

CATECHESIS SERIES

(An Education in the Catholic Faith)

FEATURING CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH,
THE HOLY BIBLE AND DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS.

CHURCH AUTHORITY

Biblical scholars tell us that the last book of the New Testament was not written until the end of the 1st century A.D., that is, until around the year 100 A.D. This fact would leave roughly a 65-year gap between our Lord's Ascension into Heaven and the completion of the Bible as we know it. Therefore, "Who or what served as the final, infallible authority during that time?" It was the *oral* tradition received from Christ and given to the Apostles that gave the directive at that time (See Acts 2:42; Acts 15:1-2, 6).

From the beginning of Christianity the teaching of Jesus' apostles was the most reliable source of the truth about him. At first, the teaching of the apostles was passed on by word of mouth from believer to believer, community to community. There was no need to write anything down since people were used to remembering important stories accurately. Besides, Jesus' followers expected that he might return at any moment to establish the fullness of his kingdom. This passing on of the Good News of Jesus by word of mouth is called oral tradition. "Tradition" is a term that simply means something that is handed over, passed on, or transmitted from one person or group to another.

The preaching of the Gospel began as *oral* tradition. It was not until later on that some of the *oral* tradition was committed to writing – becoming Sacred Scripture (See Lk. 1:1-4) - and it was later still that these writings were declared to be inspired and authoritative. The authoritative list of exactly which books are part of inspired Scripture was not settled and fixed until the end of the 4th century. Until that time, there was much disagreement over which Biblical writings were considered inspired and Apostolic in origin. The Biblical canon varied from place to place: some lists contained books that were later defined as non-canonical, while other lists failed to include books which were later defined as canonical (i.e. inspired to be Scripture). It was not until the Synod of Rome (382) and the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) that we find a definitive list of canonical books being drawn up, and each of these Councils acknowledged the very same list of books. From this point on, there is in practice no dispute about the canon of the Bible (the only exception being Protestant Reformers who entered the scene 11 centuries later).

How can one know with certainty which books belong in the Bible? The unadulterated fact is that one *cannot* know unless there is an authority outside the Bible which can tell him. It was none other than the Catholic Church which eventually identified and ratified the canon of the Bible naming the very same list of 73 books that had been included in the 4th century. The fact is that the Church came before the Bible, and not the other way around. It was the Church, in effect, which wrote the Bible under the inspiration of Almighty God. Since the Church produced the Scriptures, it is quite biblical, logical

and reasonable to say that the Church has authority to apply and interpret them correctly.

A good illustration of this point is the case of Arius, the 4th century priest who declared that the Son of God was a creature and was not equal with the Father (a doctrine that is still taught by Jehovah's Witnesses today). A Council, under the authority of the Pope (325 A.D.), declared Arius' teachings to be heretical and made some decisive declarations about the person of Christ, and it did so based on what Sacred Tradition had to say regarding the Scripture verses in question. A majority of bishops at that time fell for the Arian heresy. It was the teaching authority of the Church which stepped in and declared Arius was wrong.

The Catholic Church holds that the immediate or direct *rule of faith* is the teaching of the Church; the Church in turn takes her teaching from divine Revelation – both the *written Word*, called Sacred Scripture, and the oral or *unwritten Word*, known as “Tradition.” The teaching authority of the Catholic Church (headed by the Pope), although not itself a source of divine Revelation, nevertheless has a God-given mission to teach and interpret both Scripture and Tradition. One must differentiate between Tradition (upper-case “T”) that is part of divine Revelation, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Church traditions (lower-case “t”) that, although good, have developed in the Church later and are not part of the Deposit of Faith. An example of something that is part of Tradition would be Baptism; an example of a Church tradition would be the Church's calendar of feast days of Saints. Anything that is part of Tradition is of divine origin

and hence unchangeable, while Church tradition are changeable by the Church.

The Catholic Church teaches that Sacred Tradition contains nothing whatsoever that is contrary to the Bible. For some doctrines, the Church draws more from Tradition for its understanding, but even those doctrines are often implied or hinted at in Sacred Scripture.

Sacred Tradition - Catechism of *the* Catholic Church

74 – “God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations.”

78 - “This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. The Church transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes. The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition.”

The Apostle Paul exhorted the church in Thessalonica to “Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours” (2 Thess. 2:15, NAB).

IN THE CHURCH

JESUS CHRIST

Christ reigns supreme
over the universal Church.
Eph. 1:22

PETER

Matt. 16:18

THE APOSTLES

Eph. 2:20
Acts 2:42

THE WORD OF GOD COMES THROUGH

TRADITION

2 Thess. 2:15
2 Thess. 3:6

SCRIPTURE

2 Tim. 3:16
Matt. 4:4

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

1. **Read Ephesians 1:22.** The Church is directed by Jesus Christ. True or False

God has put all things under the power of Christ, and for the good of the church he has made him the head of everything. (Eph. 1:22) ^(CEV)

2. **Read Matthew 16:18.** The Pope, which means *head bishop* of the Church, is referred to as the “rock” of the Church, or as the “shepherd” of the Church. Christ used that terminology when He appointed the Apostle Peter the first head bishop of His Church. True or False

And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt. 16:18) ^(Douay-Rheims)

3. **Read Acts 2:42.** The early Church continued in the teachings of Jesus as they were orally taught through the apostles. True or False

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42) ^(RSV)

4. **Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15 & 3:6.** The Word of God comes to us today through the Tradition of the Church. True or False

Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours. (2 Thess. 2:15) ^(NAB)

And we charge you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother walking disorderly, and not according to the tradition which they have received of us. (2 Thess. 3:6)
(DOUAY-RHEIMS)

5. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 & Matthew 4:4. The Word of God comes to us today from the Sacred Scriptures. True or False

¹⁶ *Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live.* ¹⁷ *The Scriptures train God's servants to do all kinds of good deeds. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)* ^(CEV)

Jesus answered, "The Scriptures say: 'No one can live only on food. People need every word that God has spoken.' " (Matt. 4:4) ^(CEV)

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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