

I FOUND THE ANCIENT WAY

By

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CHAPTER SEVEN

TRADITION

THROUGH THE EXPOSITION of the preceding chapters, as the reader has probably realized, I have shown that the Evangelical Church is the purely Christian one. In it CHRIST is recognized as Redeemer and Saviour; it professes the faith He came to teach us, which is contained in what both Roman Catholics and Evangelical Christians consider to be books inspired of GOD.

But doesn't there also exist a body of tradition consisting of apostolic teachings not written down in the New Testament? There does indeed exist a body of tradition of very real historical value. But this tradition neither is unanimous, and therefore conclusive as to doctrine, nor does it have anything to do with the salvation of souls.

The Holy Scriptures are perfect. And this perfection naturally includes the fact that the end toward which they aim is fully developed in them. So it is evident that we ought to add nothing to them for the following reason:

John on finishing his Gospel (20:30) says: "**Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: 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.**"

If with the things written I have enough to believe, and believing I have (not shall have when I die, but have right now) life, that is, that I am saved, there is no need to add anything.

And if I don't have enough, why does John say, "**These are written that ye might believe**"?

This text strongly attracted my attention when I still had the idea that I ought to believe in all of the Catholic dogmas in order to be saved.

As for other things that JESUS did that were not written, doubtless the Holy Spirit did not think they were necessary for our faith, since He did not intend to have the authors He inspired write to satisfy curiosity but to narrate certain deeds and teachings so that by believing them we might obtain salvation. On finishing Revelation, John says: "**If any man shall add unto :these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book**" (22:18).

What is it that the Roman Church calls tradition, I asked myself, but a continual adding of things to those that are written in the Holy Book?

Where in the Scriptures can one find the greater part of what the Catholic Church calls dogmas of faith? I had to search necessarily for their foundation in tradition, and then it seemed that my imagination pounded into me the words of John, "*These were written that you might believe and be saved, but if you add anything God will curse you.*"

My soul tormented itself trying to find a reason why Rome could do differently and add things to those that were written. I read all the writings of the first century, but all their doctrine was contained in the Word of GOD. I had to look for it several centuries later, and then I found myself with a group of traditions of such differing, and even contradictory, opinions that it can be said that of every ten Fathers there aren't three who think the same way except on what is to be found in the inspired Word.

How then did the Church of Rome extract its dogmas from this confusion of ideas?

It took what suited its purposes, I found out, and made a dogma of it. What disillusion invaded my soul! I had believed that Rome was following CHRIST in everything; when because doubts had arisen in my mind, I tried to prove its doctrine by the Holy Scriptures, I saw that its dogmas were not based on them but on doctrines of men whose books - perhaps following the idea that Rome had taken to make it a dogma - contained some phenomenal errors.

Father Tapias Ruis, S.J., in his book *The Whole Bible*, page 142, says: "The Bible is not enough, we need tradition, too."

So I thought for a long time, too; but today, thank GOD, I don't think as he and other Catholics do. I prefer to imitate the early disciples of Berea who examined the Scriptures every day to see if the things the Apostles preached were true (Acts 17:11).

And I agree with Augustine, who some centuries later says:

"Do not be willing to yield to my writings as to the canonical Scriptures; but in these, when thou hast discovered even what thou didst not previously believe, believe it unhesitatingly; while in those, unless thou hast understood with certainty what thou didst not before hold as certain, be unwilling to hold it fast" (*On the Trinity*, Bk. 3, Preface, Sec. 2).

Let's see now how Augustine tells us that he examines the writings of others:

"I confess that I have learned to yield respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. As to all other writings, however great the superiority of the authors . . . I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them; but only because they have succeeded in convincing my judgment of its truth" (*Letter 82 to Jerome*, sec. 3).

From this teaching of Augustine we can gather two things.

- First, the Fathers themselves recognize that they may make mistakes and actually did make mistakes.
- Second, authority does not reside in the Fathers but in the Scriptures.

But let's see what other Fathers think about what the Catholic Church calls tradition.

Irenaeus says: "We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of GOD, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith."

"When however [the heretics] are confuted from the Scriptures, they turn round and accuse these same Scriptures, as if they were not correct, nor of authority, and [assert] that they are ambiguous, and that the truth cannot be extracted from them by those who are ignorant of tradition." (*Against Heresies*, Bk. 3, Chs. 1, 2).

It looks as if Irenaeus differs a great deal from the Catholic Church in what relates to the Scriptures, for he says that the Scriptures are perfect and that already in those times there were heretics who said that the Scriptures were not enough and that tradition was needed. While writing this there comes to my mind Ecclesiastes 1:9: "**The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.**" Not that I wish to belittle the great fertility of the Catholic Church in creating new, non-Christian doctrines!

Cyprian declares that it is pride and presumption to compare human traditions with divine ordinances (*Epistle 70 to Quintus*).

Basil says: "Enjoying as you do the consolation of the Holy Scriptures, you stand in need neither of my assistance nor of that of anybody else to help you to comprehend your duty. You have the all-sufficient counsel and guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead you to what is right" (*Letter to a Widow*, 283).

Augustine not only speaks against tradition in the previous quotations but in *Christian Doctrine* (Bk. 2, Ch. 8, Sec. 12) he says that we should submit only to the authority of the canonical books.

And in his *epistle to Maximin* he adds: "Let our arguments appeal to reason and to the authoritative teaching of the Divine Scriptures."

John Chrysostom affirms that he who appeals to other things than the Holy Scriptures shall perish (In *Mat. Hom. 49*).

Any Catholic would say that these Fathers have some Protestant in them. This is because among those called Protestants there are some genuinely Christian churches.

These Fathers in most of their doctrine are in accord with the Gospel. And since our own doctrine is entirely in agreement, for it is our only rule of faith and conduct, we are so much like them that, without having them on the altars, without inventing miracles for them, or addressing prayers to them that they would reject, and without there being a visible, uninterrupted line of popes between them and us, - there is an invisible line of the Gospel that makes our ideas the same since they are based on the same faith - that of CHRIST.

Many books could be written just of quotations in which the Christians of the first centuries rejected all tradition that was not contained in the Scriptures.

We have seen the harsh term that Cyprian applies to the position of the Catholic Church, which it calls tradition but he says is pride and presumption. But Basil is just as strong when he argues against tradition, saying that those who have the Scriptures "stand in need neither of my assistance nor that of anybody else to help you to comprehend your duty."

"The heretics weave JESUS CHRIST in with their own speculations [traditions are only speculations or reasonings that have been spread around and in time accepted by the people as true; but they are not to be found in the revelation], which are presented as trustworthy [the solemnity with which Rome proclaims its doctrines], when in reality they are like those who offer a deadly poison [this poison is tradition, which kills souls when it alienates them from the only doctrine of salvation, that of CHRIST], diluted in wine with honey."

Let not the reader think that this paragraph has been the idea of some Protestant or of me. All except what is in the brackets are ideas of the most ancient Christian writer, Ignatius the martyr of Antioch, and I think any comment would be superfluous.

As we said in the Preface of this little book, it was a pastoral letter of the Archbishop of Barcelona that inspired me with the idea of writing it.

That pastoral letter, to confirm the value of tradition, gives two quotations from Paul which I shall transcribe together with the text of the Nacar-Colunga version (Modern Spanish Catholic version):

NACAR-COLUNGA TEXT

Keep yourselves, then, brethren firm, and keep the teachings ye received, whether by word or by our letter.

II Thessalonians 2:15

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we commend you to withdraw from every brother who lives disorderly and does not follow the teachings ye have received from us.

II Thessalonians 3:6

As you can see, according to the translation of Nacar and Colunga, Paul does not say a thing about tradition. If we compared the texts of the pastoral letter with a Protestant Bible, the Catholic reader might think that it is a forgery of ours and that our Bible is corrupted, as some think.

But since I suppose no one will doubt the Roman Catholic orthodoxy of Nacar and Colunga, we shall have to recognize what little hesitancy Catholic authors have in inserting words or removing them when it suits their convenience to prove a doctrine.

Paul doesn't mention tradition at all, but oral and written teachings, teachings that could not differ. The spoken word would be the more extensive, since not all the teaching of the Gospel is to be found in the letters of the Apostle to the Thessalonians that are preserved.

On the other hand, the Apostle does talk about tradition when he says, "**Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ**" (Colossians 2:8).

There we have a good clear apostolic warning for us not to be deceived by doctrines based on human traditions.

What clarity one feels when his ideas follow the straight line drawn by JESUS in His doctrine, which is contained only in the New Testament!

And what peace I experienced when I made the firm decision not to believe in anything else but what the Catholic Church itself had taught me were the canonical or inspired books!

I asked myself, "Is it possible that GOD should have left to the uncertainty of an oral tradition a thing so important that it was worth His taking our nature and dying on a cross?" No, it simply is not possible. GOD himself tells me the same thing in the aforementioned passages from John, so as to calm the voice of my conscience.

TEXT OF THE PASTORAL

Keep firmly the traditions in which ye were instructed, whether by the living voice or by our letter.

We recommend to you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition ye received of us.

It cost me many sleepless nights to come to this conclusion.

At the beginning it horrified me just to think of the error in which I had lived until then and had taught others to live. When I had to answer the question, I asked myself whom I would follow, CHRIST or Rome, I decided to leave all for JESUS and not to have any other guide than His teachings and to study them thoroughly. Only then did peace revive in my soul with the stability of knowing assuredly that we have with us One who is all powerful and never fails to keep His word.

Sorrowfully I had been seeing the teaching of Rome fall from the pedestal on which I had elevated all of its dogmas.

I had always had the idea that it might have departed somewhat from the straight road through outside influences; and each time I found one of these departures and struggled in my soul to justify the church in whose midst I was trained, I lost peace.

But when I firmly resolved not to look at any other beacon but JESUS through His Gospel, then the peace I so much desired came to dwell securely in my soul.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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