



Developed and Taught by Mark Dattoli

APPENDIX 6

◀What is Catholic Tradition?▶

◀APPENDIX: What is Roman Catholic Tradition?▶

From *The Gospel According to Rome*, by James McCarthy

The Catechism on Tradition & Authority

- The gospel was handed on in two ways: orally...and in writing
- This living transmission...is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture
- Sacred Scripture is the speech of God...and Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God
- As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone'
- Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others (76-95)

What is Catholic Tradition? First, it is not:

- Inherited culture or practices originating from merely human sources or from Church discipline and policy
- Sacred Tradition does not refer to matters such as:
 - priestly celibacy
 - the direction in which the priest faces while saying Mass, or
 - whether girls can serve alongside altar boys.
- These may rightly be called traditions; they are not sacred Tradition (with a capital letter), because the Church does not consider them to have their origin in divine revelation

Tradition is not:

- The conclusions of scholars who have studied the documents, history, and archaeology of the first centuries in search of the primitive Christian faith
 - Tradition is not the writings of early Christian leaders, ancient liturgies, or even the decrees of synods and ecumenical councils
 - These may be partial expressions of or witnesses to Tradition, but they are not sacred Tradition itself

Tradition is defined as:

- "Tradition is the word living continuously in the hearts of the faithful," "the living memorial of God's Word"
- Tradition is not something you can read or even lay your hands on
 - [Tradition]...is not an inanimate thing passed from hand to hand; it is not, properly speaking, an assemblage of doctrines and institutions consigned to books or other monuments...it must be represented as a current of life and truth coming from God through Christ and through the Apostles to the last of the faithful who repeats his creed and learns his catechism.
 - It...is not contained in books, but in people, in the life of the Church. It is the life experience of the Catholic faithful. It is revelation "...written principally in the Church's heart rather than in documents and records"

Tradition is:

- A “living transmission” through which “...the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes”
- This...is accomplished in a variety of ways, such as:
 - the sign of the cross that a mother traces on the forehead of her child
 - teaching the basic prayers of Christianity, especially the “Our Father,” in the home and in religious instruction
 - by architecture and the plastic arts (especially representations of the cross, which is considered a privileged Christian symbol)
 - by the liturgy of the Church

Is Tradition the oral teaching of the Apostles?

- Catholic definitions equating Tradition with the oral teachings of the apostles are misleading. For example:
 - the Second Vatican Council described Tradition as revelation that the apostles passed on “...by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established...”
 - In support of this definition, the Council referred to Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.” 2 Thess 2:15
- In citing this verse, the Church would have us believe that Tradition is equivalent to the Apostle Paul's oral teachings
- This is misleading, however, because Roman Catholic Tradition is a far more complex concept; It is not the direct oral teaching of the apostles as referred to in 2 Thess 2:15
- Rather, Roman Catholic Tradition is “a current of life and truth”
- It can be as ethereal as an idea that, after having lain dormant for centuries, can spring to life in modern times through pious contemplation

Scripture and Roman Catholic Tradition are not equals

- The RCC teaches that “...both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence.” But
 - The Scriptures are a written record of revelation. They are tangible, unalterable, and accessible to all. Moreover, they are an inspired record, “God-breathed,” the writings of “...men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” Scripture, therefore, is rightly called the Word of God
 - Roman Catholic Tradition, on the other hand, is an amorphous body of beliefs and practices which the Church claims has been handed down for some 60 generations in “human formulas”: a bishop teaching, a priest delivering a Sunday's homily, a theologian writing, a mother reciting prayers with her children, a hymn, a stained glass window, or the unspoken “spiritual realities” shared by the faithful

Catholic Dogma

Dogma are doctrines requiring “assent by the faithful”;

Dogma has grown over the years:

- 2nd cent. Presbyters (or elders) were first called priests
- 300 Prayers for the dead
- 375 The veneration of angels & dead saints; use of images
- 394 The Mass as a daily celebration
- 416 Infant baptism by sprinkling becomes compulsory
- 431 Proclamation that infant baptism regenerates the soul
- 431 The beginning of the exaltation of Mary; first use of the term “Mother of God”
- 451 The worship of Mary instituted
- 500 The Mass instituted as re-sacrifice of Jesus for the remission of sin
- 500 Priests dress differently from the laity
- 526 Extreme unction (last rites, or anointing of the sick)
- 593 The doctrine of purgatory
- 600 Prayers offered to Mary, dead saints, & angels
- 607 The bishop of Rome adopts the name Pope; done only after the fall of the Roman Empire
- 709 Kissing the Pope's foot
- 788 Veneration of the cross, images, & relics
- 850 Holy water blessed by a priest
- 927 College of Cardinals begun
- 995 Canonization of dead people as saints
- 998 Fasting on Fridays & before Lent
- 1000 Attendance at Mass made mandatory under penalty of mortal sin
- 1056 RC and Greek Orthodox churches split over papal authority, different modes of baptism, & the veneration of saints & images
- 1079 Celibacy of priesthood
- 1090 The rosary (beads copied from Hindus & Muslims)
- 12th cent. The 7 sacraments defined
- 1184 The Inquisition of “heretics”
- 1190 Sale of indulgences to reduce time in purgatory
- 1215 Transubstantiation
- 1215 Confession of sins to the priest at least once a year
- 1220 The adoration of the wafer (host)
- 1229 Bible placed on Index of Forbidden Books
- 1251 The scapular invented
- 1414 Cup forbidden to laymen
- 1438 Purgatory elevated from doctrine to dogma
- 1439 Dogma of sacraments affirmed
- 1545 Apocryphal books were added to the Bible
- 1546 Tradition declared equal authority with the Bible
- 1854 The Immaculate Conception of Mary
- 1864 Pope condemns all scientific discoveries not approved by the RCC
- 1870 Infallibility of the pope in matters of faith & morals
- 1922 Virgin Mary proclaimed co-redeemer with Jesus
- 1930 Pius XI condemns the public schools
- 1931 Mary as “The Mother of God” reaffirmed
- 1950 Assumption of Mary into heaven
- 1965 Mary proclaimed the Mother of the Church
- 1985 Pope John Paul II declares God will not forgive sins directly; forgiveness of sins can only be obtained through a RCC priest

Key Biblical Interpretations

- Matthew 16:18 "On this rock I will build my church"
 - Catholic teaching: The rock is Peter, not his confession
- John 6 "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life"
 - Catholic teaching: This is to be taken literally, not figuratively
- Luke 1:28 "Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you."
 - Catholic teaching: This means Mary was sinless
- Luke 2:48 "All generations will call me blessed"
 - Catholic teaching: This means we should venerate Mary
 - The Church rightly honors the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of 'Mother of God,' to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs.
 - This very special devotion...differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit (971)
- 2 Maccabees 12:46 "Thus, (Judas Maccabees) made atonement for the dead that they might be free from sin"
 - Catholic teaching: This means praying for the dead can release them from their sins; It also supports the concept of Purgatory
- I Cor 3:15 "he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."
 - Catholic teaching: This means purgatory

Excerpts from "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Catholicism"

Ch 9. Tasting, Touching, Smelling God

The senses are God's gateway to the human mind and imagination. For this reason, Catholics emphasize ritual more than learning. If the imagination is not excited, the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings are meaningless. The bells, beads, and candles used in Catholic rituals are not just decorations; they are essential to spirituality and to effective Catholicism.

They can touch God, feel him, taste him, bring him inside themselves through the scent of incense, and see him in the colors of the vestment. (p. 118)

When Catholics touch their rosaries, they touch their God. (p. 119)

Another important ingredient in Catholic ceremony is fire, which is why candles are a requirement for any Catholic Mass. Before leaving the church, most Catholics will probably place a few coins in a metal stand that holds 20 to 40 small candles. They might then light a candle and say a prayer for a special intention or for a loved one. The candle burns for several hours as a reminder of the prayers being offered. It also tells God, "If I could stay longer, I would, but I have to go now, so I'll leave this little candle burning in my stead." (p. 121)

Ritual changes our consciousness and puts our brain in a dream-like state. This dream state is an important part of Catholic religious experience because God speaks to us through dreams. The challenge today, as always, is to know how to hear the voice of God. Catholic ritual is attuned to this dream communication. (p. 125)

Catholics do have codes of behavior, such as the Ten Commandments and the teachings of the church, to inform them. But the key to conscience is to match intuitive knowing with what we have learned, which is why the church has always said the bottom line in making a moral decision is "to follow your conscience." In order to do this, you have to be able to access the part of the mind where feelings reside. Again, Catholicism's high degree of ritual and ceremony makes this access easier. (p. 125)

Protestants worship from the neck up. Catholics do it from the neck down. (p. 126)

Perhaps the best example of the vitality of Catholic imagery is the Catholic veneration of Mary, which may well be the place where Protestants and Catholics differ most. Through Mary, Catholics experience the female face of God. She is a mother, loving, relational, and most of all, flesh and blood. (p. 127)

Purgatory was once thought to be an actual place, but it is now commonly believed to be a condition of purification necessary before being admitted to the glory and happiness of heaven. It is a state of passive suffering, which means that the suffering stems from being delayed in seeing God and enjoying the heavenly reward. (p. 207)

Ch 16. The Teaching Church

How can Biblical teaching be realigned in the light of new truths? One way is by rethinking how the Bible functions. Many have come to see that the Bible is transmitting important truth to the people at the level of poetry and myth. (p. 254)

Myth is a story that tells the beliefs of a group of people regarding their origins, history, and destiny. Myth is neither historically true nor false. Myths transmit truths that cannot be understood apart from the story. In other words, you must look below the surface of the mythological story to find the meaning of it.

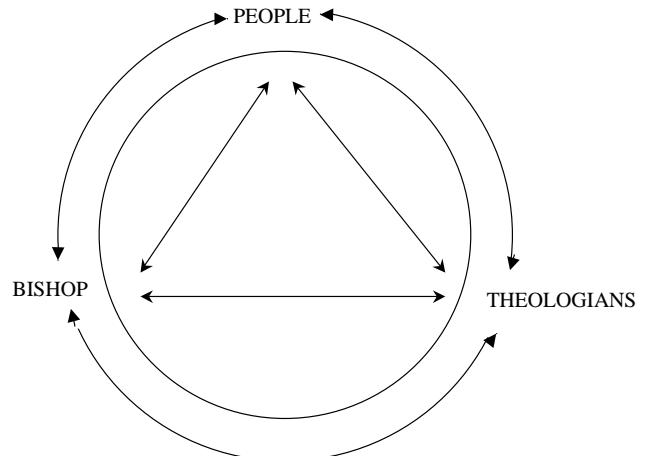
The Dynamic Triangle: The People, Theologians, and Bishops

A new teaching goes out to the people, usually in the form of a letter from the bishops. The people choose to accept the belief or reject it. Keep in mind that the church acts as an advisor in matters of faith; it is ultimately up to the people to determine what is true for them. (p. 256)

Ch 18. The Teachings of the Church

Post-Vatican II church morality takes a larger and more positive approach to sin than the Catholic Church did in the past. (p. 263) New beliefs emphasize people's basic goodness and build on it. Although sin is often thought of as a violation against God, it is actually a violation against ourselves, our neighbors, and all creation. The understanding of sin today is focused on the law of love and informed by the human sciences. (p. 264)

The pre-Vatican II approach to sin was to look at it as commission, meaning what people did; the post-Vatican II emphasis is on "omission", or what people have failed to do. If you sin, look within! If you notice you're continually falling short of what you know to be right, you're in a potentially sinful pattern. At the end of the day, spend a few moments going over your day to see whether you are acting in accordance with your ideals. (p. 266)



The doctrine of original sin is still a central dogma of the Catholic Church, and contemporary theologians struggle to keep its meaning relevant in the light of science and psychology. The underlying belief is that Christ's redemption, which is characterized by love and forgiveness, is at the very heart and soul of the divine plan. All humans are in need of the redemption he offers. The Biblical story of Adam, Eve, the snake, and the tree is not a literal description of a historical first sin, but it is a description of what it means to be human. It is not necessarily telling what happened at the beginning of human history, but rather is reminding us of what is happening all the time in the human struggle. When viewed this way, the story of the fall tells us of the inevitable mix of good and evil contained in human existence. Our highest motives at best are mixed and ambiguous. (p. 267)

The seven capital sins are: • Pride • Envy • Anger • Sloth • Greed • Gluttony • Lust

Although they are called sins, these seven characteristics are not sins in and of themselves. Instead, they describe tendencies toward sinning or character weaknesses through which sin occurs. You can't sin in your mind or heart. People tend to regard feelings and emotions as having moral significance. Emotions and feelings are not sinful. Some Catholics confess anger and lust when they have not acted on these feelings. By themselves, the seven capital sins are human conditions that we all struggle with. (p. 268)

Hell: The Eternal Loss of God

Our free will allows us to cooperate or not to cooperate with God and to accept or refuse to enter into the loving relationship we are offered. Hell is the pain produced by our choice of utterly and deliberately refusing to live in relationship with God, if such a choice is even possible. Speaking on the subject of hell, Pope John Paul II said not to consider it a place, but rather a state that the soul suffers when it denies itself access to God. (p. 272)

Hell is the ultimate consequence of sin. To describe this reality, scripture used symbolic language. They are used as an analogy to show the complete desperation and emptiness of life without God. Images of hell are a poetic warning. The pope went on to say that God has never revealed "whether or which human beings" are eternally damned. The Bible often teaches with parables, stories, and metaphors, so the Biblical images of everlasting fire are poetic warnings of what it would be like to be without God. (p. 273)

Through revelation, Pope John Paul II says, we are taught that "heaven or happiness" is "neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living personal relationship with the Holy Trinity." In attempting to describe ultimate realities, language always falls short, he reminds us. In the new interpretation, heaven is not a place of ideal real estate, but a description of the soul when it is in its completed form. (p. 274)

