (1938)
- Latest edition covers up through most of John Paul II’s papacy (2001)
The Christian Faith

- Contents arranged by Subject
  - Chapter III: The Triune God
  - Chapter IV: Humankind and the World
  - Chapter V: Original Justice and Fall
- Each chapter's contents presented in chronological order
The Christian Faith

- For every document, a brief summary is usually supplied, either to set the stage for the excerpt or to relate the document’s concerns to the larger topic
- Each excerpt is marked by a new number
- Second number is a cross-reference to Denzinger

The General Council of Constance

Condemnation of Errors of Wyclif and Hus (1415)

Wyclif’s errors on the sacraments were not without relative to his ideas about the Church to which only the prebendaries belonged (cf. n. 1410). The same same issue was taken over by John Huss and spread by Jan Hus in Bohemia. After banning the scholar, Church reform and the campaign against the errors of Wyclif and Hus were for the Council of Constance the most urgent issue. It condemned these errors in its 28th session (May 1415). According to Wyclif, a sinful person (and not only in both the civil and the religious sphere) could be admitted to the sacraments administered by a cleric, priest or bishop, and not true sacraments.

(Letter of Wyclif condemned)

1300 If a bishop or priest is in mortal sin, he does not 1154 redeem, he does not compensate, he does not perform [the Eucharist], he does not baptize.

MARTIN V

BULL INTER CINCATAS (1418)

Soon after his election as Pope, Martin V meant to set in action the decisions taken by the Council of Constance. In this bull he anates back to the errors of Wyclif and Hus already condemned by the Council in a series of 39 questions submitted to the Fathers. One of these is quite concerned with the problem of the validity of a sacrament administered by an unqualified minister.

(Queries proposed to the followers of Wyclif and Hus)

1304 Likewise, whether he believes that a bad priest who uses the correct matter and form and has the intention of doing what the Church does, truly performs [the Eucharist], truly absolves, truly baptizes, truly confers the other sacraments.

The General Council of Florence

Decree for the Armenians (1445)

Soon after the Bull Lamentaque Caedi declared to bring about the union of the Greeks which in fact did not materialize (cf. n. 1520), the Council issued a decree for the union of the Armenians; this document has been published as a Bull of Pope Gregory IV, entitled Possilata Domus. The Decree for the Armenians was accepted by the delegate of their Church. The Bull mentions the doctrines of the early Councils on the Trinity (including the Filioque in the profession of faith of the Council of Constantinople: cf. n. 125), and on the
Heinrich Denzinger’s intention in first producing this collection (1854) was to provide the theological student with an orderly presentation of doctrine in the words of the Church:

- Professions of faith
- Decrees of councils
- Resolutions of synods
- Papal documents
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Denzinger

2328. Vae baptisatus colletis a miseria, qui conse- 
mit anum spiritum sanctum, qui ab omni 
2329. Fortis et invicem confunctus est a Donatist 
2330. Omnis anima, sicut in Christo, in animo, 
2331. Bellum Urbis VIII in oriente est subtilitatis 
2332. [Censure: Condemned and prohibited as heretical, 

INNOCENTII XII: July 22, 1695—September 27, 1704

2340. Qvì: An animi primo etiam sequa sabbates, 

Marriage Contract and Testament

2341. Question: Is marriage legally extended into 

2351. 1. Is there a literal sense of the word of God? 

Errors of Franciscus de Sales

2352. 2. In the state of the contemplative or 

2353. 3. Which is essential in the direction of a soul 

2354. 4. In the state of holy indolence, a soul no longer 

2355. 5. In the same state of holy indolence we visit 

2356. 6. In this state of holy indolence we no longer seek 

2357. 7. Abatement is nothing else than the abandonment 

2358. [Origenes: Origen, Is a person called "spiritually 

2359. 40: 44] (1673/1674, 2d ed. 1841, 2d ed. 240)

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2359. 40: 44] (1673/1674, 2d ed. 1841, 2d ed. 240)
Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils

- Collects all of the decrees of the twenty-one ecumenical councils
- From the Foreword: “The ecumenical councils form the most important part of Christian ‘tradition.’ Therefore for Christians, at least for Roman Catholics, the book may be regarded as the most authoritative work in the world after the Bible.”
- Bilingual, face-to-face texts
Decrees on the Ecumenical Councils

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The Liturgy Documents

Collects all the relevant documents concerning the modern Catholic liturgy

Good source for learning about the modifications that have been introduced to the Catholic liturgy since the Second Vatican Council
Compilación del Docro de la Sociedad de la Iglesia

Compilación de la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia

Chapter six

284. Rest from work. As God "rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had done" (Gen 2:2), so too men and women, created in his image, are to enjoy sufficient rest and free time that will allow them to tend to their family, cultural, social and religious life.\(^{[66]}\) The institution of the Lord's Day contributes to this.\(^{[66]}\) On Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation, believers must refrain from "engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body."\(^{[66]}\) Family needs and service of great importance to society constitute legitimate excuses from the obligation of Sunday rest, but these must not excuse habits that are prejudicial to religious, family life or health.

285. Sunday is a day that should be holy both by charitable activity, devoting time to family and relatives, as well as to the sick, the aged and the elderly. One must not forget the "freethinkers who have the same needs and the same rights, yet cannot rest from work because of poverty and misery."\(^{[66]}\) Moreover, Sunday is an appropriate time for the reflection, silence, study and meditation that foster the growth of the interior Christian life. Believers should distinguish themselves on this day too by their moderation, avoiding the excesses and certainly the violence that mass entertainment sometimes occasion.\(^{[66]}\) The Lord's Day should always be lived as a day of liberation that allows us to take part in "the fastidious gathering and the assembly of the hearers who are enthralled in leisure"\(^{[66]}\)

Compiles Church teaching on social issues in the same format as the Catechism

- Human rights
- The common good
- Solidarity
- The dignity of work
- Political systems
- War and peace
Papal Pronouncements

- Companion volumes to the *Papal Encyclicals*
- Not a collection of texts, but an index of all the speeches, lectures, letters, and public statements made by the popes
Web sources

- For most 20th-century Church and papal documents, the Vatican’s website serves them quickly:
  - [The Holy See](#)

- For the publications of the magisterium in the United States, this website is the major source:
  - [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)
Sample Reference Question

Why do Catholics pray to saints? What does the Church teach about saints and their veneration?
Getting started

Just using google is not recommended at the beginning of a search for Church documents/Church teaching. It is too complicated and tricky. You never know where you will end up.
Start with reliable print resources

The *Catechism* and compilations like *The Catholic Faith* can help guide you to where the answer to your question will lie.
The Catechism has a great topical INDEX to help you, and many CITATIONS that will reference primary source DOCUMENTS.
Well-organized compilations are helpful

The *Christian Faith* is organized topically, and it has a great table of contents in which you quickly see that documents on the saints are gathered in an appendix, “On the Cult of Saints and Sacred Images”
Other helpful tools

There are various iterations of the Catechism, and some older compilations of Church documents as well. You can check a good book on apologetics, since they are bound to cite Church Documents. And don’t forget the wonderful *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. 
Special print tools

God bless Sister Claudia Carlen who compiled *Papal Pronouncements* before the Internet days. Not all documents exist online. This might still help you find where some papal documents have been published in print.
NOW you can go online.

Once you are armed with citations to specific documents, your online search will be more fruitful. Google sometimes even finds Church documents more quickly than if you tried to search individual sites like the Vatican or USCCB yourself. Some other sites (like ETWN.com) have also made Church documents available.
The editors of the authoritative 43rd edition of the Denzinger compendium of church documents quote Yves Congar when they caution against the “dangers” of using Denzinger: “The succession of texts that are in themselves of widely differing importance can give the impression that it is a question of paragraphs in a code of law. . . . The idea can be fostered that there might be for all believers a kind of unique superbeing. . . . the Magisterium, that watches over them, treats them like children, corrects, and determines what opinions may and may not be held.” The editors encourage us to consult not only Magisterial documents, but The Church Fathers, the liturgy, and great theologians, etc. “Magisterial documents represent merely one of the forms of this interpretation by which the faith is protected.”
Resources and References

Handout


Resources - Part 2


http://guides.lib.cua.edu/c.php?q=711409&p=5183780


Spring Hill College, Department of Theology. “Papal Documents”. (accessed April 6, 2018)  
http://theolibrary.shc.edu/docs.htm