

**RCIA
The Church
Session # 7**

"The word 'Church' means 'convocation'. It designates the assembly of those whom God" word ' convokes' i.e. gathers together to form the People of God, and who themselves, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church
#777



THE CHURCH

Scripture AND Tradition

Protestants claim the Bible is the only rule of faith, meaning that it contains all of the material one needs for theology and that this material is sufficiently clear that one does not need apostolic tradition or the Church's magisterium (teaching authority) to help one understand it. In the Protestant view, the whole of Christian truth is found within the Bible's pages. Anything extraneous to the Bible is simply non-authoritative, unnecessary, or wrong – and may hinder one in coming to God.

Catholics, on the other hand, recognize that the Bible does not endorse this view and that, in fact, it is repudiated in Scripture. The true “rule of faith” – as expressed in the Bible itself – is Scripture plus apostolic tradition, as manifested in the living teaching authority of the Catholic Church, to which were entrusted the oral teachings of Jesus and the apostles, along with the authority to interpret Scripture correctly.

In the Second Vatican Council's document on divine revelation, *Die Verbum* (Latin: The Word of God), the relationship between Tradition and Scripture is explained:

“Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For sacred Scripture is the word of God in as much as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. To the successors of the apostles, sacred Tradition hands on in its full purity God's word, which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Thus, by the light of the Spirit of truth, these successors can in their preaching preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same devotion and reverence.”

Evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestants, who place their confidence in Martin Luther's theory of *sola scriptura* (Latin: Scripture alone), will usually argue for their position by citing a couple of key verses. The first is: “*These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his Name*” (John 20:31). The other is: “*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be equipped, prepared for every good work*” (2Timothy 3: 16-17). According to these Protestants, these verses demonstrate the reality of the “Bible only” theory.

The Catholic reply: First, the verse from John refers to the things written in that book (read it with John 20:30, the verse immediately before it to see the context of the statement in question). If this verse proved anything, it would not prove the theory of *sola scriptura* but that the Gospel of John is sufficient. Second, the verse from John's Gospel tells us only that the Bible was composed so we can be helped to believe Jesus is the Messiah. It does not say the Bible is all we need for salvation, much less that the Bible is all we need for theology; nor does it say the Bible is even necessary to believe in Christ. After all, the earliest Christians had no New Testament to which they could appeal; they learned from oral, rather than written instruction. Until relatively recent times, the Bible was inaccessible to most people, either because they could not read or because the printing press had not been invented. All these people learned from oral instruction passed down, generation to generation, by the Church.

Much the same can be said about 2 Timothy 3: 16-17. To say that all inspired writing, “has its uses” is one thing; to say that such a remark means that only inspired writing need be followed is something else. Besides, there is a telling argument against claims of Evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestants. It is the contradiction that arises out of their own interpretation of this verse. John Henry Newman explained it in an 1884 essay entitled “Inspiration in its Relation to Revelation.”

Newman’s argument: *”It is quite evident that this passage furnishes no argument whatever that the sacred Scripture, without Tradition, is the sole rule of faith; for, although sacred Scripture is profitable for these four ends, still it is not said to be sufficient. The Apostle Paul requires the aid of Tradition (2 Thess. 2:15). Moreover, the Apostle here refers to the scriptures, which Timothy was taught in his infancy.*

Now a good part of the New Testament was not written in his boyhood; some of the Catholic epistles were not written even when Paul wrote this, and none of the books of the New Testament were then placed on the canon of the Scripture books. He refers, then, to the scriptures of the Old Testament, and if the argument from this passage proved anything, it would prove too much, viz., that the scriptures of the New Testament were not necessary for a rule of faith.

Furthermore, Protestants typically read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 out of context. When read in the context of the surrounding passages, one discovers that Paul’s reference to Scripture is only part of his exhortation that Timothy take as his guide Tradition and Scripture. The two verses immediately before it state: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3: 14-15)

Paul tells Timothy to continue in what he has learned for two reasons; first, because he knows from whom he has learned it – Paul himself – and second, because he has been educated in the scriptures. The first of these is a direct appeal to apostolic tradition, the oral teaching which the apostle Paul had given Timothy. So Protestants must take 2 Timothy 3: 16-17 out of context to arrive at the theory of sola scriptura. But when the passage is read in context, it becomes clear that it is teaching the importance of apostolic tradition.

The Bible denies that it is sufficient as the complete rule of faith. Paul says that much Christian teaching is to be found in the tradition which is handed down by word of mouth (2 Tim. 2:2). He instructs us to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thess. 2:15).

Christians accepted this oral teaching, just as they accepted the written teaching that came to them later. Jesus told his disciples: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me” (Luke 10:16). The Church, in the persons of the apostles, was given the authority to teach by Christ; the Church would be His representative. He commissioned them, saying, “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” (Matt. 28:19).

And how was this to be done? By preaching, by oral instruction; “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ”

(Rom. 10-17). The Church would always be the living teacher. It is a mistake to limit “Christ’s word” to the written word only or to suggest that all his teachings were reduced to writing. The Bible nowhere supports this notion. Further, it is clear that the oral teaching of Christ would last until the end of time. “But the word of the Lord abides for ever.” That word is the good news which was preached to you” (1 Pet. 1:25). Note that the word has been ‘preached’ – that is, communicated orally. This would endure. It would not be supplanted by a written record like the bible (supplemented, yes, but not supplanted). And would continue to have its own authority.

This is made clear when the apostle Paul tells Timothy; “What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Here we see the first few links in the chain of apostolic tradition that has been passed down intact from the apostles to our own day. Paul instructed Timothy to pass on the oral teachings (Traditions) that he had received from the apostle. He was to give these to men who would be able to teach others, thus perpetuating the chain. Paul gave this instruction not long before his death (2 Tim. 4:6-8), as a reminder to Timothy of how he should conduct his ministry.”

WHAT IS TRADITION?

It is important to keep in mind what the Catholic Church means by tradition. The term does not refer to legends or mythological accounts, nor does it encompass transitory customs or practices, which may change as circumstances, warrant, such as styles of priestly dress, particular forms of devotion to saints, or even liturgical rubrics. Sacred or apostolic tradition consists of the teachings that the apostles passed on orally through their preaching. These teachings largely (perhaps entirely) overlap with those contained in Scripture, but the mode of their transmission is different.

They have been handed down and entrusted to the Church (which means to its official teachers, the bishops in union with the pope). It is necessary that Christians believe in and follow this tradition as well as the Bible (Luke 10:16). The truth of the faith has been given primarily to the leaders of the Church (Eph. 3:5), who, with Christ, form the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20). The Church has been guided by the Holy Spirit, who protects this teaching from corruption (John 14:25-26, 16:13).

HANDING ON THE FAITH

Paul illustrated what tradition is: “for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures... Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor. 15:3, 11). The apostle praised those who followed Tradition: “I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2).

The first Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42) long before there was a New Testament. From the very beginning, the fullness of Christian teaching was found in the Church as the living embodiment of Christ, not in a book. The teaching Church, with its oral, apostolic tradition, was authoritative. Paul himself gives a quotation from Jesus that was handed down orally to him: “It is more

blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This saying is not recorded in the Gospels and must have been passed on to Paul. Indeed, even the Gospels themselves are oral traditions, which has been written down (Luke 1:1-4). What’s more, Paul does not quote Jesus only. He also quotes from early Christian hymns, as in Ephesians 5:14. These and other things have been given to Christians “through the Lord Jesus” (1 Thes. 4:2)

Fundamentalists say Jesus condemned tradition. They note that Jesus said, “And why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Matt. 15:3). Paul warned, “See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ”(Col. 2:8). But these verses merely condemn erroneous human traditions, not truths that were handed down orally and entrusted to the Church by the apostles. These latter truths are part of what is known as apostolic tradition, which is to be distinguished from human traditions or customs.

COMMANDMENTS OF MEN

Consider Matthew 15:6-9, which Fundamentalists and Evangelicals often use to defend their position: “So by these traditions of yours you have made God’s laws ineffectual. You hypocrites, it was a true prophecy that Isaiah made of you, when he said, ‘This people does me honor with its lips, but its heart is far from me. Their worship is in vain, for the doctrines they teach are the commandments of men.’” Look closely at what Jesus said. He was not condemning all traditions. He condemned only those that made God’s word void. In this case, it was a matter of the Pharisees feigning the dedication of their goods to the Temple so they could avoid using them to support their aged parents. By doing this, they dodged the commandments to “honor your father and your mother” (Ex.20:12).

Elsewhere, Jesus instructed his followers to abide by traditions that are not contrary to God’s commandments. “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice” (Matt. 23:2-3).

What Fundamentalists and Evangelicals often do, unfortunately, is see the word “tradition” in Matthew 15:3 or Colossians 2:8 or elsewhere and conclude that anything termed a “tradition” is to be rejected. They forget that the term is used in a different sense, as in 1 Corinthians 11:2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15 to describe what should be believed. Jesus did not condemn all traditions; he condemned only erroneous traditions, whether doctrines or practices, that undermined Christian truths. The rest, as the apostles taught, were to be obeyed. Paul commanded the Thessalonians to adhere to all the traditions he had given them, whether oral or written.

THE INDEFECTIBLE CHURCH

The task is to determine what constitutes authentic tradition. How can we know which traditions are apostolic and which are merely human? The answer is the same as how we know which scriptures are apostolic and which are merely human – by listening to the magisterium or teaching authority of Christ’s Church. Without the Catholic Church’s teaching authority, we would not know with certainty which purported books of Scripture are authentic. If the Church revealed to us the canon of Scripture, it can also reveal to us the “canon of Tradition” by establishing which traditions have been passed down from the apostles. After all, Christ promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church (Matt. 16-18) and the New Testament itself declares the Church to be “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

THE TRANSMISSION OF DIVINE REVELATION

What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations, until Christ returns in glory.

“Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God” (DV 10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches.

“The Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes” (DV 8:1)

Thanks to its supernatural sense of faith, the People of God as a whole never ceases to welcome, to penetrate more deeply, and to live more fully from the gift of divine Revelation.

The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him.

MAGISTERIUM

Source of the Teaching Authority of Bishops

Catholic belief that the bishops have inherited the teaching mandate which Christ gave to his apostles, is expressed in the following statements of Vatican II: “by divine institution bishops have succeeded to the place of the apostles as shepherds of the Church”. (L.G. 20); “The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in teaching authority and pastoral rule” (L.G. 22); “As successors of the apostles, bishops receive from Christ the mission to teach all nations and to preach the gospel to every creature.” (L.G. 24)

Admittedly, it is not possible to prove assertions from the New Testament alone, because the development by which each local church came to have a single bishop as its pastor, assisted by a group of presbyters and deacons, is a development that took place in the post-NT period. Neither is it possible to show in detail just how this development took place, since there are so few written records from that period that could throw light on it.

However, what is certain and well documented is that by the end of the second century, each Christian church was being led by a single bishop, and that these bishops were universally recognized by the faithful as legitimate successors to the apostles in their pastoral role. It is also a matter

of historical fact that the whole Christian church accepted these bishops as the authoritative witnesses to apostolic tradition. These bishops had the authority to judge whether a particular doctrine was in conformity with this tradition or not, and consequently the authority to define the terms in which the community should profess its faith. In other words, the whole church accepted the teaching of bishops as *normative* for its faith.

But it is fundamental for Christian faith to believe that the Church that Christ founded and to which he promised the abiding assistance of the Holy Spirit will be forever maintained in the true faith by the Spirit of truth. On this basis, one must conclude that the second century church could not have been mistaken when it determined the very norms of its faith. During the same period when the church came to recognize certain writings as normative for its faith, it also recognized the bishops as authoritative teachers whose decision about matters of Christian doctrine would be normative for the interpretation of the gospel message. A church that is maintained in the true faith by the Holy Spirit must have been guided by that same Holy Spirit when it determined the norms of its faith. On this basis we can be confident that it was not mistaken either when it decided which writings belonged in the canon of the NT, or when it recognized the bishops as the successors to the apostles in their pastoral teaching role.

SACRED SCRIPTURE In Brief

“All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and that one book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ. (Hugh of St. Victor).

“The Sacred Scriptures contain the Word of God and, because they are inspired they are truly the Word of God.” (DV 24)

God is the author of Sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors; he acts in them and by means of them. He thus gives assurance that their writings teach without error his saving truth. (cf. DV 11)

Interpretation of the inspired Scripture must be attentive above all to what God wants to reveal through the sacred authors for our salvation. What comes from the Spirit is not fully “understood except by the Spirit’s action” (cf. Origen)

The Church accepts and venerates as inspired the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament

The four Gospels occupy a central place because Christ Jesus is their center.

The unity of the two Testaments proceeds from the unity of God's plan and his Revelation. The Old Testament prepares for the New and the New Testament fulfills the Old; the two shed light on each other; both are true Word of God.

“The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord” (Dv 21). Both nourish and govern the whole Christian life. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105; cf Isa. 50:4).

VATICAN II

Vatican II was a council of renewal. It called individual Catholics, lay, religious, and ordained, to personal conversion and to a more authentic Christian discipleship and at the same time attempted to renew the church in almost all aspects of its community and institutional life.

The documents of Vatican II did not descend ready made from heaven, nor was their content created out of nothing by bishops during the four short years that the council was in session. They were able to build on and to carry further a process of renewal that had already been underway for several decades. The liturgical movement offers an excellent example. Although some scholars seek its roots in the nineteenth century and in certain innovations made by Pius X, the twentieth-century liturgical movement received its initial major impulse in the 1910s and 1920s from a number of Benedictine monasteries in Belgium and Germany. Before long individual priests with pastoral responsibilities in various European countries and especially in France became involved in it and gave it a more popular direction. Meetings and conferences in the years after World War II won adherents to the movement among both laity and clergy throughout Europe and in North America. Pius XII in a 1947 encyclical, *Mediator Dei*, recognized its importance and gave it an initial endorsement and in the 1950s introduced changes in the Holy Week celebrations recommended by it.

Other movements focused on theology, scripture studies, ecumenism, and the lay apostolate paralleled the liturgical movement.

Without all the work and experimentation that had preceded it, the council would not have been able to achieve what it did: what it finally did achieve, however, cannot be reduced to a simple endorsement of what others had done before it. The council was a significant and creative event in itself. It brought together bishops from all over the world and provided them with an opportunity to discuss and debate a variety of issues related to the Church – to its inner life, its relation to other religious groups, its mission in the modern world. In spite of conflicts and differences of opinion among them, the vast majority of the bishops came to recognize and accept that they were participants in a massive process of renewing the whole life of the church. They were grateful for what had been done in the years leading up to the council and turned to many of the theologians and others who had contributed to that earlier process to help them in their deliberations. What they produced in the end, however, remains very much their work and their responsibility. They offered a vision of a renewed Catholicism and laid down certain guidelines for its implementation.

As a council of renewal, Vatican II's ultimate significance will be established only over time as its decrees and its call for change in attitudes and structures become part of the life of the church. The initial process of implementation turned out in some ways to be more difficult than many had anticipated. For some clergy and religious it provoked a crisis of identity.

Renewing the Catholic Church, effecting *aggiornamento* in regard to so many aspects of its life and self-understanding, has not been an easy task. This should not be surprising, given the size of the church and the fact that it exists in such different situations around the globe. Moreover, Vatican II followed a period in church history when relatively little change was made, which made renewal all the more difficult. Acknowledging all of this, one has to recognize that the extent of the renewal that has been brought about is quite remarkable.

Vatican II, like other historically significant efforts at church reform, called for renewal of mind and heart as well as of institutions and structures.

Documents of Vatican II

4 Constitutions – Most solemn – Dogmatic issues

9 Decrees – Practical guidelines – Disciplinary

3 Declarations – Position of Church on an issue

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

Nature of the church as “People of God” – Redefining of Mission - Restores Permanent Diaconate.

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

Scripture and Tradition as main sources of revelation – Importance of Word of God

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Liturgy as focus of community piety and worship – Liturgical renewal, participation

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

Church and World as mutually related – Dignity of People – Marriage and family, culture, socio-economic, political concerns, peace.

Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication

Responsibility and challenge of all media – Use of media to promote faith and values.

Decree on Ecumenism

Encourages Christian unity and respect for other beliefs – Sets forth guidelines for interfaith endeavors.

Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches

Addressed to Eastern Churches united with Rome – Recognizes diversity of Rites – Need to retain traditions

Decree on the Bishops’ Pastoral Office in the Church

Collegiality of bishops in sharing authority with pope – Calls for synods of bishops.

Decree on Priestly Formation

Priest training responsibility of National Bishops’ Conferences – Call for evaluation of seminary curricula

Decree on the Appropriate renewal of the Religious Life

Religious called to renew and examine relevance in the world and spirit in conformity to Gospel values.

Decree on Apostolate of Laity

Call of laity to holiness – involvement in Church – Bring Gospel to the world.

Decree on the Ministry and life of Priests

Priests called to integrate life with work and spirituality – Pastoral dimension emphasized.

Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity

All share in mission work – Evangelization by example more effective than direct tactics.

Decree on Christian Education

Upholds value of education and efforts to develop the mind – Parents have prime responsibility for moral training of their children.

Declaration on the relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

Sacred values of non-Christian religions – Judaism as root of Christianity – Anti-Semitism condemned.

Declaration on Religious Freedom

Conscience is norm of morality – Dignity and rights of human person – Discrimination in all forms condemned.

<i>PRE – VATICAN VIEW</i>	<i>VATICAN VIEW</i>
----------------------------------	----------------------------

THE CHURCH	
HIERARCHICAL	COMMUNITY

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD	
INDEPENDENT SOCIETY	INCARNATED IN THE REALITY
	OF THE WORLD
SEPARATED FROM THE WORLD	SOCIAL JUSTICE
SEPARATION CHURCH/WORLD	LIGHT, SALT, LEAVEN
REFUSAL TO BE OPEN TO OTHER	OPENNESS TO OTHER
CHURCHES	CHURCHES

THE LAITY	
RECIPIENTS OF MINISTRY	ALL CALLED TO MINISTRY
	BY BAPTISM
PASSIVE	
ACCEPT AUTHORITY OF HIERARCHY	

SPIRITUALITY	
DEVOTIONS	EVANGELISTIC
NOVENAS	SOCIAL JUSTICE
ROSARIES	EUCCHARIST

THE MASS

PASSIVE SPECTATORS
OBLIGATION

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS
CELEBRATION

THE SACRAMENTS

THINGS RECEIVED
PRIVATE

ACTIONS OF COMMUNITY
COMMUNAL

SALVATION

FULFILL LAWS

RELATIONSHIP WITH
GOD AND COMMUNITY

A PERSON

SEPARATION OF BODY AND SOUL

A TOTALITY OF BODY
SOUL AND SPIRIT

GOD IS INTERESED IN ONLY SOUL

MINISTRY

A PRIVILEGE

A RESPONSIBILITY