

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER THREE

TRADITION

THE CLAIMS that the Roman Catholic Church makes for herself are vast. She has never abated them one whit. On the contrary, there has been an ever-increasing build-up through the centuries. The pope claims to be the Vicar of Christ on earth through a long succession of popes which is supposed to start with the Apostle Peter. The church of which the pope is the visible head is to be acknowledged as the true catholic church, universal in her sway, all other churches whatsoever being schismatic, in a state of rebellion against her lawful authority. She claims infallibility for her doctrines and practices, which must be received on pain of perdition. She alone has the right to decide the meaning and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. In her alone is salvation found. She claims world-wide temporal as well as spiritual authority, all civil and military governments being under her control by divine appointment. That she has not been able to implement this claim makes no difference to its validity so far as she is concerned.

On what authority does she base these stupendous claims?

First she makes her appeal to Holy Writ, for she acknowledges the divine inspiration and therefore the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures.

Second, she appeals to tradition and the pronouncements of the various popes and church councils.

Let us first consider her appeal to the Holy Scriptures.

The Roman Catholic Bible is the Vulgate, which was translated into Latin by Jerome, the Old Testament, except the Psalms, direct from the Hebrew, and the New Testament from the Greek. At the close of the fifteenth century the knowledge of Hebrew and Greek had sunk to a low level, and where the Bible was read it was the Vulgate which was in general use, though there were members of the Council of Trent who knew that Jerome's translation was not at all perfect and desired to have a new translation. But the labor involved was great and, moreover, the Protestant Reformers based their arguments on the original Hebrew and Greek texts, so the majority of the Council decided that they must recognize one text as their court of appeal and fell back upon the commonly used, thousand-year-old translation of Jerome as the standard.

Thus it came about that all Romish preaching, reasoning, and teaching, together with all written notes, were based upon the Latin Vulgate. The Church of Rome can plead no authority for setting aside the Hebrew and Greek originals and substituting the Latin translation as the standard of appeal. If a translation is made the standard, then the translator must have had the same degree of divine inspiration as the original writers. But Romanists themselves acknowledge that the Vulgate is not perfect.

The Vulgate edition of the Bible also includes the Apocrypha which was not translated from the Hebrew but from the Septuagint Greek. Jerome's own list of the canonical books of the Old Testament does not include the apocryphal books, whose divine inspiration he refused to accept. He was not responsible for their Latin translation, but notwithstanding, they were included as an integral part of the Vulgate Bible.

The Apocrypha, in Tobit 12:9, and II Mace. 12:46, countenances the two Romish doctrines of salvation by works and prayers for the dead, neither of which are found in the canonical Scriptures. This may account for the inclusion of the Apocrypha in the Roman Catholic Bible.

It is noteworthy that the Apocrypha was not accepted as divinely inspired by the Jews of our Lord's day, and though He and His disciples quoted from the Old Testament more than 300 times in the New Testament, not once did they appeal to the apocryphal writings. We are told in Romans 3:2 that the oracles of God had been entrusted to the Jewish people, yet neither our Lord nor His apostles ever rebuked them for rejecting the apocryphal books. The early church fathers also do not quote them as being on the same level as the canonical books.

The use of quotations from the canonical books to bolster Romish claims and doctrines will be examined chapter by chapter as this book proceeds, and will prove to be not use, but misuse.

Now we come to the appeals to tradition and church councils.

Great areas of Roman Catholic doctrine have no scriptural support whatsoever, since they lie outside the range of Bible revelation, and for these another source of authority has been found in what has been called Tradition and the Decrees of Church Councils. Rome claims that outside the written Word of God in the New Testament, there is a body of oral teaching, handed down from our Lord and the apostles generation by generation.

Thus the Council of Trent declares:

This Council, perceiving that this truth and discipline are contained both in the written books and in unwritten traditions which have come down to us either received by the Apostles from the lips of Christ Himself or transmitted by the same Apostles under the direction of the Holy Spirit, following the example of the orthodox fathers, doth receive and reverence with equal piety and veneration all the books as well of the Old and New Testaments, the same God being the Author of both, and also the aforesaid traditions pertaining both to faith and manners, whether from Christ Himself or dictated by the Holy Spirit and preserved in the Catholic Church by continual succession.

And again, following a list of the Old and New Testament books, in which the apocryphal books appear, the decree concludes:

Whosoever shall not receive as canonical all these books and every part of them as they are commonly read in the Catholic Church and are contained in the old Vulgate Latin Edition, or shall knowingly and deliberately despise the aforesaid traditions, let him be accursed.

Here we have brought together as sources of Romish authority:

- (a) The Vulgate Old and New Testament, including the Apocrypha, all in the Latin tongue, and of course, as seen in Chapter I of this book, to be understood as explained and interpreted by the "Holy Mother Church."

(b) A body of oral tradition, supposed to have been handed down generation by generation in unbroken succession, either from the Lord Himself or from the apostles enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Rome has been challenged to disclose what that body of tradition is, and what are its contents beyond what has already been announced by the papacy, but she has never made it known. It can only be concluded that she prefers to have its substance secret; that she may draw further upon its hidden store as later circumstances require. It reminds one of the hat out of which the conjuror produces his rabbits one after another.

Yet even this does not complete the picture, for church councils are brought in as another source of authority. All priests at ordination have to subscribe to the creed of Pope Pius IV, which declares:

I also profess and undoubtedly receive all the other things delivered, defined and declared by the sacred canons and general councils and particularly by the holy Council of Trent.

So at last we see the whole foundation of papal authority set before us, broader and broader with the passage of the centuries, until it is ostensibly wide enough to bear the entire ponderous superstructure.

With regard to tradition, it needs to be observed at the outset that the Romish Church really does not possess any information concerning the mind of Christ or His apostles which is not equally open to all Christians. Furthermore, there is no evidence that any traditions have been left to the church beyond the truths contained in the Old and New Testaments. Admittedly, the Romish Church does bring forward certain passages which she claims as evidence. One of these is John 20:30: "**And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.**"

This verse certainly establishes that there were signs or miracles of our Lord which are not recorded in the Gospel of John. Many of them were probably recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, all of which were in existence long before John's Gospel. But there may have been others which were not recorded in any book. But if this were so, there is not the least hint that these oral traditions were committed to the apostles for transmission to later generations as Rome claims. The next verse (John 20:31) says:
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.

The written record then was sufficient to establish the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, and sufficient also to create and establish faith that brings eternal life.

No supplementary tradition was or is needed.

Other passages cited are:

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (II Thessalonians 2:15).

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (II Thessalonians 3:6).

Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances [traditions], as I delivered them to you (I Corinthians 11:2).

Here are three references to “**traditions**,” but these three epistles were written long before the New Testament canon was formed, before the early oral teaching was committed to writing to form the New Testament. The epistles in question were written to confirm the oral teaching already given, which was not, as Rome would suggest, something given to supplement written Scriptures already in use, in order to complete the body of revealed truth.

Here may we consider one or two other passages of Scripture which show how fallacious Rome’s appeal to Scripture is, and as we do this, let us remember that these passages are taken from the New Testament whose divine authority the Roman Catholic Church acknowledges.

(a) **“It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”** (Jude 3).

Jude’s epistle is a general one, not written to any pope or bishop or particular church, as for instance the Church of Rome, but “**to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ and called**,” in other words, to all true believers. “**The faith**” therefore was delivered, not to Peter and his claimed successors, but to all believers. Furthermore, it was delivered “**once**,” not to be added to by later generations of popes or church councils.

One is reminded of the solemn warning found at the end of the New Testament, almost in its last words:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18, 19).

True, the Church of Rome denies having added any new doctrine to the original revelation, saying that all she has done is to draw from the treasury of apostolic tradition and develop it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But this is obviously false, for too many of the doctrines based on so-called “apostolic tradition” conflict vitally with truths revealed in the written word, and God is “**the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning**” (James 1:17).

(b) Peter says to the believers to whom he writes:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (I Peter 1:23).

Then he adds:

And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (I Peter 1:25b).

Now in the Acts of the Apostles we have six recorded sermons or addresses of Peter’s, so we know what Gospel he preached. Never once did he go one step beyond the doctrines clearly set forth in the New Testament. There was certainly no place in Peter’s sermons for doctrines based on tradition supplemental to the written word. Yet his Gospel sufficed under the power of the Holy Spirit to bring thousands of listeners into the experience of the new birth.

(c) Again, in II Timothy 3:16, 17, we read:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Since the Holy Scriptures are not only able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 3:15) but are also able to make us perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work, what need is there for the addition of oral tradition?

Our Lord put the Devil to flight with His threefold “**It is written**,” prefacing each quotation from the Old Testament Scriptures (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). He discomfited those who disputed His Messianic claims with words quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures (Matthew 22:41-46), and comforted His distressed and perplexed disciples by “**expounding unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself**” (Luke 24:25-27). But He sternly rebuked the Pharisees because they made the commandments of God of none effect by their traditions (Matthew 15:6) and even transgressed those commandments (Matthew 15:3). He quoted the words of the prophet Isaiah against them:

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:8, 9).

We shall find as we proceed further with this book that Rome is doing this very thing. Whereas she charges Protestants with corrupting and perverting the Word of God, she herself has been grossly guilty of this sin.

The following extract is taken from a Roman Catholic book, called *The Question Box*, written by Bernard Conway of the Paulist Fathers, with the authority of the superior general of that order, the “*Censor Librorum*” and under the imprimatur of Cardinal Hayes, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York in 1929. The title page states that over three million copies have been printed.

The question asked is:

Is not the Bible the only source of faith—the one means whereby the teachings of Christ have been handed down to us?

And the answer is:

No. The Bible is not the only source of faith as Luther taught in the sixteenth century, for without the interpretation of a divine infallible teaching apostolate distinct from the Bible, we could never know with divine certainty which books constituted the inspired Scriptures, or whether the copies we possess to-day agree with the originals. The Bible itself is but a dead letter calling for a divine interpreter; it is not arranged in a systematic form like a creed or catechism; it is often obscure and hard to be understood as St. Peter says of the Epistles of Paul (II Peter 3:16; cf. Acts 8: 30, 31); it is open to false interpretation. Moreover, a number of revealed truths have been handed down to us by divine tradition only.

There Rome stands revealed, for she arrogates to herself the title of the “*divine infallible teaching apostolate, distinct from the Bible*.”

Against her word that “*the Bible itself is but a dead letter*,” let us put the passage in Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

On which side do we stand?

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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