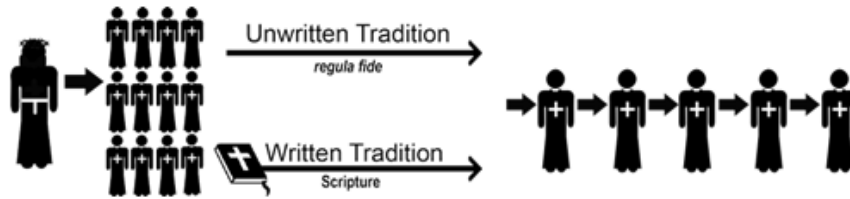
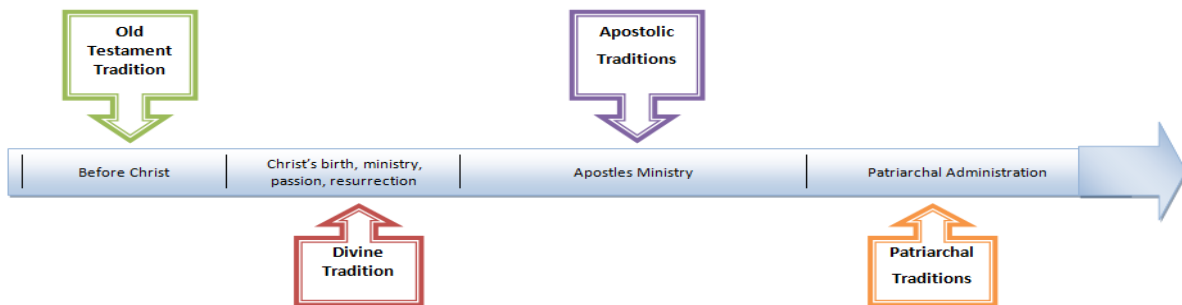


Apostolic Traditions



PURPOSE: To understand the importance of apostolic traditions alongside with the Holy Bible and the dangers associated with the concept of *Sola Scriptura*.

Traditions: Then & Now



The term "tradition" comes from the Latin *'tradere,'* which means to transmit or to handover. The written and oral traditions and even the practices which were handed down from our holy fathers are an integral part of the history and development of our great Syriac Orthodox Church.

OLD TESTAMENT TRADITION:

Often the assumption is that the Holy Scripture dictates the happenings of the past, it is critical to understand and note that tradition is more ancient than the recording of the Holy Scriptures. Prior to the recordings of the Scripture, predecessors of several generations handed down the the belief in one God and they abided by what was known as the law of conscience. The believers



Stop & Relate:

Even today traditions, stories and recipes are handed down to reinforce family identity and values.

used to verbally share stories of historical events, that took place through the ages and were handed down generation after generation until the coming of prophet Moses who was divinely inspired to record these events. Moses was also given the Ten

Commandments as written laws. He also recorded also all necessary laws, which he received from God.

In spite of not having laws recorded, it is clear traditions were sacred and maintained among the people of the past, the Holy Scripture instructs "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying 'This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt'" (Exodus 13:8). And "Ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you" (Deuteronomy 32:7). Undoubtedly, verbal teaching was extremely necessary, because the majority of people were illiterate.



NEW TESTAMENT TRADITION:

As Syriac Orthodox Christians we maintain and practice a very ancient and fundamental faith system that marries Apostolic traditions and the Holy Bible. Tradition is divine, apostolic or patristic.



Divine tradition is that teaching given by Jesus Christ directly and by word of mouth to the Holy Apostles. Prior to His passion, crucifixion, and resurrection, Christ had been preparing the Apostles to continue His works after His death. Christ entrusted the "keys of the kingdom" to St. Peter (Matthew 16:19) to ensure that the will of God would continue in the generations to come.

Apostolic tradition is the teachings of Christ which was orally communicated to the Apostles then in turn these teachings and practices of Apostles to their successors over the course of time and history have been transmitted from generation to generation for the preservation of the Holy

Church. Apostolic tradition includes the teachings of the Apostles, their laws and the messages they handed down to their disciples and their immediate successors orally. It also includes constitutions of faith, the Church Sacraments, enacted laws and liturgies which are derived from Christ and established by the Apostles.

Our Lord Jesus never recorded His Gospel nor handed it over in a written form. He preached the Gospel of salvation, calling people to repentance.

The Holy Gospel is a testimony to what the disciples of the Lord Jesus have seen and heard from Him. What was therefore written down in the Gospel was exactly what had been first preached verbally by the disciples.



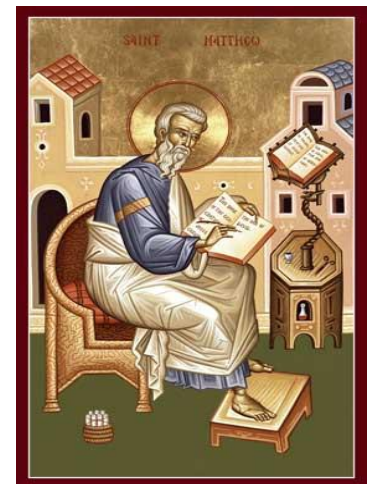
It goes without saying that the Christian Church came into being much earlier than the New Testament was recorded and that it had been established for a period of time during which only the Old Testament was recorded. The first to pen the Holy Gospel was the Apostle Matthew in Aramaic in the year AD 39. The last book of the New Testament is the Book of Revelation which was written by John in Greek between AD 90-100.

Patristic tradition is what the Holy Church has received from the dawn of its history from its Holy Fathers. It includes noble statutes based on the teachings of the Holy Apostles with respect to the interpretation of doctrines; exegesis of the Holy Scripture, organization of religious rites and enactment of laws, especially decisions taken by the holy synods and works of some Church Fathers, such as Patriarch Kyriakos (+817) and laws enacted by them.

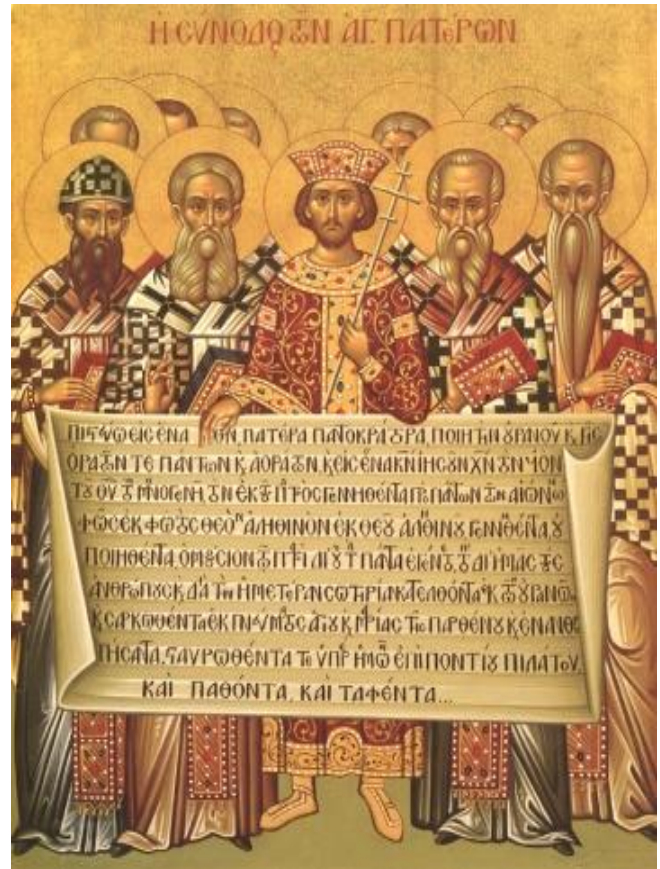
Some apostles and disciples penned the Holy Gospel and some others wrote epistles which were joined to the New Testament. Those books, however, did not include all what they had preached to the world. We have received from early Church Fathers the laws attributed to the apostles and the rules they established for the structure of the Church. We did also receive the valuable doctrines they had verbally handed over to the Church, but never recorded in the New Testament. The Apostle John said in one of his epistles: "Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full" (II John 12 & III John 13, 14) thus signifying the importance to oral passing down of traditions.

Holy Spirit Role in Apostolic or Patristic Tradition

It is true that tradition preceded the composition of the Holy Scripture, and that the Holy Church attested to the authenticity and validity of these books, yet they have derived their authority directly from the Holy Spirit Who spoke through the Prophets and Apostles, preserving thus the teachings and doctrines of the Church, inspiring Church Fathers, reminding them of all that had been said by Jesus Christ to His disciples, guiding them to the truth because he is the Spirit of Truth emanating from the Father.



Having been inspired by the Holy Spirit to complete whatever might be needed for the organization of the Holy Church in accordance with the requirements of time, such as the establishment of the office of deacons in the Church, the election and appointment of the seven deacons to care for the Church (Acts 6:1-8), the convocation of Synods, such as the Synod of Jerusalem (AD 51), and taking decisions they considered to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, the apostles and disciples wrote: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us" (Acts 15:28). Moreover, the working of the Holy Spirit is apparent, especially at the election of bishops and sending them away to minister, as quoted in the Acts of the Apostle: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2).



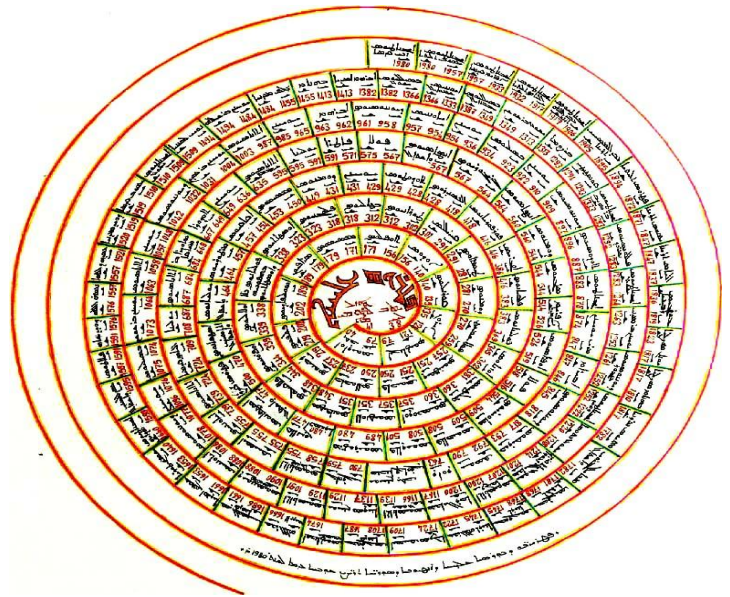
The Holy Spirit's role in the organization of the Church was not surprising to the apostles for the Lord had formerly told them about it saying: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12-13). All this conforms to the teaching of the Scripture, yet has never been recorded in it. It was passed on verbally by the Fathers; and the Apostle Paul commands to the Thessalonians: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (II Thessalonians 2:15). And in relation to the Apostle Paul's explanation of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist to the Corinthians, he elucidates the fact that the apostolic tradition is based on the divine tradition by saying: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you" (I Corinthians 11:23). And the Apostle Paul concludes by saying: "And the rest I will set in order when I come" (I Corinthians 11:34).

With such words, the Apostle Paul defers explanation of some organizational or liturgical matters until going to meet them. These matters which he conveyed face to face, and which the Church circulated and passed through tradition generation after generation, have been kept intact by the Holy Spirit up to the present date and have

been practiced by the Universal Church in different languages and in the contexts of different local civilizations.

To maintain the continuity of ancient traditions, even today the Holy Synod meets on a regular basis to discuss the doctrines and practices of the Church to ensure that it stands in accordance of the ancient traditions and laws. The Patristic succession and tradition continues today as our Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka-I Iwas is the 122nd successor to St. Peter in the Apostolic See of Antioch. This clearly signifies the authenticity, authority, and ancientness of our Holy Church faith and practices.

(Note: The spiral diagram visually denotes the succession of our lineage from the throne of St. Peter in the center out to our current Patriarch with the names in Syriac and the term years.)



SOLA SCRIPTURA

This conclusiveness of both the Scriptures and Apostolic traditions distinguish our Church from some other denominations. Several Christian

DID YOU KNOW?

The Nicene Creed was written prior to the compilation of the New Testament.

denominations believe in *sola scriptura*. *Sola Scriptura* translates, "By scripture alone". According to this belief, the Bible contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness,

nothing else should be used or supplemented with it. Our Church, along with most of the Apostolic churches, does not agree with this theory and more over we are opposing the danger of this type of practice and teaching.



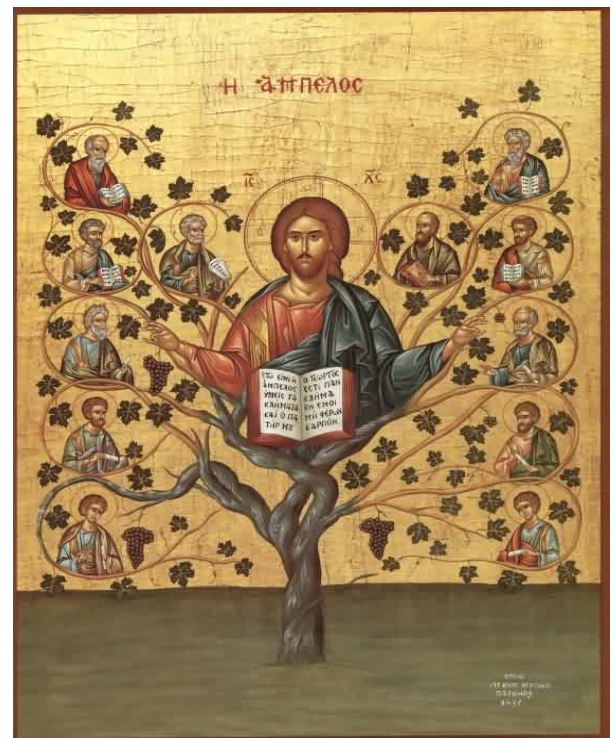
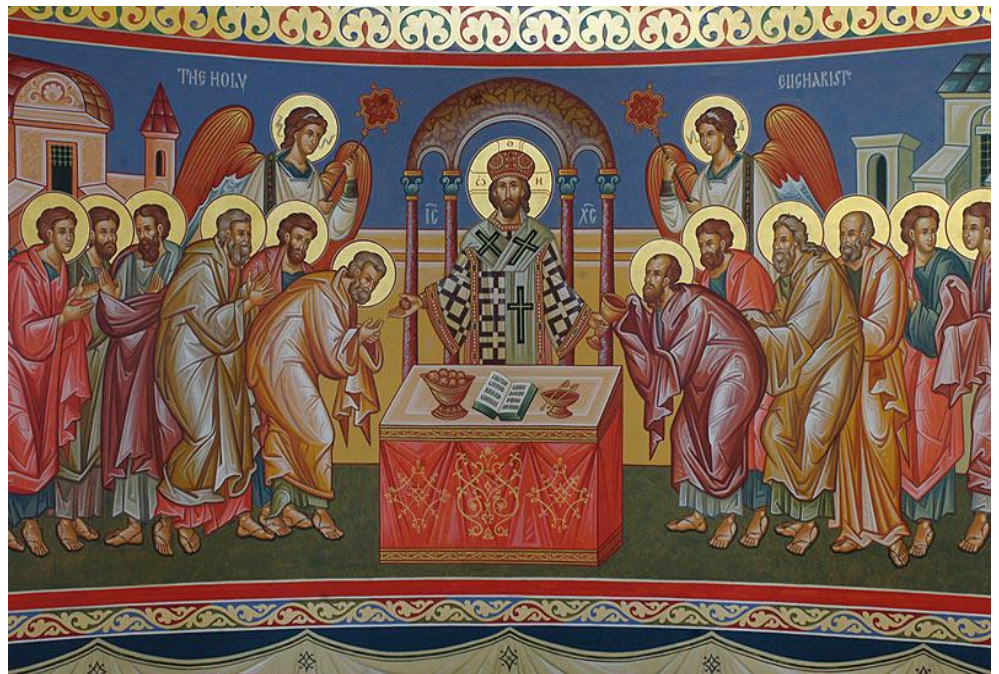
The Holy Church does not in any means degrade the importance, dignity or holiness of the Holy Bible. It is important as Syriac Orthodox Christians to understand that the Bible is a compilation of books decided upon by the Council of Carthage (AD 397). Furthermore the Holy Bible was assembled only after the composing of the Nicene

Creed (AD325). These historical events are evidence that the Holy Church was not established on the basis of Bible but later the Church introduced the Bible for its own purpose, practices, and teaching.

The advocates of *sola scriptura* believe that the scripture is complete and they are not accepting any other areas for salvation. The scripture itself states that it is not complete (Jn.21:25, 2Jn:12, 2Thes2:15, 2Tim:1:12, 2:2). There are many texts in the Holy Gospel indicating that the Holy Apostles did not record in the Gospel every saying of the Lord Jesus or every deed done by Him. A conspicuous evidence of authenticity of this is what the Apostle John said at the conclusion of his Gospel: "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). He also said: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30).

Often Scripture passages are often quoted to mislead the faithful to oppose traditions (Mt: 15:3, Col: 2:8, 1Pt.1:18). Jesus did not oppose Moses' traditions but he opposed Pharisees misleading interpretations of the laws and traditions. St. Paul and St. Peter were criticizing here the Jewish traditions. As St. Paul writes in his epistle to the Thessalonians, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle" (Thessalonians)

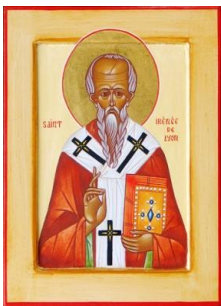
St. Luke very clearly says that he wrote the gospel only on the basis of what he listen the apostles (Luke 1:1-4). Therefore the gospel according to St. Luke is perfectly a tradition. St. Paul instructed Timothy that he should share his advises to faithful men who were able to teach others also (2Tim 2:2).



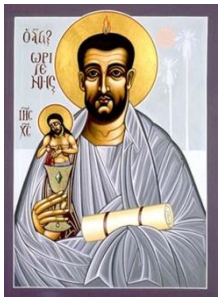
The supporters of sola scripture believes that, the content of Bible is very clear and anybody without any guidance from the Church can understand it. St. Peter's words denying these arguments (2Pt:3:16). More over the eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia asked Phillips to interpret the Prophecy of Isaiah for him (Act: 8:30-31)

Quotes of Holy Fathers and scholars regarding the importance of tradition and scripture:

Tertullian AD 160-225 (early Christian author): "If no scripture has determined this, surely Custom has confirmed it, which has been derived from tradition for, how can a thing be used unless it is first delivered to us. But you say even where tradition is pleaded; written authority ought to be required. Where fore let us enquire whether none, save a written tradition ought to be received. Certainly we shall deny that it ought to be received, if there be no precedents to determine the contrary in other observances, which, without any Scripture documents, we defend on the ground of tradition only and by the support of consequent custom."



St. Irenius AD130-202: First of all, which is of greatest moment in things of this sort, the practice amongst us, which we can produce, has the form of law because our rules have been handed down to us by holy men. Tradition is the continuing stream of the mind of the Church "(Baselius AD329-379)."I would not believe the Gospel unless moved there to by the authority of the Church"(St. Augustine AD 354-430)."St. Polycarp (AD69-155) taught what he learned from Apostles and the Church traditionally teaching this true faith.



Origen (185-253): "I have come to know the four Gospels through tradition, and I believe that they are unique." And Augustus (354-430) stated: "I would not have believed in the Gospel had I not been convinced by the voice of the Universal Church."

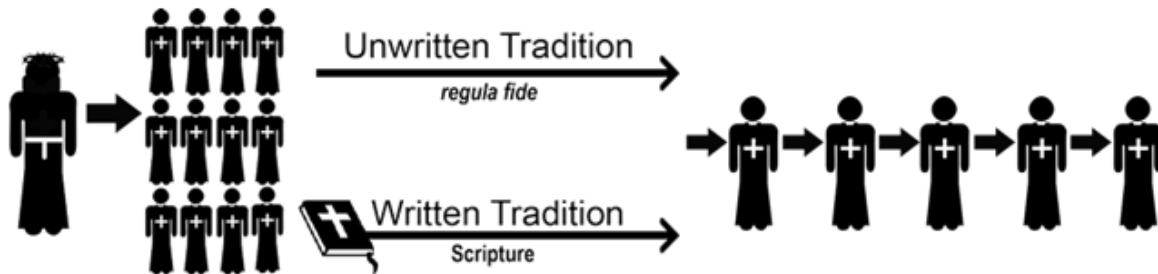
As tradition is more ancient than the written Gospel, whoever receives the teachings of the Holy Gospel shall, no doubt, receive the divine and apostolic traditions spontaneously. No one can receive the Gospel, yet reject tradition so long as the Gospel is considered as part of tradition. Both the Gospel and tradition form one entity and neither one can be dispensed with as each one completes the other. The Syriac Orthodox Church is truly apostolic and the Bible or Scripture is the essential part of its rich tradition.

CHECKPOINT:

1. Define Apostolic Traditions
2. Describe
 - a. Old Testament Traditions
 - b. New Testament Traditions
 - c. Patristic Traditions
3. Explain why Sola Scriptura is not supported by our faith and tradition
4. Discuss how the Apostolic Traditions are preserved in the Holy Church Today

CHALLENGE:

Briefly describe the below image and how it translates to Apostolic Traditions.



PRAYER:

Midnight Prayer: Second Watch Qolo

Apostles! adversaries have encircled the Church from all sides to hinder the spread of the gospel that you have preached. Therefore, intercede for us before the Lord who chose you, so that there may be no divisions and disputes in the Church and among the children of the Church. O Lord! let Your truth be a furnace that keeps Your word as pure as gold. May the priests cry aloud in purity that, blessed is the Lord who sustains the growth of the Church. Barekhamor.

O Lord, by the prayers of the chosen twelve apostles, bless the twelve months of the year. May the earth receive regular rain and sun that we may be blessed by the heavenly grace and the harvest of the earth. O Lord, by the rain and drizzle of Your blessing, may the fruits grow and the needy and the poor eat those and praise Your name. Moryo rahem `a lay noo `adarayn.