

Lesson Ten: Authority Part III – Tradition

It is time to close the cover on this study - Understanding Catholicism. It has been a very tedious, laborious and taxing study. I have shuddered at some of the official teaching of the RCC as I considered the millions of faithful Catholics that hold to them as a life line. Yet there is hope - a front line report from Peru

We praise the Lord for the power of the gospel.

Once again for newcomers: we are letting the Catholic Church speak for itself. Sources of Catholic Doctrine.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church- Edited by Joseph Ratzinger [Also known as Pope Benedict XVI (1994)]

Two books helpful in this study are:

- Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma – Ludwig Ott¹
- The Gospel According to Rome - ² [AVAILABLE AT THE BOOKSTORE]

So we have covered **salvation**, The **Mass** and **Mariology**. We are now finishing up with **authority**. Where do they get their dogmas?

Divine Revelation [50-141]

Originates in Christ [65-67, 73, 75]

According to the RCC Jesus revealed the Catholic faith to the Apostles by his physical **presence** and self-manifestation. He did it through His:

...words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by His death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Holy Spirit of truth. Vatican II – Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation – No. 4

Listen carefully to what they say here. It sounds like what a fundamental Baptist might say. Christ was God's **final** revelation, He, "completed and perfected Revelation." Vat II DCDD no 4. "No new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ."- Vat II DGDV no 4.

¹ Ott, Ludwig. *Fundamentals of catholic dogma*. S.I: Tan Books & Pub, 1992.

² McCarthy, James G. *The Gospel according to Rome*. Eugene, Or: Harvest House, 1995.

Amen!

Transmission of revelation through scriptures and Tradition [74-83]

As is consistent with the RCC the church insists that the authority to transmit faithfully all divine truth lay first with the Apostles by inheritance to the Bishops with the Pope being the Bishop who enjoys *primacy* or of first status and authority. The RCC teaches that divine truth comes to us through the Apostles and now bishops in two forms:

- The unwritten form is known as **Tradition**.
- The written form of revelation is the **Scripture**.
- The RCC illustrates divine revelation as a **pool** of truth beginning in heaven that flows out in two streams. One stream is the Bible (scripture) and the other is Tradition. Together they “preserve and transmit the revelation that Jesus gave to the apostles.

Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scriptures then, are bound closely together, and communicate with one another. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move toward the same goal. Vatican II [DCDR no.9].

The Word of God [80-85]

The RCC calls this, “one thing,” The Word of God.

Sacred Tradition and Sacred scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church [DCDR no.10].

When a Roman Catholic theologian wants to refer to the **written** Word of God he is talking about the Scriptures. When he is talking about the **unwritten** (oral) Word of God he is talking about Tradition. When he simply talks about the Word of God he is taking about the **combination**. He does not have to cite a chapter and verse to be giving divine revelation from God’s word

...the church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence
Vatican II - DCDR no.10.

[The Church] has always regarded, and continues to regard the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith. [Vatican II - DCDDR no.10 as well as the Council of Trent: session four first decree.]

So the written and unwritten word supply the foundation for RCC teaching

[READ ILLUS FROM PG 287] - This story represents the two opposing views on how the faith received from Christ is to be understood and practiced. The RCC teaches that the faith is contained in the bible and tradition. Together as interpreted by the popes and the bishops they are the supreme rule of the church. Biblical Christianity insists that the plain teaching of the bible, **illuminated** by the Holy Spirit contains all doctrine essential for salvation and Christian living.

A Biblical Response

Scripture is inspired; Tradition is not.

Tradition needs to be understood as the RCC means it. 1) It is not referring to the inherited culture and **practices** handed down through merely human sources [celibacy – unenforced until the 11th century; which direction to face when you pray; can girls serve like altar boys. These are *traditions* (lower case letter) whereas *Tradition* is something else. 2) Tradition is not the **writings** of the doctors and scholars; or the findings of synods, councils. These might witness to the Traditions but they are not the essence.

Tradition they explain is the word living continuously in the **heart** of the faithful [78, 113, 2650, 2661].

... it is not an inanimate thing passed from hand to hand; it is not, properly speaking, an assemblage of doctrines and institutions consigned to books or other monuments...it must be represented as a current of life and truth coming from God through Christ and through the apostles to the last of the faithful who repeats his creeds and learns his catechism. [The Catholic encyclopedia Vol 15. Pg 9]

This is stated in so many ways it is hard to include them all. Tradition is not contained in books, but in **people**, in the life of the Church. It is the **life**

experience of the Catholic faithful shown in many ways – [examples] How on earth could all of this living life experience be verified and kept orthodox?

In order that the full and living gospel might always be preserved in the church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them, "their own position of teaching authority. Vatican II Vatican II - DCDR no.7.

Tradition as a source of Dogma – The Assumption of Mary as an example

In 1946 Pope Pius XII sent a letter to the bishops of the world asking to know if they consider the Assumption of Mary [that is because of no original sin she did not die normally she was assumed or raptured to the throne of God] ready to be proposed and defined as a dogma of the church. To answer they had to go through the following steps:

- Is it spoken of in the written word (the Scriptures)? No luck there...
- Is it spoken of as a belief in the unwritten word (Tradition) hardly. Since this was not written they had to look at the three instruments of Tradition: the Pope, the bishops and the faithful. So the search then was made in seven specific areas:
 - 1) The dogmatic decrees of the Magisterium
 - 2) The **creeds** of the church [Apostle's and Nicene
 - 3) The **teaching** of the fathers
 - 4) The teaching of the church **doctors**
 - 5) The unanimous teachings of the **bishops**
 - 6) Was the belief in the assumption a universal **practice** of the church? Temples, images, relics, rituals, pilgrimages and the official church calendar all recognized it. in other words this is what people are believing (Santa Claus like) so let's affirm it.
 - 7) Was the Assumption of Mary the common understanding of the faithful? 1946 marked the all-time high of Mary veneration especially since the "Immaculate Conception was dogmatized in 1854.

Without any basis in scripture or tradition Pope Pius XII signed the document on November 1st 1950. Tens of thousands gathered in Saint Peter's square rejoicing for hours as 400 bells pealed the news that a new dogma has been declared.

Scripture Tradition and the Magisterium

I am including a page from the book *The Gospel according to Rome*³ in order to give you a visual of how authority works in the RC [last page]. What is significant is to see that the Magisterium sits atop the Bible and Tradition.

In the interest of time and also to not practice overkill I need to expedite this section. Let me show you the leap of authority that Pope Pius XII made in this decision.

... God has given to his Church a living Teaching authority to **elucidate** and **explain** what is contained in the deposit of faith (pool of truth in heaven) only obscurely and implicitly. This deposit of faith our Divine Redeemer has given for authentic interpretation not to each of the faithful, not even to theologians, but only to the Teaching Authority (Magisterium) of the Church – Humani Generis no.21.

Understand this. The Pope and Bishops authority is so great that they can find and define truth between the lines of scripture and tradition and once they declared it to be dogma it **must** be believed as from Jesus himself. This authority is the **proximate** rule or it is the closest rule to the faithful. The Bible is called the **remote** rule and is much more distant and obscure. In other words just listen to us and don't try to understand or locate things in the Bible.

The Biblical Verdict

What is all of this? How did the Catholic Church ever get to this point? Let Jesus explain it. Matt 15 and Mark seven tell the story.

The Catholic Church has picked up where the Sadducees and Pharisees left off. They hold their traditions and teaching **above** the Bible.

³ Ibid, pg 303