

A Biblical Refutation of the Roman Catholic View of Authority

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Introduction

One of the fastest growing religions in the United States is Roman Catholicism. This growth is due to a number of factors. There is a large body of Roman Catholics who immigrate (both legally and illegally) to the United States each year from Mexico, Central and South America. There also is a fairly large group of people who convert to the papal church every year. Recently, there has been an aggressive campaign by some Romanists to convert Protestants to the Roman Catholic faith. There are a number of Roman Catholic web sites dedicated to winning Protestants over to the papal fold and there are even Romanist apologists and debaters who travel the country spreading the doctrines of Rome and defending the Romanist system against Protestant doctrine. In recent years a number of prominent Protestant pastors have converted to Roman Catholicism. Such men tend to be the most vocal critics of the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation. Given the current trend in which many people are embracing Roman Catholicism we need to examine some of the central tenets of the papal church and determine if these doctrines are in harmony with, or contrary to, the teaching of God's infallible Word. A scriptural evaluation of some of the central tenets of Romanism will conclusively prove that the Roman Catholic Church has more in common with many cults than with genuine Christianity and "the faith delivered once for all to the saints."¹ (Jud. 3 NAB)

Issue of Authority

The major foundational issue that divides Roman Catholics and Protestants concerns what is the ultimate source of authority for faith and life. Bible believing Protestants would assert that the Bible alone is the sole standard for doctrine, church ordinances and ethics while a trained Romanist would argue that the Bible *and tradition* is the final seat of authority in religion.² Protestants adhere to a single source (Scripture) as the normative foundation for theology while

¹Bibles quoted in this book are: DB-Douay Bible (1914). The Old Testament is the Douay version, the New Testament is the Confraternity edition; the complete Bible is commonly called the Douay Bible or Douay Version. Officially approved by the Roman Catholic Church. JB-Jerusalem Bible (1966). In common use among Roman Catholics. NAB-New American Bible, New Testament (1970). Officially approved by the Roman Catholic Church. RSV-Revised Standard Version (1952, 1971). An altered version has been approved for lay use.

²Roman Catholic teaching on authority can be seen in the following documents. The Council of Trent (4th sess., 1546) stated, "Seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the *unwritten traditions*." Cf. The Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council (3rd sess., 1870), chap. 2, par. 3; the Creed of Pope Pius IV. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) reads: "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other." (Para. 80.) And [Holy] *Tradition* transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching" (Para. 81). "As a result the [Roman Catholic] Church...does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence." (Para. 82)

Roman Catholics hold to a two-source theory of Scripture and tradition. The Roman Catholic concept of tradition is the central pillar that upholds all of its distinctive beliefs. If this pillar can be shown to be a false human construct that is a gross corruption of the Christian faith, then the edifice of Romanism will come tumbling down. Why is this assertion true? Because virtually all of the major Romanist distinctives that set it apart from the *solas* of the Protestant Reformation are based not on the Bible but on the vast pool of Church traditions.

Before we prove that the Papal church's concept of tradition is a gigantic fraud designed to give the church hierarchy autonomous authority (i.e., independent of the restraints of Scripture) over the laity, let us define the Roman Catholic doctrine of tradition. Romanist theologians define authoritative traditions in a very broad manner. It would include all the apostolic traditions that were never written down in Scripture.³ (These unwritten teachings are supposedly passed down through the centuries through the unbroken succession of Bishops.)⁴ Any of the accepted teachings of the church that cannot be proven from Scripture can conveniently be placed in the category of unwritten apostolic teachings. Authoritative tradition includes what Romanists call "the unanimous consent of the fathers"; that is, the many volumes of writings from the early Greek and Latin church fathers. It includes the teachings handed down by plenary councils or by Papal decrees.⁵ According to the papal church the Pope "possesses infallible teaching authority when...he proclaims with a definitive act that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held as such."⁶ Further, the college of bishops has a supreme authority that must be believed and obeyed when they "enunciate of faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium"⁷ (i.e., when they meet and act officially as an authoritative body). Unlike orthodox Protestants who view the Bible as a sufficient, perspicuous, finalized, completed revelation of God that is the sole standard which does not need supplementation, the Roman Catholic Church views its own hierarchy as the continuing voice of the Holy Spirit, as a living and incarnate Word from God.⁸ Romanists insist that all of their teachings originated either from the written Scriptures or the *unwritten* teachings of the apostles. All of these unwritten teachings have been entrusted to the church (i.e., the hierarchy: the bishops and the Pope) and the Holy Spirit keeps this unwritten revelation free from corruption. (It is important to keep in mind the close relationship between the Roman Catholic concept of the living unwritten authoritative traditions

³ The tradition here in question comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition. (Para. 83)

⁴ "...from the preaching of those who have received, along with the right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of true" (para. 94).

⁵ Bellarmine (1542-1621), a Jesuit and a noted Roman Catholic writer, divides tradition into three classes: divine, apostolic, and ecclesiastical. Divine traditions are those which it is alleged Christ Himself taught or ordained, which were not written but were handed down generation after generation by word of mouth. Apostolic traditions are those that were taught by the apostles but not written. And ecclesiastical traditions are those council pronouncements and papal decrees which have accumulated through the centuries. (Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* [Phillipsburg: NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962], 79)

⁶ "The Supreme Pontiff, in virtue of his office, possesses infallible teaching authority when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful...he proclaims with a definitive act that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held as such." (Catechism of the Catholic Church [para 891].)

⁷ *Code of Canon Law* (Washington DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983 [New English Translation, 1999]).

⁸ "[T]he Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book'. Christianity is the religion of the 'Word' of God, not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living" (Catechism of the Catholic Church [108].) "...interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the church [i.e., the Bishops and the Pope] which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God" (CCC par. 119).

and the teaching of apostolic succession and the Pope as the vicar of Christ on earth. These errors are interrelated and support one another.)

How does the Roman Catholic Church defend their two-source theory of Scripture and tradition?⁹ Modern Romanists naturally appeal to both the Bible and tradition. Given the fact that papal apologists are usually defending their position against evangelicals who give no weight to quotes from church fathers or medieval theologians their main argument often comes from Scripture.

There are a number of areas that need to be considered as we refute the Romanist concept of tradition as an equal source of authority along with written revelation: (1) The Roman Catholic argument from Scripture; (2) The papal church's idea that the church gave us written revelation; (3) The irresolvable problems associated with tradition as a source of *infallible* authority on a par with written revelation; (4) How the Romanist concept of tradition nullifies the teaching of God's word; (5) How the testimony of Scripture destroys Papal infallibility and apostolic succession.

The Romanist Argument for Tradition Derived From Scripture

Roman Catholic apologists argue that the Bible itself rejects the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. They teach that the genuine rule of faith set forth in the Bible is Scripture *plus apostolic tradition* which is manifested in the living teaching authority of the papal church. The passages used to prove their doctrine of a living oral tradition are as follows.

“But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25 RSV)

“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 RSV)

“Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.” (2 Tim. 1:13-14 RSV)

“So then, brethren, 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 RSV)

“You, then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim. 2:1-2 RSV)

⁹ The Romanist apologist will not refer to his position as a two-source theory but as one true rule of faith, which is Scripture and apostolic tradition. Note the comments on divine revelation from the Second Vatican Council: “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 inasmuch 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.” *Dei Verbum* (Latin: “The Word of God”)

“First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1:20-21 RSV)

“Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.” (2 John 12 RSV)

The first passage cited, John 21:25, simply teaches that there are many things that Jesus did that are not recorded in the gospel of John. This verse does not speak to the issue of a continuing oral tradition. The apostle in his concluding remarks wants the world to know that the gospels of necessity are selective in their accounts of what the Savior said and did. If an attempt was made to document everything the Lord did in His ministry then figuratively speaking the world couldn’t contain the volumes written. Perhaps the Romanist could attempt to infer from this passage that since what Christ said and did could not be contained in books then an oral tradition became necessary. Aside from the fact that this assertion is an argument from silence, how, we ask, could thousands of volumes regarding the ministry of Jesus be faithfully memorized and passed on to succeeding generations?

Another passage quoted, 2 Peter 1:20, also does not speak to the issue of a continuing authoritative oral tradition at all. In this section of Scripture Peter is setting forth the divine authority of God’s *written revelation* – the Bible. The men who received direct revelations from God were not expressing their own private opinion about God but were infallibly recording truths from the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are not the mind of man but the mind of God. Perhaps a Romanist would argue that the phrase “a matter of one’s own interpretation” refers to the fact that only the magisterium or church hierarchy has the ability to infallibly interpret the Bible. This argument falls to the ground when we consider the fact that Peter is not addressing the study of written revelation but the manner in which a prophet receives direct revelation. These are two completely different subjects.

The rest of the passages are more relevant because they at least address either traditions given orally to specific churches or elders, or discuss doctrine being spoken directly to congregations or elders. Are these passages excellent proof texts for the Roman Catholic teaching of a continuing living oral tradition passed down from bishop to bishop, pope to pope throughout the centuries? No. These passages do not support the Romanist doctrine of a *continuing* authoritative oral tradition at all. Note the following reasons. (a) Every passage cited refers *explicitly* to teachings or doctrines given *directly* by either the apostle Paul or by a plurality of apostles: 1 Corinthians 11:2, “Maintain the traditions...as I [*Paul*] have delivered them...”; 2 Timothy 1:13, “Follow the...sound words which you heard from me [*Paul*]”; 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “hold to the traditions which you were taught by us [*the apostles*]”; 2 Timothy 2:1-2, “What you heard from me [*Paul*]...entrust to faithful men.”; 2 John 12, “I [*John*] hope to...talk with you face to face.”

It is one thing to say that the apostles (who were appointed *directly* (i.e., in person) by Jesus [Mt. 10:2 ff.; Mk 3:13-19; Lk. 6:13; 1 Cor. 15:7-8] could give authoritative oral communications to pastors, elders and churches. The apostles had a special authority from Christ peculiar to their office [Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1]; were invested with a special unique teaching authority [cf. Mt. 15:17-19; 19:18; Lk. 22:29, 30; Jn. 16:12-14; 20:21-23; Ac. 1:2-8; Eph. 2:20]; had a unique more abiding and permanent inspiration of the Holy Spirit [cf. Jn. 14:26; 16:13-15; 1 Jn. 1:1, 3, 5]; were infallible - authoritative messengers of Christ and therefore could give authoritative commandments to all the churches [1 Cor. 7:17;

16:1; cf. 11:34; 1 Th. 4:2; 2 Pet. 3:1-2]. Likewise, the apostles were ministers of the gospel [1 Tim. 1:3; 6:14; Tit. 1:5] who proved that they were authoritative messengers with new revelations from God by their public repeated working of signs, miracles and wonders [Ac. 2:43; 3:6-9, 16; 5:12, 15, 16; 6:8; 8:6; 9:40; 14:3, 14; 15:12; 20:9-12; 1 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4; cf. Jn. 3:2; 9:30; 10:25; Ac. 2:22]); however, it is *quite another* thing to assert that a bishop living in the fourteenth century (who has never seen Jesus in person or publicly proved his authenticity through mighty miracles; who is a heretic and a whoremonger) has the same authority, ability or direct inspiration as the apostles Paul, John or Peter. Romanists *assume* that there is a direct connection between what the apostles were doing and what the pope and bishops have done throughout history without any evidence whatsoever. The apostles Paul and John never encouraged believers to place their trust in an oral tradition passed down to them via sixth, seventh or eighth hand reports. Neither do they instruct believers in the distant future to put their faith in an unwritten tradition that has somehow survived intact secretly through the centuries. Instead, the apostles commanded elders and churches to accept as inspired infallible truth what they had heard *the apostles teach personally*. Why? Because the apostles and the only apostles had a unique authority. Once the last apostle died and the canon of Scripture closed direct revelation ceased. The only way to learn the apostolic tradition is to read the Bible.

(b) The Roman Catholic interpretation assigns its own definition to the word “tradition” instead of interpreting the word within both the narrow and broad contexts of Scripture. The word (*paradosis*) translated as “tradition” or “ordinance” (KJV) in the New Testament refers either to: the immediate (face to face) instructions of inspired apostles (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; cf. 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:21-2); the traditions of the Pharisaical Jews (Mt. 15: 1-3, 6-9; Mk. 7:6-9; cf. Mt. 5:31 ff; Gal. 1:14), that is the man made doctrines and commandments that the Jewish religious leaders added to Scripture; or, to the traditions of men in general whether Jewish or pagan (Col. 2:8).

(c) It is noteworthy that while the Bible commends traditions in the first sense (i.e., the direct, face to face, oral communications of the apostles) it strongly condemns all man made traditions in the religious sphere as untrustworthy and corrupting. The Roman Catholic concept of tradition has much more in common with Pharisaical Judaism than it does with Scripture. Rabbinic Judaism teaches that when Moses received the written law on Mt. Sinai, he also received a very lengthy unwritten tradition. Roman Catholics teach that the early church not only received the written revelation (the New Testament) but also all the oral teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Pharisaical Judaism asserts that the oral revelation was passed on to Joshua, the seventy elders, the prophets and then to the great rabbinic teachers in each generation. Papal doctrine asserts that the oral teachings of Jesus and the apostles reside with the bishops together with the pope and are made public generationally through decrees, pronouncements, official councils, the magisterium and so forth.¹⁰ Rabbinic Judaism has codified or committed to writing a huge body of their traditions in the Talmud (which in English translation runs to 34 large volumes of small print). The Roman Catholic Church has an even larger body of traditions in the writings of the post apostolic fathers, the decisions of councils (e.g. Trent, Second Vatican,

¹⁰ “Technically, the Roman Catholic Church does not claim that the pope receives new revelations or that he is inspired by the Holy Spirit as were the prophets and apostles when they wrote Scripture. In fact, it denies that it formulates any new doctrine at all. Rather, it insists that in *ex cathedra* pronouncements the Holy Spirit enables the pope to draw out and proclaim what belonged to the original [oral] revelation.” (Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 79-80.)

Catechism of 1994), papal declarations, canon law and so on). The Jewish Talmud contains hundreds of blatant, explicit internal contradictions and clearly contradicts God's Word in many places. The traditions of Romanism also contain many internal contradictions (see below) and also explicitly contradict written revelation (the Bible) in several key areas.

The Roman Catholic argument for tradition from Scripture is an excellent example of inserting one's own presuppositions into the text of Scripture. The idea that the apostle Paul was endorsing doctrines and practices introduced into churches many centuries after his death by corrupt popes and bishops, when he was simply instructing local churches *in his own day* to heed *his own direct teachings* is patently false and absurd.

Human Traditions Nullify the Word of God

Having noted how papal apologists completely redefine the word "tradition" (when used in a positive sense) to suit their own corrupt presuppositions, we will now turn our attention to the Bible's unequivocal condemnation of tradition as a source of authority. This examination will involve a refutation of Romanist attempts to refute the standard Reformed Protestant use of the anti-tradition texts.

In the whole Bible there was no greater opponent of human traditions in the religious sphere than Jesus Christ Himself. In the sermon of the mount our Lord spends a great deal of time refuting Pharisaical additions to the Law of Moses (Mt. 5:17-48). There were also direct confrontations with the Jewish religious leaders over their additions to written revelation. In these confrontations our Lord strongly condemned tradition as a rule for religious authority and exalted the Word of God. "The Pharisees and Scribes asked him, 'Why do not thy disciples walk according to the tradition of the ancients...?' But answering he said to them, '...in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine the precepts of men. For letting go the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men....Well do you nullify the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition....You make void the commandment of God by your tradition'" (Mk. 7:5-13 DB).

Roman Catholic apologists understand that Matthew 15:1-9 and Mark 7:5-13 are often used proof texts against their position and thus offer two arguments against the standard Protestant interpretation of these passages. One argument is that these passages need to be interpreted in light of the other New Testament passages that praise apostolic tradition (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15). The problem with this argument (as noted in the previous section) is that the New Testament defines positive tradition as direct, face-to-face, personal instructions by an inspired apostle. Thus, these positive passages have nothing to do with developments in theology after the death of the apostles that are *not directly rooted* in a historical, grammatical exegesis of Scripture.

Another Romanist argument is that Jesus only condemned bad traditions that are used to nullify the clear teaching of Scripture. Papal apologists support this assertion by an appeal to the immediate context in Matthew's account where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for using a man made commandment to avoid supporting their aged parents (cf. Mt. 15:5-6; Ex. 20:12). While it is true that our Lord's example does show how a tradition can be used to make void the Word of God, this point does not mean that we can completely ignore verse 2 or the original confrontation that elicited Jesus' response in verses 3 to 9. This whole section of Scripture begins with Christ condemning the most innocent-looking and apparently harmless human tradition ever invented by man— religious hand washings. How does washing one's hands contradict, violate or

explicitly set aside God's word? The point our Lord is making is that when religious leaders have legislative authority to make up their own religious rules or regulations without authorization from Scripture (i.e., without biblical proof by direct commandment or logical inference), God's Word will be hidden or rendered irrelevant by a growing mass of human traditions. Thus, an appeal to antiquity, or the post apostolic church fathers, or commonly accepted traditions, or even church councils *without also* supplying biblical proof rooted in an historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture is not enough to establish a doctrine or religious practice in Christ's church. It was not enough for Jesus and the apostles and it must never be enough for us, His followers.

Our Lord's words and actions in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 cannot be exegetically circumvented by Romanist apologists. It is crystal clear from these sections of Scripture that Christ and the apostles would never countenance or participate in the ever-growing catalogue of Roman Catholic traditions that have nothing to do with the Bible (e.g., the sign of the cross, holy water, the mass, prayer and/or worship to saints and the virgin Mary, pilgrimages, the use of relics, holy sites, the adoration of the host, priestly vestments, the title "Father" for ministers, celibacy, the confessional, the hierarchy of bishops, the papacy, apostolic succession, the immaculate conception of Mary, etc.).

The apostle Paul also condemns man-made doctrine and commandments. "Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy, and vain deceit: according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ....If you have died with Christ to the elements of the world, why, as if still living in the world, do you lay down the rules: 'Do not touch; nor taste; nor handle!' – things that must all perish in their very use? In this you follow 'the precepts and doctrines of men,' which, to be sure, have a show of wisdom in superstition and self-abasement and hard treatment of the body, but are not to be held in esteem, and lead to the full gratification of the flesh" (Col. 2:8, 20-23). Note that the apostle's condemnation of philosophy that is according to the tradition of men is universal. This teaching means that Christians must reject both the use of non-Christian systems of philosophy to formulate aspects of Christian doctrine (e.g., Thomas Aquinas' dependence on Aristotle's thinking) and the syncretism of biblical doctrine with heathen ideas, ethics and customs. Romanism is a very syncretistic religion (e.g., celibacy – neo-Platonism; Christmas – Saturnalia; Mariolatry – goddess worship; statue worship – rank heathenism; Easter – fertility cults, etc.).

Scripture condemns all human traditions because of man's sinful heart, which is drawn to human autonomy and consequently makes human traditions more important than the Bible itself. Thus, traditions supplant the Word of God and become the ultimate standard by which the Scriptures are interpreted and judged. This sad reality explains why the Pharisees *in practice* regarded their traditions as more important than the Old Testament. It also explains why Romanist apologists do not attempt to alter or redefine their traditions to harmonize them with the Bible. Instead, the Bible is always reinterpreted so as not to contradict Roman Catholic additions to Scripture.

Note the following examples: The Bible indicates that all of the apostles were married except for Paul (1 Cor. 9:5) but Rome teaches the celibacy of the priesthood. Scripture teaches that after the birth of Jesus, Mary had normal conjugal relations with Joseph and bore other children (Mt. 1:25; 13:55-56; Ac. 1:14) but the papal church teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary. The Bible teaches us to confess our sins directly to God (1 Jn. 1:9) while Romanism requires confession to a priest. God's word says that Christians are justified by faith apart from the works of the law (Rom. 3:20), yet papalism teaches salvation by faith plus our own good

works or human merit. The Scriptures say that there is only one Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5). Romanism, however, advocates a whole host of mediators between man and God (e.g., Mary and the saints). Our Lord said call no man father (Mt. 23:9), yet Roman Catholic priests have taken unto themselves this forbidden religious title. The law of God explicitly teaches that God's people must never bow down to or serve statues (Ex. 20:4-5; Ac. 10:25-26; Rev. 19:10).¹¹ Yet Romanists are encouraged to bow down to, serve and even kiss religious statues of Jesus, Mary and the saints.¹² One could multiply examples where papal doctrine and practice has explicitly contradicted and nullified the teaching of God's holy word. Roman Catholic doctrine overturns the teaching of Scripture at several key points. It is obvious from both the biblical and historical evidence that the Romanist doctrine of an authoritative tradition is merely a clever attempt at justifying centuries of *man-made* doctrines and practices.

While Romanism teaches that the Word of God is contained both in the Bible and tradition, that both are of equal authority, the bottom line is that the papal church hierarchy *in practice* has authority over both the Bible and tradition. It is the church hierarchy which says what the correct interpretation of Scripture is and which determines what traditions are in (i.e., are authoritative) and which are out (i.e., rejected as merely human in origin). Because the Bible is not the sole standard for doctrine and practice in the papal church but the church hierarchy is, the Roman Catholic Church is ultimately founded upon *human doctrinal relativism*. Not even long held Romanist traditions and practices are safe. At one time it was a mortal sin for a lay person to read the Bible in their native tongue¹³, and people were even burned at the stake by church authorities for translating and distributing Bibles.¹⁴ Yet, after Vatican II, the reading of the Bible in approved English versions was permitted. For several centuries it was a sin to conduct the Mass in the vulgar tongue (i.e., the common language of the people). Any priest who did such a thing would have been excommunicated. Yet, since the 1960's the vulgar tongue is required. Both the Bible and church tradition have long approved of the death penalty for murder, yet now the college of bishops has contradicted Scripture and their own tradition to declare capital punishment inhumane. How long will it be before the bishops and the Pope eliminate the requirement for celibacy, or allow women priests, or sanction homosexuality?¹⁵ A Roman Catholic may regard such ideas as outlandish and outrages. But given their doctrinal relativism and their rejection of *sola Scriptura*, why not? After all, if a sixteenth century Roman Catholic was told that the laity would have the Bible and Mass in their own language, the

¹¹ “In the Hebrew ‘You shall not bow down’ is a negative *hithpael* imperfect; it carries the force of a causative/indirect reflexive. Thus, bowing down to a statue ‘as an aid to worship’ causes one to worship and to serve. Attempts to separate bowing down from actual worship violate the clear teaching of the Hebrew text.” (Brian Schwertley, *Roman Catholicism: A Biblical Analysis* [Lansing, MI: Reformation Forum, 1996], 4).

¹² “The images of Christ and the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be kept, especially in Churches, and due honor and veneration are to be given them” (Council of Trent, 25th sess. [1563]).

¹³ The Council of Valencia (1229), Trent (1545) and Pope Clement XI (1713) all condemned letting the laity have and read the Bible in their own language.

¹⁴ In October 1536 the godly William Tyndale was strangled and then burned at the stake by Roman Catholic authorities.

¹⁵ Actually, the church has already compromised the biblical position on homosexuality by declaring that it is morally o.k. to be a homosexual as long as one does not practice homosexuality. This position apparently is based on the presupposition that homosexuals are born that way and cannot help being what they are. Homosexuality, however, is a learned sinful perversion. Contrary to the arbitrary ethics of modern Roman Catholic bishops, who are unduly influenced by secular psychiatry and psychology, the Bible unequivocally condemns both inward perverse desires (e.g. Mt. 5:28) as well as outward acts. When the homosexual becomes a Christian he repents and puts his old thought life and lifestyle behind him.

elements in both kinds and that the elements would be touched by non-priests, they would not believe it. They would be shocked and mortified. The fact that doctrines and practices that once were authoritatively declared to be absolutely true and binding have now been set aside and changed is clear proof that the romish system is an unbiblical fraud. The Roman Catholic system may seem fairly sound to some people on paper, but in actual practice it has all the characteristics of a cult. The traditions are whatever the church says they are at any given time. But, we ask, if the traditions are simply the actual teachings of Christ and the apostles that have been handed down through history by the bishops and popes then *why have traditions evolved and even changed completely?*

Anyone familiar with Roman Catholic history is aware that many of the authoritative doctrinal statements made by the bishops and the popes are more reflections of what is happening in the culture of that time than they are of the mind of Christ and the apostles. For example, in the unpluralistic, dogmatic days of the sixteenth century the “Profession of the Tridentine Faith” (1564) declared that no one could be saved without professing and truly adhering to the Roman Catholic faith (see section 12). Yet in the pluralistic, “democratic” days of the twentieth century other communions outside of the Roman Catholic fold are “means of salvation” (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 818-819). Modern Romanism even argues that people totally outside of the Christian faith can be saved and go to heaven. When the new Catholic Catechism (1994) re-explains the old expression “outside the church there is no salvation” it says, “Those who, through no fault of the own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation” (CCC. para. 847). In other words, a person who has never even heard of Jesus can be saved if they are sincere in their search for God. Such politically correct nonsense contradicts both the earlier positions of the church as well as the Bible (Jn. 14:6; Ac. 4:12; Rom. 10:9-17).

The Absurdity of the Romanist Position on Tradition

The Roman Catholic position on tradition requires Romanists to believe in something that is incredible and absurd. The Romanist position is that the *whole* oral revelation of Christ and the apostles was entrusted to the church hierarchy. This large deposit of truth is just as important, authoritative and binding as the written word of God. This doctrinal position raises a few questions. First, how does this huge volume of material pass from one generation to the next? Obviously, no normal person could memorize or master such a huge deposit of oral teaching. Is it transferred mystically from one generation of bishops to the next by the laying on of hands? Is it stored in the subconscious? Is it miraculously transferred to the conscious mind by the power of the Holy Spirit? Remember, we are talking about a virtual library of material. The Roman Catholic doctrine of an authoritative oral tradition requires a greater miracle than even the divine inspiration of Scripture itself.

Second, if the church hierarchy is in possession of this vast unwritten body of inspired truth from the very beginning then why dole it out in little snippets over a period of almost two thousand years? Keep in mind there was only one Christ and twelve apostles. Even if we include Paul and the inspired evangelists the oral tradition would at most only include a few dozen men. The papal church has had dozens of popes and literally thousands of bishops. Why not simply write down the whole inspired oral tradition and have it printed so the whole church could

benefit from it? Why not put it all out in the open so that all may drink from this well of inspired wisdom? Why wait until A.D. 1079 to tell the church that God required the celibacy of the priesthood? Just think of all those poor priests who were sinning by getting married because the earlier popes and bishops didn't share the oral tradition on this matter. Why wait until A.D. 1854 to tell the church about the immaculate conception of Mary? This oral tradition could have helped all those earlier generations in their adoration of the blessed virgin. Why wait until the 1960's to tell the laity to read the Bible in their own language?

The truth of the matter is that there will *never, ever* come a time when all the supposed oral traditions will be written down. Why? Because the Romanist fiction of authoritative tradition that resides with the popes and bishops gives the church hierarchy incredible power. If the oral tradition were written down for all to examine then the pope and bishops would lose all their flexibility. They would no longer be able to make up *new* doctrines and ordinances. They, just like everyone else, would be forced to submit to an objective written standard. With an unwritten, unverifiable, evolving, changing standard a new doctrine or practice can be made up and imposed on the people for more power or to increase the popularity of the church officials. This gives the Roman Catholic hierarchy a cult-like power over their flock.

Third, why would the God of infinite wisdom commit some of His revelation to writing and the rest to oral tradition? While written revelation is easily preserved from corruption, oral tradition is easily corrupted and lost. Charles Hodge writes,

It is of course conceded that Christ and his Apostles said and did much that is not recorded in the Scriptures; and it is further admitted that if we had any certain knowledge of such unrecorded instructions, they would be of equal authority with what is written in the Scriptures. But Protestants maintain that they were not intended to constitute a part of the permanent rule of faith to the Church. They were designed for the men of that generation. The showers, which fell a thousand years ago, watered the earth and rendered it fruitful for men then living. They cannot now be gathered up and made available for us. They did not constitute a reservoir for the supply of future generations. In like manner the unrecorded teachings of Christ and his Apostles did their work. They were not designed for our instruction. It is as impossible to learn what they were, as it is to gather up the leaves, which adorned and enriched the earth when Christ walked in the garden of Gethsemane. This impossibility arises out of the limitations of our nature, as well as its corruption consequent on the fall. Man has not the clearness of perception, the retentiveness of memory, or the power of presentation, to enable him (without supernatural aid) to give a trustworthy account of a discourse once heard, a few years or even months after its delivery. And that this should be done, over and over from month to month for thousands of years, is impossibility. If to this be added the difficulty in the way of this oral transmission, arising from the blindness of men to the things of the Spirit, which prevents their understanding what they hear, and from the disposition to pervert and misrepresent the truth to suit their own prejudices and purposes, it must be acknowledged that tradition cannot be a reliable source of knowledge of religious truth. This is universally acknowledged and acted upon, except by Romanists. No one pretends to determine what Luther and Calvin, Latimer and Cranmer, taught, except from contemporaneous written records. Much less will any sane man pretend to know what Moses and the prophets taught except from their own writings.¹⁶

Further, when a pope or the bishops come up with a new doctrine from the supposed trough of unwritten apostolic tradition, how are we to determine whether or not they simply made it up out

¹⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 1:21.

of their own imagination? Are we supposed to simply accept their word on it? Is this not a blind faith in the words of men? When the apostles first delivered the inspired teachings in the generation after the death of Christ they backed up the new revelations with miracles, signs and wonders (2 Cor. 12:12; Ac. 14:3; Heb. 2:3-4; cf. Ex. 4:5; 1 Ki. 17:24; Jn. 10:25). The Roman Catholic Church offers no verification at all.

Romanist Doctrine of Authoritative Tradition Disproved by Internal Contradictions

The Roman Catholic Church says that the oral traditions from Christ and the apostles reside with the pope and bishops throughout history. These traditions are supposed to be inspired, infallible and fully authoritative. Romanists are supposed to accept and submit to these traditions and must even interpret the Bible so that it harmonizes with the traditions. Trent's formula for submission to the papal church reads: "I shall never accept nor interpret it [the sacred Scriptures] otherwise than in accordance with the unanimous consent of the Fathers". If the authoritative traditions within the Roman Catholic Church were truly of divine origin and inspired we could expect them to be totally unified in the doctrinal teachings and church practices. After all, the perfect consent of all the various parts of the Bible, the fact that it contains no internal contradictions and is fully directed to the same end, is an excellent evidence for the Scriptures' own inspiration and perfection. Unlike the Bible, an examination of the authoritative traditions reveals a whole host of blatant contradictions. For example, the Council of Trent placed the apocrypha in the canon of Scripture while Jerome (who gave the church the Latin Vulgate translation) rejected Sirach, Judith, and Tobit as uninspired man-made documents.¹⁷ Further, if the church officials (the pope and bishops) had a special direction and access by the Holy Spirit to the oral traditions, then why do we encounter the church endorsing opposing doctrines in different generations? Hodge writes,

It is an undeniable fact of history that Arianism prevailed for years both in the East and West; that it received the sanction of the vast majority of the bishops, of provincial and ecumenical councils, and of the Bishop of Rome. It is no less certain that in the Latin Church, Augustinianism, including all the characteristic doctrines of what is now called Calvinism, was declared to be the true faith by council after council, provincial and general, and by bishops and popes. Soon, however, Augustinianism lost its ascendancy. For seven or eight centuries no one form of doctrine concerning sin, grace, and predestination prevailed in the Latin Church. Augustinianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Mysticism (equally irreconcilable with both), were in constant conflict; and that, too, on questions on which the Church had already pronounced its judgment. It was not until the beginning of the sixteenth century that the Council of Trent, after long conflict within itself, gave its sanction to a modified form of Semi-Pelagianism.¹⁸

Regarding the church fathers; Loraine Boettner notes that the Romanist idea of unanimous consent is a myth:

They [the church fathers] contradict each other, and even contradict themselves as they change their minds and affirm what they previously had denied. Augustine, the greatest of the fathers, in his later life wrote a special book in which he set forth his *Retractions*. Some of the fathers of the second century held that Christ would return shortly and that he would personally

¹⁷ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 2:45.

¹⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:124.

reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years. But two of the best-known scholars of the early church, Origen (185-254) and Augustine (354-430) wrote against that view. The early fathers condemned the use of images in worship, while later ones approve such use. The early church almost unanimously advocated the reading and free use of the Scriptures, while later ones restricted such reading and use. Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome and the greatest of the early bishops, denounced the assumption of the title of Universal Bishop as anti-Christian. But late Popes even to the present have been very insistent of using that and similar titles which assert universal authority. Where, then, is the universal tradition and unanimous consent of the fathers to papal doctrine?¹⁹

According to the Roman Catholic concept of an authoritative tradition, the laity must submit to the magisterium, the church fathers and the pope, especially when he makes official statements on doctrine or ethics. Note, once again however, how the papal church has abandoned and then completely changed important doctrinal positions once held as binding by the church hierarchy. An excellent example of a major church reversal regards pictures of Jesus. There was a time when the bishops, popes and church fathers condemned pictures of Christ as idolatrous. Both Pope Gregory III (elected 731) and Pope Constantine V (elected 740), who ruled the church for nearly sixty years, condemned the use of pictures of the Savior as heretical.

In A.D. 754 a major church council with over 338 bishops in attendance condemned all religious representations of our Lord. The council of Constantinople decreed: "If any person shall divide human nature, united to the Person of God the Word; and, having it only in the imagination of his mind, shall therefore, attempt to paint the same in an Image; let him be holden as accursed. If any person shall divide Christ, being but one, into two persons; placing on the one side the Son of God, and on the other side the son of Mary; neither doth confess the continual union that is made; and by that reason doth paint in an Image of the son of Mary, as subsisting by himself; let him be accursed. If any person shall paint in an Image the human nature, being deified by the uniting thereof to God the Word; separating the same as it were from the Godhead assumed and deified; let him be holden as accursed." Regarding this council Philip Schaff writes, "The counsel, appealing to the second commandment and other Scripture passages denouncing idolatry (Rom. 1:23, 25; John 4:24), and opinions of the Fathers (Epiphanius, Eusebius, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, etc.), condemned and forbade the public and private worship of sacred images on pain of deposition and excommunication....It denounced all religious representations by painter or sculptor as presumptuous, pagan and idolatrous. Those who make pictures of the Savior, who is God as well as man in one inseparable person, either limit the incomprehensible Godhead to the bounds of created flesh, or confound his two natures like Eutyches, or separate them, like Nestorius, or deny his Godhead, like Arius; and those who worship such a picture are guilty of the same heresy and blasphemy."²⁰

Thus, in the middle of the eighth century we find the Pope and the magisterium unequivocally condemning the religious use of images. Furthermore, the church council appeals to the writings of many church fathers as support for their decision. Yet, look at what the supposed unchanging church teaches today. The Council of Trent writes, "The images of Christ and the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and to be kept, especially in Churches, and due honor and veneration are to be given them" (25th sess. [1563]). "The Christian

¹⁹ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 78-79.

²⁰ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eudmans, 1987 [1910]), 4:457-458.

eneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which prescribes idolatry” (CCC para. 2132 [1994]). Note, once again that the *supreme* authority in the Roman Catholic Church is neither Scripture nor tradition but what the pope’s and bishops’ opinion is at any given point in time. At one point in time we encounter popes and bishops in conjunction with earlier church fathers condemning the use of pictures and statues of Christ. (This view is in harmony with the teaching of Scripture, see Ex. 20:4-5; Ac. 10:25-26; Rev. 19:10.) At another point in time the Pope and bishops officially sanction the adoration (i.e., the worship) of statues and pictures. Given the history of how the “authoritative” traditions in the Roman Catholic church have evolved and even completely reversed, one must either admit that the church’s authoritative traditions have nothing to do with the inspired oral teaching of Jesus and the apostles or, that the oral tradition contains propositions that are simultaneously true and false.

Hodge notes that the supposed common consent of the fathers “...is a Procrustean bed which may be extended or shortened at pleasure. In every *Catena Patrum* prepared to prove this consent in certain doctrines, it will be found that two or more writers in a century are cited as evincing the unanimous opinion of that century, while double or fourfold the number, of equally important writers, belonging to the same period, on the other side, are passed over in silence. There is no rule to guide in the application of this test, and no uniformity in the manner of its use.”²¹ If the use of the fathers by the papal church is completely arbitrary and the writings of the fathers are a large pool of conflicting theological interpretations that can be selectively used to support one preferred theological view among many, then obviously one cannot appeal to the fathers as evidence of an inspired, fixed, unchanging oral tradition. Tradition in the papal church really means the *present* consensus among the church hierarchy of what the faith ought to be. This reality (as noted) is a form of theological relativism.

Another key linchpin of the Roman Catholic Church’s concept of a continuing authoritative tradition is the concept of papal infallibility. The papal church teaches that the pope is infallible when he speaks on matters of doctrine.²² An examination of papal statements and decisions throughout history reveals that (just as in the case of the Magisterium) there are hundreds of explicit contradictions among authoritative papal doctrinal statements. Ralph Woodrow merely scratches the surface on this topic:

Pope Honorius I, after his death, was denounced as a heretic by the Sixth Council in the year 680. Pope Leo confirmed his condemnation. Now if Popes are infallible, how could one condemn the other?

Pope Vigilius, after condemning certain books, removed his condemnation, afterward condemned them again and then retracted his condemnation, then condemned again! Where is infallibility here?

Dueling was authorized by Pope Eugenius III (1145-53). But later Pope Julius II (1509) and Pope Pius IV (1506) forbade it.

In the eleventh century there were three rival popes at the same time, all of which were deposed by the council convened by the emperor Henry III. Later in the same century, Clement

²¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:126.

²²The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful...he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals (CCC para. 891). “There is neither appeal nor recourse against a decision or decree of the Roman Pontiff” (*Trent*, canon 333, Sec. 3). “The Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church” (CCC para. 882).

III was opposed by Victor III and afterwards by Urban II. How could popes be infallible when they opposed one another?

Then came the “great schism” in 1378 that lasted for fifty years. Italians elected Urban VI and the French cardinals chose Clement VII. The popes cursed each other year after year until a council deposed both and elected another!

Pope Sixtus V had a version of the Bible prepared which he declared to be authentic. Two years later Pope Clement VIII declared that it was full of errors and ordered that another be made!

Pope Gregory I repudiated the title of “universal bishop” as being “profane, superstitious, haughty, and invented by the first apostate” (Epistola 5:20-7:33). Yet through the centuries, other popes have claimed the title. How then can we say that popes are infallible in defining doctrine, if the directly contradict one another?

Pope Hadrian II (867-872) declared civil marriages to be valid, but Pope Pius VII (1800-1823) condemned them as invalid.

Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) condemned Joan of Arc to be burned at the stake as a witch. Later, another pope, Benedict IV, declared her to be a “saint.” Could this be papal infallibility?

How could all popes be infallible when a number of popes themselves denied such a teaching? Vigilinus, Innocent III, Clement IV, Gregory XI, Hadrian IV, and Paul IV all rejected the doctrine of papal infallibility. Could an infallible pope be infallible and not know it? Such inconsistency!²³

Once again the idea of a deposit of inspired oral tradition that resides with the church hierarchy has been shown to be erroneous. The theological direction of the Roman Catholic Church has nothing to do with oral tradition and everything to do with the personal opinions of the pope and bishops. If the next pope is a liberal then the church will *change* a number of their old traditions and practices regarding the priesthood, homosexuality, birth control and so on. If the next pope is a conservative then the church’s shift toward modernism will be slowed but not stopped. Once *sola Scriptura* (i.e., the Scripture alone) is abandoned for a nebulous flexible concept of tradition that is really controlled by sinful men, there is no stopping the papal church’s drift toward modernism and humanism.²⁴ The Roman Catholic Church is built on shifting sand instead of the solid rock of the Bible.

Papal Teaching Contradicts the Sufficiency and Perfection of Scripture

Protestants have rejected the Roman Catholic concept of tradition not simply because an examination of the history of the papal church proves it to a fraud, but also because the Bible

²³ Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion* (Riverside, CA: R.W. Ev. Ass., 1966), 102-103.

²⁴ “[G]iven Rome’s view of itself as a *living* organism in its capacity as the ‘depository of tradition,’ there can never be a codification of or limitation placed upon the content of this tradition. As Charles Elliot states: ‘So far as we are aware, there is no publication which contains a summary of what the Church believes under the head of tradition.’ As a result, because tradition is free to aver doctrines which are the very antithesis of Scripture teaching while yet claiming divine authority, becoming thereby bad tradition as recent history will verify (see the papal dogmas of the immaculate conception in 1854, papal infallibility in 1870, and the assumption of Mary in 1950), the church is left vulnerable to every kind of innovation. Moreover, Rome’s teaching on tradition impiously implies, since Protestantism self-consciously rejects one of the two ‘indispensable media of divine revelation,’ that Protestantism cannot possibly be the church of Christ, when in fact it is Rome with its dogmatic deliverances from the Council of Trent to the present day that is perverting Christian truth by its traditions of men.” (Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998], 85-86).

itself teaches that the holy Scriptures are all we need for faith and life. The fact that the Bible is sufficient, perfect and complete renders all attempts at supplementing its teachings regarding faith and ethics with ideas and rules that originate in man's mind to be unbiblical and foolish. Thus, orthodox Protestants have always rejected so called "new revelations of the Spirit" or the "traditions of men." The Protestants' doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is set forth succinctly in the Westminster Confession of Faith which reads: "The Old Testament in Hebrew...and the New Testament in Greek..., being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them" (1:8). "The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined and whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" (1:10). There are a number of reasons why orthodox Protestants hold to the Bible as the sole standard for faith and life.

First, even before the completion of the canon (i.e., the 66 books of the Bible) Scripture expressly forbids anyone from adding or detracting from God's written word. "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Dt. 12:32; cf. 4:2; Pr. 30:5-6; Josh. 1:7-8; Rev. 22: 18-19). Although the many strict commands from God not to add to written revelation before the Bible was finalized did not preclude God Himself from adding His own words to Scripture throughout redemptive history or speaking directly to His own people through prophets or apostles, it did forbid human traditions as a source of authority. In both the Old and New Testaments we never encounter tradition as a source of authority in addition to Scripture. The people had to submit either to the *direct* teaching of an inspired prophet or apostle; or, they had to follow the divine teaching that was previously enscripturated. The Pharisees attempted to formulate theology and ethics based on an unwritten authoritative tradition and were strongly condemned by Christ (Mt. 15:3, 6, 9; Mk. 7:8, 9, 13; cf. Col. 2:8).

Second, even prior to completion of the Bible, all teaching was subject to the authority of the written revelation God's people had in their possession. To protect God's people from false teachers Isaiah declared: "To the law rather, and to the testimony. And if they speak not according to this word, they shall not have the morning light (Isa. 8:20 DB; or, "It is because there is no light in them" KJV). "The law...is the revelation of God expressing His will for man's obedience, and the testimony is His revelation expressing His will as a system to be believed. These are the standards by which all opinions and utterances are to be judged. If anyone does not speak in accordance with the law and the testimony, he is the one to whom there is no dawn. Whoever speaks not in accordance with these standards is one that still abides in the darkness of sin and unbelief, and hence, one who cannot give light."²⁵ There is a written revelation among God's people, which at all times must be consulted and obeyed.

Jesus applied the same principle to the Sadducees when He said, "You err because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Mt. 22:29 DB). When the suffering rich man wanted to testify to his brothers to keep them from going to hell our Lord said, "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hearken to them" (Lk. 16:29 DB). Christ told the unbelieving Jews that the Scriptures "bear witness to me" (Jn. 5:39 DB). When the Savior wanted to instruct the disciples of the significance of His suffering, death and resurrection He went to the Old Testament Scriptures: "And beginning then with Moses and with all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things referring to himself" (Lk. 24:27 DB). When the Bereans

²⁵ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:319-320.

wanted to know if the Apostle Paul's teachings were of God or not they compared them to the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. "Now these were of a nobler character than those of Thessalonica and they received the word with great eagerness, studying the Scriptures every day to see whether these things [spoken by Paul] were so [i.e., true]" (Ac. 17:11).

Note, that the supreme test of religious truth, even before the canon of Scripture was completed, was *written* revelation. Every teaching, doctrine, law or even verbal prophetic word was subject to the *enscripturated Word* (cf. Dt. 13:1-18). Thus, Peter could say that "we have the prophetic word made more sure" (2 Pet. 1:19 RSV), indicating that the written word of God is more sure than even being an eyewitness of a miraculous event. Nisbet writes, "He calls it a *more sure Word*, comparing it with *the voice from Heaven*, but because it is a greater matter to have foreseen and foretold things to come, than to have seen and related the greatest things present. And because a transient voice is more easily mistaken or forgotten than a standing authentic record, therefore the written word is a more sure ground for sinners' faith to rest upon than a voice from heaven could be."²⁶ Note also, that Paul did not rebuke the Bereans for going to written revelation in order to see if what he was teaching was in accordance with Scripture. On the contrary; Luke, writing under divine inspiration, commends the Bereans for testing every doctrine through a careful examination of the Bible. If Paul had believed in Roman Catholic doctrine then he would have ordered the Bereans to submit to his teaching because as a leader in the church only his interpretation of Scripture was authoritative and could be trusted. (Both Paul and Luke held to a Protestant understanding of Scripture.) If everything, including the verbal teaching of an apostle, is to be subject unto and tested by written revelation, then obviously the supposed unwritten oral tradition of Romanism must also be subject to Scripture and not the other way around. Anything taught by the Roman Catholic Church that cannot be proven from the Bible (i.e., the 66 books of the Old and New Testament) must be discarded as man-made rubbish.

The Bible teaches that we do not need extra-biblical tradition. Divine revelation is all we need: it alone can make a Christian "fully competent." Paul says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching – for reproof, correction, and training in holiness, so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Why is Scripture sufficient as a rule for faith and life? Because: (a) It is inspired (or literally breathed out) by God and therefore is inerrant, infallible and perfect (Ps. 19:7). It contains no errors or mistakes and merits our full trust as the very word of God. Such a statement cannot be said of the so-called authoritative traditions of the papal church, which are full of gross errors, heresies and contradictions. (b) The Scriptures are able to make us wise (Gk. *sophisai*) unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Everything that a person needs to know regarding God, Christ and the way to eternal life is found in sacred writ. Therefore, there is no need for finite sinful man to supplement the Bible with his own traditions, philosophies or ideas. God's word alone is the object of our faith. It alone reveals to us the person and work of Christ. Everything else is just a vapor – the speculation of men. (c) God's Word is useful for teaching all the important elements of the Christian faith. It alone is used by the Holy Spirit as a means of sanctification (see, Ps. 119:9, 11, 15, 16, 33, 34; Jn. 17:17; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; Gal. 5:18). Paul says that man-made traditions, ordinances or rules and regulations are of no value in subduing the sinful flesh (Col. 2:23).

The Romanist will respond to this argument by saying that the fact that written revelation is useful does not preclude other forms of revelation such as oral tradition, which are also useful. This argument falls to the ground when we consider that Paul says the Scripture can make the

²⁶ Alexander Nisbet, 1 and 2 Peter (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982 [1658]), 239.

man of God *fully* competent or perfect and equipped for *every* good work (2 Tim. 3:17). If written revelation contains everything that we need to make a man wise unto salvation, for the indoctrination of believers in true doctrine, for the refutation of false doctrine, for the correction of evil behavior and instruction in righteous behavior so that nothing more is required for perfection, then obviously Scripture is *sufficient* to meet all of our needs. It does not need to be supplemented with man made theories, traditions or philosophies regarding salvation or ethics. Further, God's word explicitly forbids man from adding or detracting from Scripture (read: Gen. 4:3-5; Lev. 10:1-2; Dt. 4:2; 12:32; Num. 15:39-40; 2 Sam. 6:3-7; 1 Chr. 15:13-15; 1 Kgs. 12:32-33; Jer. 7:24, 31; Isa. 29:13; Col. 2:20-23; Mt. 15:3 ff.).

Christians need to be aware that Roman Catholic apologists have a clever argument against 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and the sufficiency of Scripture. They will point out that: (a) Paul is only referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. Thus, they will say that the Protestant use of 2 Timothy 3:15-17 proves too much. It would prove that the New Testament itself is not needed since the Old Testament is sufficient. (b) The Protestant argument ignores the passages where Paul orders believers to hold fast the traditions or oral teachings. If the Old Testament Scriptures are sufficient, then why do they need to be supplemented by Paul's inspired instructions?

These Romanist arguments need to be rejected for the following reasons: First, the fact that Scripture itself taught its own sufficiency prior to the close of the canon should not surprise anyone. If Scripture is the very Word of God written and nothing else is, then it had to declare its own sufficiency before it was finished. It most certainly could not declare its own perfection after it was finished for then that declaration would then need to be added. Second, the fact that throughout Scripture God's people are told to trust in written revelation and are repeatedly warned not to add or detract from it does not preclude God Himself from adding new revelation as redemptive history progressed. The New Testament does not make the Old Testament less sufficient and certainly does not prove that the Old Covenant revelation was defective. It simply sets forth God's work of redemption in a clearer manner and interprets the redemptive history that had not yet occurred. However, once the apostles and New Covenant prophets under divine inspiration explained the person and work of Christ, the canon of Scripture was completed. There is no need for further revelation and there is no evidence for a continuing unwritten oral tradition.

Third, Paul's statement regarding the sufficiency of Scripture was made at the very end of his career when the New Testament canon was almost complete. Although, it cannot be denied that 2 Timothy 3:15-17 is probably speaking about the Old Testament,²⁷ it most certainly

²⁷ "The term Scripture (*graphe*), which occurs over fifty times in the New Testament (in a singular or plural form), *always* refers either to the whole Old Testament (the sacred Scriptures) or to a passage from the Old Testament (e.g., Mk. 12:10). The Greek word *pasa* can be translated as 'all' (KJB, NKJV, NASB, NIV, RSV, JB) or as 'every' (ASV, NEB). Most translators and commentators (at least the conservative ones) favor translating *pasa* as 'all' for the following reasons. First, the Greek grammar permits it (cf. Rom. 11:26) and some of the greatest Greek scholars (e.g., C. F. D. Moule) favor the translation *all*. Second, the context decidedly favors the translation *all*. Paul had just told Timothy in verse 15 that the Holy Scriptures (i.e., the whole Old Testament) are able to make a person 'wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' Paul then proceeds to tell Timothy why the Holy Scriptures are able to do this. It is because "all Scripture", or the entire Old Testament, is inspired. Third, the translation 'every Scripture' is easily interpreted in a manner that violates the immediate context and the analogy of Scripture. A Modernist could say that 'every inspired Scripture' (NEB) is profitable, but the uninspired Scriptures are not profitable. This translation contradicts verse 15 (as noted above) where Paul says the whole Old Testament is able to make one wise for salvation and the hundreds of passages that teach or imply the inspiration of the Old Testament. Many conservative scholars (e.g., William Hendriksen, George W. Knight III, Fairbairn) argue that the translation 'every Scripture' still teaches the inspiration of the entire Old Testament for it would mean that every Old Testament

applies to the *whole* of written revelation. The apostles were aware that their writings were inspired Scripture with the same authority as the Old Testament (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Therefore, the word “all” (*pasa*), as in “all Scripture”, by way of application must include the whole Bible not just a portion of it.

Fourth, the Roman Catholic understanding of 1 Timothy 3:15-17 essentially makes Paul out to be wrong when he points Timothy to the sufficiency and perfection of Scripture. If the Roman Catholic understanding of an authoritative unwritten tradition that continues throughout history, that is just as important as written revelation is true, then Paul had no business telling Timothy that the Scriptures were all he needed for the true knowledge of salvation and perfection in sanctification. While Roman Catholic apologists raise some good questions, their own understanding of the passage is an explicit contradiction to the plain meaning of Paul’s words.

Roman Catholic Doctrine Contradicts the Nature of Scripture as Self-Authenticating

A major argument for tradition as a source of authority in the papal church is the idea that the Roman Catholic Church gave us the Bible. In other words, the New Testament canon rests upon the infallible teaching authority of the church. One Roman Catholic apologist even argues that anyone who accepts the canonicity of the 27 New Testament books implicitly places his faith in the papal church, which decreed which books are canonical. Rome says that the Bible is the word of God because the church hierarchy says so and the church hierarchy is infallible. Williamson writes,

Thus the Baltimore Catechism (Q. 1327) states that “it is only from Tradition (preserved in the Catholic Church) that we can know which of the writings of ancient times are inspired and which are not inspired.” Concerning the testimony of the Bible, God’s Word, that the Bible *is* God’s word, found in many texts, a recent Roman Catholic textbook says this: “Even though these texts from Scripture are exceedingly clear, they cannot possibly be our main proof that the Bible is the inspired Word of God” (“This Is The Faith,” *Catholic Theology for Laymen*, by F. J. Ripley, 41). Much more important than what God says about his Word, according to Rome, is what the Church says. “The Scriptures needed a guarantee of authenticity. The Church alone could give that guarantee; without the Church it cannot exist” (*ibid.*, 45). Note that Rome does not hesitate to say that God *cannot* guarantee His own word: only man, collective man (the Church) can.²⁸

Is it true that the New Testament canon rests upon the infallible authoritative ruling of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy? No. Such an argument is a bare assertion without evidence that contradicts the Bible itself. Because the Bible is God’s Word it is self-authenticating. Anything written by God is infallible and fully authoritative whether or not men recognize it or not. The authority of Scripture is objective. It rests wholly upon God who cannot lie and not upon finite sinful men. Were the 27 books of the New Testament canon written by God and

passage, or every component part of the sacred Scripture is inspired. The important thing to note is that Paul explicitly teaches that *the entire Old Testament* is inspired by God. This one passage refutes all the foolish trash that emanates from modernist colleges and seminaries (i.e., Satan’s training centers).” (Brian Schwertley, *Modernism and Biblical Inerrancy*, [Internet Article, 2001]).

²⁸ G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith For Study Classes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 7-8.

authoritative *before* a church council officially recognized them? Yes, of course they were. It is an absurd thing to give finite creatures a supreme authority over the Bible simply for admitting what was already true. If a man finds a priceless diamond he does not make the diamond what it is simply because he recognizes it for what it is. The diamond's perfection and value as a diamond is intrinsic. As soon as men sit in judgment over God's word by subjecting it to autonomous human reason; or, the traditions of the fathers; or to the so-called findings of science then one has placed the creature over the creator. One has assumed authority over the authority of God. A. A. Hodge writes, "[T]he authority of the inspired Scriptures does not rest upon the testimony of the Church, but directly upon God. This proposition is designed to deny the Romish heresy that the inspired Church is the ultimate source of all divine knowledge, and that the written Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition alike depend upon the authoritative seal of the Church for their credibility".²⁹ Thus Romanists make the Scriptures dependent upon and a creation of the church when the truth is that the Holy Spirit used God's Word to give birth to the church. "[T]he church is built upon the Scripture (Eph. 2:20) and borrows all authority from it."³⁰ The papal system would have us place our faith in the church before we can believe the Bible. Such thinking is blasphemous. Further, it would have us direct our faith to fallible sinful men as the foundation of Christianity instead of the infallible Word of God. Such thinking is wicked.

There are other serious insurmountable problems for the Roman Catholic view of the church as having authority over Scripture. One problem is that if the Scripture receives its authority from the church, then where does proof of the authority of the church come from? If the Roman Catholic Church argues that its doctrine of an authoritative infallible church hierarchy is based on Scripture, then they have placed the Bible over the church. In other words their starting point for religious truth is the Bible and not the church hierarchy. This interpretation has the Romish church adopt a Protestant view of Scripture to prove their own peculiar doctrine of the church. If the Roman Catholic Church says that the church is authoritative because the church says so, then it at least is being consistent. The problem with this position is that it is arbitrary. It is a bare assertion without evidence.

Every world view, philosophy or religious system has an ultimate starting point or axiom that undergirds the whole system. For Bible believing Protestants the ultimate authority is the sacred Scripture. For Roman Catholics it is the church hierarchy's opinion throughout history. Protestants have a perfect, sufficient, complete, objective, unchanging standard of truth. Roman Catholics have a defective, contradictory, evolving, changing, arbitrary standard.

Another serious problem for Roman Catholics is that the council of Trent (1546) placed the Apocrypha in the canon of Scripture (the Apocrypha refers to 15 uninspired books written in the intertestamental period).³¹ If the Bible derived its authority from the church then the

²⁹ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958 [1869]), 35-36.

³⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:88.

³¹ Some examples of the numerous errors in these books are: Judith, chapter 1, vs. 1-7, calls Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians and declares that he reigned in Nineveh. But we know that he was king of Babylon (Dan. 4:4-6, 30). In Tobit an angel is represented as telling a lie, claiming that he is Azarius, the son of Ananias. But an angel is a created spirit and cannot be the son of any human being. The book of Baruch purports to have been written by a man of that name who was secretary to Jeremiah (1:1). But he quotes from Daniel, and the book of Daniel was not written until long after the time of Jeremiah, for Jeremiah wrote at the beginning of the 70 year captivity and Daniel at its close.

In answer to the question as to why these books were never accepted by the Jews as canonical, Dr. Edward J. Young, Professor of Old Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, says: "The answer must be that these books were never regarded as divinely inspired....Both Judith and Tobit contain historical,

Apocrypha would be truly authoritative and it is not. Further, if the church gave us the canon of Scripture then why did it wait until 1546 to tell us that the Apocrypha was part of the Bible? Would not the infallible pope and Magisterium have known this earlier? If this knowledge was part of the inspired oral tradition then why did Christ and the apostles never use the Apocryphal books? Why did most of the early church fathers explicitly *reject* the Apocrypha as canonical (e.g. Jerome, Origin, Tertullian Athanasius)? Why did many Roman Catholic scholars (e.g. Cardinal Cajetan, 1532; Cardinal Zomenes) and even popes (e.g. Pope Gregory the Great, Leo X) *reject* the Apocrypha as part of the canon of Scripture prior to Trent? Obviously, the church is right when it recognizes and declares what is true and the church is wrong when it says that something false is true. The theological debacle at Trent proves that the church did *not* give us the Bible. God did.

Does all of this mean that the early church's recognition of the New Testament canon is unimportant? No, absolutely not! In the first centuries of the church there were many heretical sects that were attempting to pervert orthodox doctrine by passing off fake gospels and epistles that supported their heterodox teachings. Also, there were theological crackpots who did not accept some inspired gospels and epistles because of their pagan presuppositions. The church as a synod or council stated what books are in the canon to separate themselves from heretics and to protect the flock from theological wolves. But once again we must remember that it is one thing to recognize the truth and point men to it and quite another to establish or create truth.

The Church Fathers Accepted *Sola Scriptura*

If the Roman Catholic doctrine of an oral authoritative tradition, which comes directly from Jesus and the apostles, that perpetually resides with the pope and bishops were true, one could reasonably expect this doctrine to be the standard teaching among the church fathers. However, an examination of the fathers reveals that the doctrine of Scripture alone as the sole standard for faith and life was common among the chief ancient theologians. Note the following examples documented by Francis Turretin:

Tertullian: "I adore the fullness of the Scriptures" (*Treatise Against Hermogenes* 22*.3 [ACW 24:57; PL 2.218]). And again: "Hermogenes may teach that it is written, or if it is not written let him fear that woe to those who add anything" (ibid.). And elsewhere: "We have no need of curiosity after Christ, nor of inquisition, after the gospel. When we believe, we first believe this, that there is nothing beyond which we ought to believe" (*Prescription Against Heretics* 7 [ANF 3:246; PL 2.20-21]). Jerome says, "That which does not have authority from the Scriptures, we can as easily despise as approve" (*Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaei* [PL 26.180] on Mt. 23:35, 36). Augustine says, "In the things openly declared in the Scriptures, we can find whatever is necessary for faith and practice" (CI 2.9* [FC 2:72; PL 34.42]). Basil says, "It is a

chronological and geographical errors. The books justify falsehood and deception and make salvation to depend upon works of merit. Almsgiving, for example, is said to deliver from death (Tobit 12:9; 4:10; 14:10-11). "Judith lives a life of falsehood and deception in which she is represented as assisted by God (9:10, 13). Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon inculcate a morality based on expediency. Wisdom teaches the creation of the world out of pre-existent matter (7:17). Ecclesiasticus teaches that giving of alms makes atonement for sin (3:3), and in I Maccabees there are historical and geographical errors. This is not to deny many fine and commendable things in the Apocrypha, but the books nevertheless show themselves at points to be at variance with divinely revealed truth. They were consequently never adopted by the Jews as canonical" (*Revelation and the Bible*, p. 167) (Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, pp 84-85).

proof of unbelief and a sign of pride either to weaken any of those things which are written or to introduce what is not written: (cf. *Concerning Faith* [FC 9:58-59; PG 31.678-79]). Irenaeus says, “We knew not the provision for our salvation through others than those through whom the gospel came to us, which indeed they preached, but afterwards through the will of God delivered to us in the Scriptures, to be the pillar and foundation of our faith” (*Against Heresies* 3.1 [ANF 1:414; PG 7.844]).³²

Catholic Doctrine of Authoritative Tradition Founded upon the Myth of Apostolic Succession

The Roman Catholic concept of an authoritative tradition is intimately related to their concept of a special intrinsic authority that resides in the pope and the bishops. The church hierarchy alone has a special ability to draw upon the oral traditions from Christ and the apostles. Therefore, whenever the pope or bishops make up a doctrine that is completely new they can claim that it came from this vast reservoir of inspired oral traditions.

Reformed Protestants teach that the Bible alone is the sole standard for faith and life. Therefore, the duties of the pastor and elders are purely ministerial. That is, the church leadership can only teach, counsel or discipline in accordance with Scripture. They do not have any authority to make up new doctrines, or invent new rites or ceremonies; or, to discipline anyone who has not violated the Bible.

The papal church’s concept of authority is based on two areas of thought: (a) The idea that Peter is the rock upon which the church is founded. Peter is supposedly the first pope; and (b) The idea that the special authority of the apostolate is somehow passed on to successors throughout history. This doctrine is called apostolic succession. The Roman Catholic Catechism (1994) reads,

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them ‘their own position of teaching authority.’” Indeed, “the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time. (para. 77)

This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, “the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes. (para. 78)

And [Holy] *Tradition* transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching. (para. 81)

If it can be demonstrated that these Romanist doctrines are false; that Peter did not have a unique authority over the other apostles; that the apostolic office ceased when the apostles died and therefore their unique authority and abilities do not continue throughout history, then the supernatural mystical claims made by the Romish church for the pope and bishops is

³² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:139-140.

overthrown. They are mere men who must look to the Bible alone for divine truth just like everyone else.

The idea that the church is founded upon Peter who is the first pope, the vicar of Christ on earth is based on Matthew 16:18 where Jesus says, “And I say to thee, thou art Peter [*Petros*], and upon this rock [*Petra*] I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Roman Catholics interpret out Lord’s statement to mean, “You are Peter and upon *you* I will build My church (DB)”. There are a number of reasons for rejecting the Romanist interpretation of this passage.

First, Jesus does not say, “You are Peter and upon *you* I will build my Church”. Neither does our Lord say, “you are *Petros* (i.e., a rock or boulder) and upon this *Petros* (a rock) I will build my Church”. Christ used two different words: “You are *Petros* (a rock) and upon this *Petra* (a cliff or solid rock) I will build my Church”. “It is essential to note that the masculine *petros* denotes a detached rock or boulder, and that the feminine *petra* signifies a rocky cliff. Liddell and Scott define the latter: ‘A ledge or shelf of rock, a rocky peak or ridge’, and add the statement: ‘There is no example in good authors of *petra* being used in the sense *petros*’...”³³ Because the two terms used by Jesus are not identical the term *petra* does not refer to the apostle Peter. (Interestingly, our Lord’s statement was made in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, which contained some of the most dramatic rocky cliffs and peaks in Palestine.)

Second, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ and the inspired teaching and writings of the New Covenant apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church.³⁴ Paul writes, “According to the grace of God which has been given to me, as a wise builder; I laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let everyone take care how he builds thereon. For other foundation no one can lay, but that which has been laid, which is Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 3:10-12 DB). How did the apostles lay the foundation of the church? They did so by their inspired teachings, by their infallible explanation of the person and work of Christ. In Ephesians the apostle says: “You [the church] are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief corner stone” (2:20 DB). Revelation 21:14 also identifies the apostles as a foundation. Note that Peter is not singled out but that all the apostles are pictured as a completed foundation upon which the church rests. This foundation was laid but once and the ever-growing church rests upon it. Clearly, then, the foundation is not the papacy as it continues through

³³ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minn: Augsburg, 1964 [1943]), 625. “Some have thought that our Saviour may have addressed Peter in Aramaic, in which language there is not a distinction of words corresponding to *Petros* and *Petra*, a Piece-of-rock and a Rock [i.e., a cliff]. But we have to do, not with conjectures regarding what Christ may have spoken in another language, but with the actual words that are actually ascribed to Him by the evangelist” (James Morrison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis, Minn: Klock and Klock, 1981 [1884]), 281).

³⁴ “In I Peter 2:6-8 Christ is called a rock and a chief cornerstone. But Peter here claims nothing for himself. Indeed he is explicit in calling all believers living stones built up a spiritual house with Christ as the head of the corner. Christ is repeatedly called a Rock. The background for this is that around thirty-four times in the Old Testament God is called a Rock or the Rock of Israel. It was a designation of God. In the Messianic passages, Is. 8:14; 28:16; and Ps. 118:22, Christ is called a Rock or Stone upon which we should believe. These passages are quoted in the New Testament and for that reason Christ is called a Rock several times. It designates Him as divine. For that reason, every Jew, knowing the Old Testament, would refuse the designation to Peter or to anyone except insofar as we are children of Christ. He is the Rock. We are living stones built upon Him. Ephesians 2:20 says this plainly. We are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Paul says of the Rock from which the Israelites drank that it typified Christ (I Cor. 10:4). In the New Testament there are twelve foundations and on them are the names of the twelve apostles – none of them are made pre-eminent” (*The Bible Presbyterian Reporter*, Jan. 1959) (Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 108).

history, but the New Testament canon, which was completed during the life of the apostles. “The offices of prophet and apostle are things of the past. No Christian since A.D. 100 has inherited any such office. No one today receives new revelations from God. The canon is closed. Hence the claims of the Pope and the Pentecostals are false.”³⁵

Third, in light of previous considerations the *petra* or immovable solid rock foundation upon which the church rests is Peter’s inspired statement (see verse 17) regarding Jesus. The Savior is the God-man, the Messiah. This confession is the whole gospel in a brief declaration. The special revelation that Peter received will be spread throughout the entire Roman Empire by the apostles and New Testament prophets and the whole wicked, demonic Roman Empire will not be able to stop it.

Fourth, the Roman Catholic view of Peter as the first pope who holds the first place of authority in the government of the whole church is totally contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. Dr. Joseph Zacchello, who trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood in Italy and served as a priest in New York has carefully documented the fact that in the New Testament Peter does not hold a position superior to the other apostles. He writes,

At the Council of Jerusalem Peter took part in the conversations, but the Apostle James *not* Peter presided and pronounced the Council’s decision: “And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, ‘Men, brethren, hear me...For which cause I judge...’” (Ac. 15:13-19). Peter calls himself an elder and not a pope: “Now I have something to tell your elders: I am an elder myself” (1 Pet. 5:1 JB). The other apostles did not recognize Peter as their chief; in fact, they sent him to preach in Samaria (not the other way around): “Now when the apostles who were in Jerusalem had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John” (Ac. 8:14).

Saint Paul did not believe Peter was chief; in fact:

- (a) Paul mentioned Peter more than once but he never mentioned him with any special title of honor, such as vicar or pope, or gave any indication that he held him above any of the other apostles.
- (b) Paul taught that those who attached themselves to Peter (or to any other apostle or person) as a distinct group were guilty of schism, because Christ is the head (1 Cor. 1:12-13; 3:22).
- (c) Paul did not mention the papacy when referring to the officers of the church (1 Cor. 12:29, Eph. 4:11).
- (d) Paul as an apostle claimed authority over the Roman church itself (Rom. 1:5-6; 16:17).
- (e) Paul was “behind the very chiefest apostle in nothing” (2 Cor. 12:11-12).
- (f) Paul expressly denied that Peter was the pope and further maintained that whatever Peter was to the Jews, he, Paul, was to the Gentiles. This certainly is incompatible with any idea of a pope in Paul’s day (Gal. 2:7,8).
- (g) Paul rebuked Peter without any mention of Peter’s supremacy (Gal. 2:11).³⁶

If Peter was chief, it was the duty of Paul and of the apostles to recognize him as such, respect him as chief and teach in their writings that he was the chief; but neither the gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the epistles nor the Revelation ever mention it.³⁷

Fifth, the idea that Peter was the bishop over Rome (the first pope) is a fabrication invented centuries after the death of the apostles. Historians and scholars have virtually no *reliable* historical records regarding the life of Peter outside the New Testament. The eminent

³⁵ Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1985), 92.

³⁶ Joseph Zacchello, *Secrets of Romanism* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948), 43-44.

³⁷ James D. Bales as quoted by Zacchello, 44.

church historian Philip Schaff writes, “The time of Peter’s arrival in Rome, and the length of residence there, cannot possibly be ascertained. The above-mentioned silence of Acts and of Paul’s epistles allows him only a short period of labor there, after 63. The Roman [Catholic] tradition of a twenty or twenty-five year’s episcopate of Peter in Rome is unquestionably a colossal chronological mistake.”³⁸ “[T]here is no authority anywhere for the idea that Peter’s peculiar and pre-eminent relationship descended after his decease, in a given line of successors. Such an idea is a mere imagination, a mere dogmatic castle in the air...there is no evidence to prove that the line of Peter’s successors is to be found in the bishops of the Church of Rome; or indeed, that Peter was the founder of the Roman church; or that he ever occupied in connection with it the office of the bishopric.”³⁹

The Roman Catholic doctrine that the apostles had the ability to transmit to their successors (the bishops of the papal church) the same power and authority that they possessed is totally contrary to the teaching of Scripture. (Remember, the Romish church must hold to the doctrine of apostolic succession to undergird their concept of an authoritative tradition that resides in the church hierarchy throughout history.) Apostolic succession is disproved by the following observations.

(a) The apostolic office was unique and foundational and was never intended by God to continue forever in the succession of bishops. This point is evident in the following considerations.

First, to be an apostle a man had to be chosen and set apart to the apostolic office by Christ Himself (Mt. 10:2 ff.; Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:13). Even the apostle Paul who was born out of due time (1 Cor. 15:8) had to receive a *personal* call from Jesus to this service. Interestingly, Paul says that he was *the last* living person to see the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:7-8). No pope was ever appointed or chosen directly by Jesus and no pope has ever seen the resurrected Messiah. “The church-appointed popes do not claim that they have seen the risen Lord; but we have seen that this is the first essential qualification of an apostle.”⁴⁰

Second, apostolic authority is never presented in Scripture as something that flows from one man to the next but is always represented as coming directly from Christ. Paul, for example, repeatedly identifies himself as an apostle called by Jesus Christ or God (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; etc.). Paul in Galatians 1:1 and other passages explicitly rejects the concept of apostolic succession when he declares that his apostleship “was neither derived from men nor conveyed through the instrumentality of men, but conferred directly by God through Christ.”⁴¹ The apostles were conscious of their unique authority and defended that authority when necessary (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1; 2 Cor. 12:11-13; Gal. 1:1, 15-17). “It is for this reason [their unique position] that *apostolic* teaching and preaching are invested with the authority of Christ and of the Holy Spirit.”⁴²

Third, the qualifications for the apostolic office are unique and limited to people who lived during the lifetime of the Messiah. When the apostles wanted to replace Judas, who had apostatized and committed suicide, they stipulated that the person chosen to be an apostle had to be a disciple of Jesus from the time of the Saviour’s baptism by John to His ascension into

³⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991 [1910]), 1:252.

³⁹ James Morrison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 279.

⁴⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 187.

⁴¹ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 2.

⁴² John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 65), 1:2.

heaven (cf., Ac. 1:21 ff.). The man chosen had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. In other words one had to be an eyewitness of all the great redemptive events and receive personal training from Jesus to lay the foundation of the church. Paul appears to be a partial exception to these qualifications. However, one must keep in mind that Paul was a witness of the resurrected Messiah (Ac. 9:3-6; 26:16-18; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8); and that Paul received personal training from the Lord in the wilderness before he assumed his special responsibilities (Gal. 1:1, 12, 16-19; 1 Cor. 11:23).

Fourth, the Bible explicitly teaches that the apostolic office was foundational and thus does not continue throughout history. Paul says that the church that continues to grow throughout history is being built “on the foundation of the apostles” (Eph. 2:19-22). The foundation is complete while the building continues to grow. Jesus told the apostles before His departure that the Holy Spirit would give them an infallible remembrance and interpretation of His own person and work. “But when the Counselor comes, whom I send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you [the apostles] also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning” (Jn. 15:26-27 RSV; cf. Jn. 14:26; 16:13-15; 2 Pe. 3:16; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 Cor. 2:13). The apostles laid the foundation of the New Testament church not only by establishing the first Christian congregations (cf. Ac. 1:8); but, also by giving an infallible history of redemption accomplished, an inspired interpretation of redemption and by setting forth all the ordinances of the New Covenant church (e.g., church government, worship, etc.). The Roman Catholic position of a living, inspired, authoritative tradition in the church that is revealed in little snippets throughout all of church history, presents an ever-growing foundation and not the completed foundation as taught by Paul.

(b) Because the apostles were organs of divine revelation they were given special sign gifts to authenticate their authority and their inspired teaching. Note that when Paul justified his special authority as an apostle to men who had challenged his legitimacy, he pointed to the miracles he performed. “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Cor. 12:12 RSV). The author of Hebrews asks, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? For it was first announced by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by those [the apostles] who heard him; God also, according to his own will, bearing them [the apostles] witness by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers” (Heb. 2:3-4 DB; cf. Ac. 5:12; 3:6-11; 5:15-16; etc.).

When the apostles came into a town and explained a new doctrine (i.e., a mystery [1 Cor. 13:2], a divine truth once hidden, but now revealed; or, a revelation [*apokalupsis*], a disclosure of something that was before unknown), God did not expect the people to simply take the apostles’ word for it. That is why God gave the apostles sign gifts to authenticate or “confirm” the truth of their message.

But what about the *new* doctrines that have been set forth by various popes and the bishops throughout history (i.e., the celibacy of the priesthood, A.D. 1079; the immaculate conception of Mary, A.D. 1854; the assumption of Mary, A.D. 1950; purgatory, A. D. 1439; etc.)? How do we know that these doctrines were not simply made up by church authorities? Since *none* of these doctrines are taught in Scripture, how are we supposed to verify their authenticity as true apostolic teachings? The answer to this question is that we cannot verify any of these new additional doctrines. We are supposed to simply accept the church hierarchy’s word on it with absolutely no proof whatsoever. Now, if God required authenticating signs for the new revelations of the apostles themselves, would He not do likewise with new (i.e., previously unknown) doctrines from the supposed apostolic successors?

The fact that miracles ceased with the death of the apostles is proof positive that Roman Catholic popes and bishops are not their true successors and thus do not have authority to reveal new doctrines. If anything, we should expect more miraculous verification for popes and bishops than for the apostles because the apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ's redemptive work while popes and bishops are centuries removed from Jesus and his immediate disciples. The Roman Catholic Church gives us no more reason to accept their additions to Scripture than does Islam or the cults.

(c) When the apostle James (the brother of John) was executed by Herod (Ac. 12:2) no successor to him was ever appointed. If God had ordained apostolic succession one could have expected the church to appoint a successor to James there and then. That, however, was never done. Obviously, the early church understood the unique foundational nature of the apostolic office.

(d) Apostolic succession is disproved by the historical fact that the episcopate as a separate and superior office to the presbyter did not come into being until at least three generations after the death of the apostles. Note the following observations: First, in the New Testament the terms "elder" or "presbyter" (*presbuteros*, cf. Ac. 14:23; 15:2-4; 20:17; 1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1) and "overseer" or "bishop" (*episkopos*, cf. Ac. 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7) are used to describe one and the same office. This point is not only readily admitted by most modern scholars but was also the opinion of some of the most prominent church fathers (e.g., Jerome, Chrysostom, Clement, and Theodoret). Second, throughout the second century the terms bishop and presbyter continued to be used to describe the same office (e.g., the Didache, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus). Third, the great early church scholar Jerome says that originally the churches "were governed by the common council of the presbyters [or elders], and not till a later period was one of the presbyters' place at the head, to watch over the church and suppress schisms. He traces the difference of the office simply to 'ecclesiastical' custom as distinct from divine institution".⁴³ The general consensus of scholars is that after a period of time churches began to appoint one of the presbyters as the leader or bishop (c. A.D. 200) and that he was considered only the first among equals. Then over a period of time the most prominent pastor in a city became the ruler over all the churches in the city or geographical area. The ascendancy of the bishop of Rome is even a later development. Obviously, apostolic succession cannot be true if the papacy and Episcopal style church government arose many decades or even centuries after the death of Peter.

Conclusion

In this study of the Roman Catholic doctrine of an authoritative tradition we made a number of important observations. First, the doctrine of the perfection, completeness and sufficiency of Scripture renders an authoritative tradition from God unnecessary. Second, God's inscripturated Word condemns human tradition because it nullifies biblical doctrine. Many Roman Catholic doctrines explicitly contradict and overturn the clear teaching of the Bible. Third, Scripture forbids men from adding or detracting from the completed canon. Fourth, many Romanist traditions contradict each other. This statement is easily proved by comparing authoritative statements from popes, church councils and church fathers. Fifth, most of the

⁴³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989 [1910]), 2:142.

additions of the papal church originated centuries after the death of the apostles. Sixth, the doctrine of apostolic succession is a myth that is easily disproved. Seventh, there is no method for authenticating the church's claims regarding tradition. Human tradition is dependent upon sinful, fallible men and thus is obscure, arbitrary, unprovable and indefinite. Eighth, the sheer volume of authoritative material produced by the papal church and the slow, arbitrary manner in which this authoritative material was dispensed over two millennia render the Romanist theory absurd. Ninth, the ultimate authority in the papal church is really neither the Bible nor tradition but the consensus of the pope and bishops at any given time. As society, culture and the church change and evolve so does the church's dogma. Tenth, the Roman Catholic apologist's attempts to support their views on tradition with Scripture have been shown to be erroneous (i.e., non-contextual eisegesis).

The Roman Catholic Church is apostate and heretical because it has subverted the authority of Scripture by clinging to human traditions. If the papal church is to be cleansed of its damnable heresies, gross idolatries and its theological relativism, it must repent and return to the Scriptures alone. The root must first be cured before the diseased and poisonous fruit is replaced. The Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible must be the standard for faith and life.

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