

Scripture, Tradition, Final Authority

- I. tradition: The action of handing over (something material) to another; delivery, transfer. (Chiefly in *Law*). Delivery, *esp.* oral delivery, of information or instruction. An ordinance or institution orally delivered.

- II. An important distinctive of Roman Catholicism is its position on final authority.
 - A. It does not hold that the truth of Scripture is the final authority but rather that the Church is an infallible institution of Christ which determines inspired truth through its leaders. The position may be summarized as follows:
 1. Christ established an infallible Church from which came the inspired Word.
 2. How did Christ establish this infallible Church? He did so through His Word.
 3. Why was this Word trustworthy to begin with? Because the infallible Church says so.
 4. This is circular reasoning at its finest.
 - B. Roman Catholicism holds to a trifold authority structure: Scripture, tradition, Magisterium (the church's teaching authority). Magisterium is the key component since it is deemed that it alone has the right to interpret Scripture and tradition, primarily through its pope and his bishops.
 1. The conciliar document, *Lumen Gentium*, from Vatican II, refers to the pope as having "infallible teaching" (3.18), as does the document *Pastor Aeternus*, from Vatican I, which declares the pope's teaching to be "infallible" and "irreformable."
 2. *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*) declares that it is through sacred tradition (which Magisterium defines) that the "full canon of sacred books is known" (2.8) and "The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church." (2.10)
 3. Yet the RCC also insists that Scripture is always superior to the Magisterium: "This teaching office is not above the Word of God, but serves it." (*Dei Verbum* 2.10) and the Catholic Catechism says, "Yet, this Magisterium is not superior to the word of God, but its servant" (86); see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994)
 4. The doublespeak aside, one must wonder how Scripture can be deemed the ultimate authority if the Magisterium is able to define, determine and interpret it at will, and regardless of the lip service paid to the Scripture's authority, it seems clear that Magisterium *functionally* has authority over the Scriptures.
 5. "The truth is what I say it is!" (Ned Beatty as Sen. Meachum in *Shooter*)
 - C. How does the RCC establish its own infallible authority?
 1. It could claim that its infallible authority is authenticated by, and derived from, the Scriptures. Not only is this circular reasoning (as noted above), one would be hard-pressed to find such a claim of an infallible church in the Scriptures.
 2. The church could claim that its infallible authority is authenticated by external evidence from its own history: origins, character, progress, etc. But these are subjective, fallible grounds that won't even stand the test of its own admissions of abuses, corruption, documented papal errors, etc. which, unbelievably, are sometimes even used as "proofs" that it must be the true church since Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against it and it has survived in spite of gross flaws.
 - a. Thus, the fallibility somehow proves its infallibility.
 - b. This is not far removed from someone under Moses' law claiming that stain-

- free tokens of virginity (**DEU 22:13-17**) were proof of virginity.
- c. Applying *reductio ad absurdem*, one would have to conclude that the more corruption and error, the more is the proof of authenticity.
3. The church could declare its authority is self-authenticating and needs no external authority to validate it: people must believe in its infallibility because it says so. Remember Sen. Meachum.
 - a. The essence of this option is taken by Peter Kreeft: “The Church is infallible because she is faithful.” (*Catholic Christianity...*, p. 102)
 - b. But who determines that faithfulness is the standard for deeming something to be infallible? Moses was faithful and fallible. **NUM 12:7; 20:12.**
 - c. Who decides the definition of “faithful?” In the RCC system, it does.
 4. While the RCC chides others for claiming a self-authenticating authority (*sola scriptura*) should be received on its own authority, it does so itself by affirming that its own claims should be received on its own authority (*sola ecclesia*).
 5. One gambit that has been used to explain away obvious papal errors of Magisterium is that there is a distinction between a pope’s *ex cathedra* utterances and non-*ex cathedra* utterances. Papal bulls and encyclicals which end up needing heavy editing or overturning can then, after the fact, be assumed to not have been *ex cathedra* inspired words.
- D. Having vested itself with ultimate authority, the Roman Catholic Church presumes to determine inspired truth and that it is not limited to the Scripture.
1. “It [the Church] also clearly perceives that these truths and rules are contained in the written books and in the **unwritten traditions**...dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church in unbroken succession.” (*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 1546, emph. added)
 2. “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God” (*Catechism Of The Catholic Church*, 97, 1994) “...Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence” (Ibid, 82)
 3. “The Second Vatican Council describes Tradition and Sacred Scripture as being ‘like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks to God’ ...Together, Tradition and Scripture ‘form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church.’ ” (*Handbook for Today’s Catholic*, Liguori Publications, 1978, pp. 24-25).
 4. “Catholics, on the other hand, say the bible is not the sole rule of faith and nothing in the Bible suggests it was meant to be. In fact, the Bible indicates it is not to be taken by itself. The true rule of faith is Scripture and Tradition, as manifested in the living teaching authority of the Catholic Church, to which were entrusted the **oral teachings of Jesus and the apostles** plus the authority to interpret Scripture rightly.” (Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, p. 134, emph. added)
 5. “It reduces to the proposition that, without the existence of the Church, we could not tell if the Bible were inspired.” (Ibid, p. 126)
- E. Some Protestants and Baptists imitate this model by giving undue heed to extra-scriptural opinions of denominational progenitors (e.g. Luther, Calvin) and/or Church Confessions.
- III. **2TH 2:15** is often used to support the notion of inspired non-Scriptural traditions. Mind that this assumes that Scripture is the superior authority since the argument is based on Scripture.
- A. This is a case of a reference text being used as a proof text.
 - B. The “word” and “epistle” under consideration in context is the *apostolic* word and epistle as opposed to the *non-apostolic* word and epistle to which the Thessalonians may have

been subjected. **2TH 2:2.**

- C. The traditions they had been taught by word were obviously apostolic traditions in context. **2TH 3:6.**
- D. The text is simply setting forth the two ways by which the Thessalonians had received the apostolic gospel and order: preaching and epistle. **ACT 17:1-3; 1TH 2:1-2; 5:27.**
- E. It is striking that, from this very chapter which denounces Antichrist's perversion of true religion (as defined by the apostles), the Roman Catholic Church has capriciously interpreted a text to justify non-apostolic, extra-biblical traditions which rival and counter apostolic revelation and Scripture in general.

IV. "Tradition" (single or plural form) appears thirteen times in Scripture.

MAT 15:2-3, 6; MAR 7:3, 5, 8-9, 13; GAL 1:14; COL 2:8; 2TH 2:15; 3:6; 1PE 1:18.

- A. Our Lord Jesus blasted the received traditions of the Jewish elders which He measured against the written commandments of the Law. Compare the above with **MAT 22:29.**
- B. Jesus argued from what was *written*. **MAT 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; LUK 10:26.**
 - 1. Like Roman Catholicism, Judaism holds that authoritative, divine revelation includes tradition which was orally given to Moses and to subsequent Jewish teachers. Mind that the decalogue was *written* in stone. **EXO 31:18.**
 - 2. Jesus Christ emphasized Moses's *writings*, the scriptures. **JOH 5:39-47.**
 - 3. When Christ argued, "Ye have heard that it was/hath been said by them of old time..." (**MAT 5:21, 33**), He was referring to Scripture. **EXO 20:13; 21:12-14; LEV 19:12; DEU 6:13.**
- C. Paul, upon conversion, abandoned received tradition (**GAL 1:14**) in favor of Scripture. **ACT 17:2; 18:28; 24:14-15; 28:23; ROM 4:3; GAL 4:30.**
- D. Peter likewise condemned "...vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers" (**1PE 1:18**).
- E. The only positive uses of the term are in **2TH 2:15; 3:6**, which refer to apostolic tradition.
- F. The same Greek word translated as "tradition(s)" (*paradosis*, SRN G3862) is translated as "ordinances" in **1CO 11:2**, a text which upholds apostolic directive, not post-apostolic traditions.
- G. It should be remembered that the Holy Spirit was promised to the apostles to guide THEM into all truth. **JOH 16:13.**
 - 1. The Spirit gave them *utterance*: they preached. **ACT 2:4 c/w 1PE 1:12.**
 - 2. The Spirit gave them *orders, prompts* and *determinations*. **ACT 10:19-20; 15:8, 28.**
 - 3. The Spirit followed up on their preaching and determinations with *letters* to the churches. **ACT 15:22-23; 1CO 15:1.**

V. The apostolic *writings* were to be the enduring directives for the churches.

- A. The apostolic determination *written* to the Gentile churches (**ACT 15**) consisted of the *decrees to be kept*. **ACT 16:4.**
- B. Paul commanded his epistles to be read and obeyed. **COL 4:16; 1TH 5:27; 2TH 3:14.**
 - 1. What was preached could be misrepresented or forgotten. **ROM 3:8; 1CO 15:2.**
 - 2. What was written was a standing record that could be copied and spread around. Jesus promised that He would send scribes. **MAT 23:34.**
 - 3. God favors preservation of His words in writing, not by oral transmission. **EXO 31:18; DEU 17:18-19; ISA 30:8; EZE 43:11; MAT 5:18; REV 1:11.**
- C. Peter declared Paul's epistles to be Scripture. **2PE 3:15-16.**
 - 1. They were therefore inspired as were other scriptures. **2TI 3:15-16.**
 - 2. The inspired **scriptures** are for the perfecting of the man of God to thoroughly

- furnish him unto all good works. **2TI 3:17.**
3. If the scriptures throughly furnish and perfect the man of God, so be it!
 4. Nowhere in Scripture is it stated or implied that unwritten non-apostolic traditions are co-revelations on par with Scripture to perfect saints.
 5. The apostles even limited what they wrote. **JOH 20:30-31; 21:24-25.**
- D. The apostles' *writings* even confirm the O.T. canon of Scripture, excluding the Apocrypha. **LUK 24:44-45.**
- E. By contrast, not all of the apostles' *oral* words, post-Pentecost, were inspired.
1. Peter in weakness dissembled and misled Gentile believers. **GAL 2:11-14.**
 2. Paul once spoke by passion, contrary to prophecy. **ACT 23:3-5.**
 3. If even the apostles' mouths could err and leave bad examples, how much more anyone subsequent to them?
- F. Contrary to the decrees of the Council of Trent, Paul declared that saints may gain understanding in the knowledge of God by **READING** what he **WROTE**. **EPH 3:3-4.**
- G. Scripture cannot be broken (**JOH 10:35**) but oral traditions have been historically sketchy, contrary to Scripture, and even discarded as errant or have been reversed.

VI. Close: **1CO 14:37-38.**