

ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION – THE INTERPRETER OF THE BIBLE?

The Roman Catholic Church believes that tradition and the Bible are both the word of God and tradition must be used to find out what the Bible is about. The pope and the bishops have to interpret the Bible for you using this other source of revelation. The injustice of this is plain in the fact that the earliest traditions of the Church all taught that the Old Testament Law was full of symbolism and was not literally true - a form of interpretation that the Church vehemently rejects. For example, the commandment God gave Abraham to get physically circumcised was taken as saying get spiritually not physically circumcised. It was really twisting the whole book. The Epistle of Barnabas, which was considered part of the Bible by many early Christians, and the Epistle of Diognetus were the two most anti literal would-be scriptures. Tradition to a Catholic just means whatever is in the early days of the Church that agrees with the pope and the Church. They don't have the integrity to admit this.

Vatican 2 declared that scripture and Tradition are the sources of divinely inspired doctrine and that both are to be revered with the same devotion and respect (On Revelation, Chapter 2:9).

Some say the Church has not made up its mind if Tradition adds to scripture or not (Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought, page 217). It is claimed that the Council of Trent taught that it has and so that Tradition adds to scripture but that is disputed. But it is obvious that the Church does regard Tradition as addition to scripture though not as scripture. The Church does not teach that the writings of the fathers of the Church and the pope are scripture but it does teach that their teachings are God's word and infallible. So tradition is not the written word of God in the way the Bible is.

It is thought that the Traditions that the great Catholic Council of Trent said were entitled to as much veneration as scripture seem to have been ones for practice like Sunday worship and the baptism of infants which were allegedly practiced since the apostles governed the Church (ibid 160). If this thought is correct then the decree cannot apply to traditions that cannot be traced back to the apostles. This would mean that the Church need not make the other traditions such as birth-control being a sin equal to the Bible and indeed should not. It would also mean that when the Catholic Church has gone on so long without the other traditions it should scrap them.

But if Trent meant what the disputers say it meant then why didn't it make it clear? The way it talks about tradition implies that it meant all the tradition of the Church. The fact remains that most Catholic doctrine that is regarded as infallible does not come from the Bible in any shape or fashion. The decree says that the Church is infallibly right when it "receives and venerates with an equal feeling of piety and reverence all the books of the Old and New Testament and also the traditions relating as well to faith as to morals" (page 63, Roman Catholic Claims). By implication this condemns birth-control as well and makes all the tradition that Trent had in mind infallible dogma. You see that the decree is a lot clearer than the disputers would have you believe. They just want a loophole to get around the fact that all Catholic tradition is binding on Catholics.

How could a Church that does not even know if its doctrines like the Immaculate Conception – to pick one out of many – are Tradition or not be infallible when it says the Immaculate Conception is true? A doctrine has to be Tradition or equal to Scripture if not better than it to be infallible. And it can't be better for the Church never said that though it treated it as better.

Roman doctrine says, "All our doctrines are true including those that are not taught in scripture for they have come down to us from the apostles in the form of tradition. They have come from those who knew what the Bible was all about and what agreed with it."

Protestant critics of Catholicism are more anxious than they should be to show that Catholic doctrines originated long after apostolic times. But it doesn't really matter when they started. Why?

A doctrine could easily have been made up by some old fraud a week after or even before the last of the apostles died and then attributed to an apostle so no matter how early a tradition is it is no good for there is no guarantee that it originated with an apostle and the Bible predicts great opposition to the truth even from inside the Church. It shows that it is risky to depend on tradition and that God would not want you to.

The Roman Church cannot teach that tradition is a good enough authority on its own but only accept it in so far as it

concur with and sheds more light on Bible revelation. This would mean that tradition would have to be implied by scripture before it could be accepted. In that case, why have tradition when common-sense would do? Rome can't admit it would for its tradition is more than just things that are implicit in the Bible.

The Church admits that much tradition is nonsense and it takes the rest to be God's word. But when it is up to a man and other men to decide which of its traditions are genuine the Roman Catholic ends up in a pit of dishonesty. It is not honest to argue that the pope and Church identify divine tradition and that this tradition shows that they are of divine institution - it is the lie of circular reasoning. There is just no reason why anyone who holds that the pope and the Church are the authority should start to doubt this.

The Church censures all traditions that conflict with scripture (Radio Replies, First Volume, page 125) so ones that do not are okay. But anyone can create doctrines that can be said to be complimentary to and not contrary to scripture. For example, you can teach that the Virgin is the fourth person of the Godhead for the Bible mentions three but does not say there are only three. If the Bible was meant to be interpreted by external material such as the teaching of a pope or an alleged prophet or whatever then we can make it mean what we like to a tremendous extent. For example, when Jesus said that there was a rock he would build the Church on and you agree with Catholic tradition that he thereby meant the pope your vision of the text is coloured. You can't let it speak for itself. The Bible does not contain rules for every moral question, rightly or wrongly, it says that armed with its general guidance we can work out God's will so it turns out that we don't need them.

Tradition is superior to the Bible in the Catholic Church no matter what it would have you believe. The Bible is interpreted by Tradition and since the interpreter is more important than the interpreted Tradition is superior. If Tradition is man-made the result will be a "gospel" with perverted teachings that don't fit the scriptures.

When you interpret a book in accordance with something else you are concealing its true meaning. For example, if tradition said the Bible meant that Jesus was only symbolically God then that would destroy the Bible doctrine of his deity (assuming it teaches his deity like Christendom says it does). In Catholicism, tradition is above the Bible for it determines its meaning and the Vatican is above tradition for it picks the traditions it prefers and enforces acceptance of those on the multitudes. Look how it dropped the universal and constant tradition that opposed ecumenism! Rome now declares that dead unbaptised babies will not suffer the agony of Hell forever though the constant tradition says they do (Vicars of Christ page 461).

When Rome drops traditions and makes changes she is not only declaring that God is her inferior but she is also saying that the Catholic faith itself is putty in her hands! You cannot have the Vatican and have a real Catholic faith. Your Church is being untruthful to you when she says that divine tradition is that tradition that she has always taught.

Vatican II claimed that tradition was not superior to the Bible for it and scripture are to be accepted as being entitled to the same devotion (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Chapter 2, Part 9) but that is a fib.

When religion is full of doctrines that cannot be understood Roman Catholicism is able to say what she likes to a great extent and call her contradictory doctrines coherent truths or paradoxes that we cannot understand. She says that her understanding of truth always needs improvement so this is her excuse. She is able to reconcile any absurd traditions with the Bible as long as she teaches the importance of mystery.

Jesus said that the faith would be a rock but tradition is too messy so the Catholic Church shows it is not Jesus' Church by being tradition based.

