

Why I Became A Protestant

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

TRADITION

The Catholic Church says that we ought to base our faith not only on the Scriptures but also on tradition.

It is natural that the Catholic Church does not want to do without tradition to establish its dogmas, because it cannot. If it omitted tradition it could not justify many of the doctrines which it sets forth, or better, which it imposes as matters of faith.

To the arguments on the validity of tradition to prove our faith, we reply:

1. The things which tradition sets forth to us and which are already contained in the Bible, we admit through the Bible. The argument of tradition is not needed.
2. The truths which are not set forth in the Bible, but tradition presents them and the Church imposes them as matters of faith, we accept if they are in agreement with the spirit of the Bible.

Concerning the Apostles and Evangelists, it is evident to us that they were infallible in their teachings and writings, and that what they did, said or wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit was all of the Lord.

We do not accept them, then, because they are tradition but because they are founded on the Word of God.

It is evident that if each one of the doctors and Fathers of the Church is not infallible, neither can they be all together, unless Jesus Christ gives them this extraordinary prerogative of infallibility. They may have more of least certainty, but not infallibility.

3. In the truths which are in the Bible, but which tradition gives a different meaning from the sacred text, we say: "If we cannot trust to Jesus Christ and the Apostles, much less can we trust what you say." Nowhere can there be seen any reason why the doctrines handed down by tradition should have for us the force of faith, as the Catholic Church maintains.

It is insisted among the Catholics that at the beginning the faith was propagated by preaching, or by the living voice, not by reading.

They say that the Apostles never said, “Read the Bible if you want to have faith and be saved.”

But this is another of the great sophistries of the Catholic Church. At the beginning, Jesus Christ did not write anything, because He was attempting to prepare the Apostles and disciples who afterward should preach and write what He had taught them.

Neither could the Apostles say to the people that they should read the doctrine of Jesus Christ, because printing did not exist and the teachings of Jesus Christ could not be spread as rapidly as they should. Very few copies could be written, and the persons who could acquire them were few.

But even with all that, it is false to say that the Apostles had preaching as the only means of propagating the faith of Jesus Christ, since the Apostles, especially Paul, whenever they could, and when it was not feasible for them to go personally, sent letters so that the faithful might read them in meeting. Moreover, they wrote the holy Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. One must suppose that if they wrote them it was so people would read them and believe in Jesus Christ:

“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

And if Jesus Christ gave them doctrinal infallibility, it was not only for what they said with the living voice, but also for what they wrote. For this reason, in spite of the fact that the Apostles died and are no longer visibly among us, whoever wants to can know now the true doctrine of Jesus Christ, because we know that there is a doctrine written by men who received from Jesus Christ the power of teaching what He taught in an infallible way.

Of course it must be taken for granted that not all that Jesus and His Apostles said was written in the New Testament. They probably taught many things which they could not or would not write.

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.”

From this the Catholic Church deduces the necessity for accepting a tradition which can transmit to us in their entirety the doctrines of the faith.

To this we reply:

It is not credible that the Apostles, and much less Jesus Christ, should preach on one occasion a doctrine which would be in contradiction with what they had preached before, nor that they would write the incidental and secondary, and would leave out what is essential for eternal life.

The mission of the Church, we repeat, cannot be any other than to preserve this doctrinal treasure, and not permit anyone to modify or adulterate it.

But it will never be shown that it has authority to add to or modify truths of the faith.

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