

Why Does the Church Teach That?

by Matthew Arnold

1. Why does the Catholic Church base its teachings on tradition instead of the Bible? Didn't Jesus condemn tradition? (Matt. 15.3, Mark 7.9)

In the Bible there are two kinds of religious tradition—human and divine. When Christ accused the Pharisees He was referring to “precepts of men” (Mark 7.7-9), in other words, to their *human* traditions.

That Christ wanted *divine* tradition preserved and honored is affirmed by St. Paul: “Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” (2 Thessalonians 2.15)

Divine Tradition (revealed truth handed down by word rather than by letter) is the Tradition upon which, along with Sacred Scripture, the Catholic Church bases its doctrines of faith. According to the 4th century Church Father St. Augustine: “These traditions of the Christian name, therefore, so numerous, so powerful, and most dear, justly keep a believing man in the Catholic Church.”

The New Testament itself is a product of Catholic Tradition. Nowhere in the Bible does it say which books belong in the New Testament.

2. Why do Catholics believe St. Peter was the first Pope, when the word “Pope” doesn't even appear in Catholic Bibles?

While the word “Pope” isn't in the Bible, neither are the words “Trinity,” “Incarnation,” or “Bible”! In Scripture, the Pope is referred to as the “rock,” or the “shepherd” of the Church. Christ used this terminology when He appointed Peter the first head bishop of His Church, saying: “And I tell you, you are Peter [rock], and on this rock I will build my church.” (Matthew 16.17-19) “There shall be one fold and one shepherd.” (John 10.16) “Feed my lambs . . . feed my sheep.” (John 21.15-17) The words “rock” and “shepherd” distinguish Peter as the head Apostle.

It is certain that the other Apostles understood that Peter had authority from Christ to lead the Church, for they gave him the presiding place every time they assembled in council (Acts 1.15; 5.1-10), and they put his name first whenever they listed the Apostles. (Matthew 10:2, Mark 3.16, Luke 6.13-14, Acts 1.13).

“It is necessary to take seriously the injunction to consider the word of God to be an indispensable ‘weapon’ in the spiritual struggle. This will be effective and show results if we learn to listen to it and then to obey it.”

—Pope Benedict XVI

3. Why do Catholics believe the Pope is infallible in his teachings when he is a human being, with a finite human intellect, like the rest of us?

The doctrine of Papal Infallibility doesn't mean the Pope is always right in his personal teaching. It simply means that the Pope is divinely protected from error when, acting in his official capacity as chief shepherd of the Catholic fold, he promulgates a decision which is binding on the conscience of all Catholics.

However, the Pope has no authority to originate new doctrine. His infallibility is strictly limited to doctrinal interpretation. This is what Christ meant when He said to St. Peter,

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16.19).

Certainly Christ would not have admonished His followers to “hear the church” (Matthew 18.17; Luke 10.16) without somehow making sure what they heard was the truth. In other words, He must have made the teaching office of His Church infallible.

4. Why do Catholics call priests

“Father” when Jesus said, “Call no man on earth your father; for one is your Father, who is in heaven”? (Matthew 23.9)

The title “Father” does not conflict at all with Matthew 23.9. Jesus Himself referred to Abraham by the title “Father.” (Luke 16.24, 30).

Christ simply forbids the Christian to acknowledge any fatherhood which conflicts with the Fatherhood of God—just as He commands the Christian to “hate” his father, mother, wife, even his own life, whenever these conflict with following Him. (Luke 14.26)

Catholic priests share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ (not a human priesthood), and their sacred ministry partakes of the Fatherhood of God. Like St. Paul, Catholic priests can refer to the souls they have spiritually begotten as their “children” in Christ,

“For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 4.15)

The title “Father” is entirely proper for an ordained priest of Jesus Christ.

5. Why do Catholics believe that the Eucharist is really the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ?

Catholics believe that the Holy Eucharist is the actual Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ because that is what Christ said: “This is my body.... This is my blood.” (Matthew 26.26-28; Luke 22.19-20; Mark 14.22-24)

Also, because Christ said: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (John 6.48-52, 54-56)

And because this is what the Apostles believed: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10.16).

Finally, Catholics believe that the Holy Communion they receive is the Body, Blood Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ because that is what *all* Christians believed until the advent of Protestantism in the 16th century.

6. Why do Catholics believe that good works are necessary for salvation when Paul says in Romans 3.28 that we are saved by "faith alone"?

Both faith and good works are necessary for salvation, because that is the teaching of Jesus Christ. Although: *"Without faith it is impossible to please God,"* (Hebrews 11.6) Jesus requires, *"faith working through love."* (Galatians 5.6)

When asked what one must do to gain eternal life, Jesus answered: *"Keep the commandments."* (Matthew 19.17)

Nowhere in the Bible is it written that "faith alone" justifies. When St. Paul wrote: *"We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law,"* (Romans 3.8) he was referring to the works of the Old Testament Law, and cited circumcision as an example.

If faith ruled out the necessity of good works for salvation, surely St. James would not have written: *"You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone"* (James 2:24) Justification by "faith alone" is another new Protestant doctrine that was unheard of before the 16th century.

7. Why do Catholics worship Mary, the Mother of Jesus?

Catholics do not worship Mary as though she were a deity. Catholics understand that Mary was a human creature, and therefore not entitled to the honors that are reserved to God alone.

What many non-Catholics mistake for adoration is a very profound love and veneration, nothing more. However, Catholics do feel that Mary is entitled to a great measure of honor because, in choosing her as the Mother of His Son, God exalted her more than any other human person.

Mary herself prophesied in Scripture:

"For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." (Luke 1.48-49)

Catholics know that every bit of the glory they give to Mary adds to the glory of her divine Son, just as Mary magnified God, not herself, when Elizabeth blessed her. (Luke 1.41-55) 75% of all Christians (Catholic and Orthodox) still hold to this view.

8. Why do Catholics pray to Mary and the saints when 1 Timothy 2.5 states that there is one Mediator between God and man—Christ Jesus?

When Catholics pray to Mary and the other saints they are not bypassing Christ. Rather, they are going to Christ *through* the saints. Catholics ask Mary and other saints to *intercede* for them before the throne of Christ in Heaven because: *"The prayer of a righteous person has great power in its effects."* (James 5.16) St. Paul also asked his fellow Christians to intercede for him: *"Brethren, pray for us"* (2 Thessalonians 3.1)

Scripture teaches that the saints in Heaven will intercede for us before the throne of Christ if they are petitioned in prayer (Revelation 8.3-4). According to St. John Chrysostom writing in the 4th century: *"When you perceive that God is chastening you, fly not to His enemies, but to His friends, the martyrs, the saints, and those who were pleasing to Him, and who have great power."*

If the saints have such power with God, how much more His Blessed Mother?

9. Why do Catholics believe in a place between Heaven and Hell called Purgatory?

The majority of Christians have always believed in the existence of a place between Heaven and Hell where souls go to be punished for lesser sins and to repay the debt of temporal punishment for sins already forgiven.

While the word "Purgatory" is not in the Bible, a place *is* mentioned where lesser sins are purged away and the soul is saved, *"yet only as through fire."* (1 Corinthians 3.15) The Bible distinguishes between those who go straight to Heaven, *"the church of the firstborn,"* and those who enter after undergoing purgation, *"the spirits of the just made perfect."* (Hebrews 12.23) Further, the Second Book of Maccabees (which was dropped from the Scriptures by the Protestant Reformers) says: *"It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."* (2 Maccabees 12.46)

These Bible verses have always been considered references to Purgatory.

10. Why do Catholics confess their sins to a priest?

Catholics confess their sins to priests because, as it is clearly taught in Scripture, Jesus Christ authorized the priests of His Church to hear confessions, and empowered them to forgive sins in His name.

To the Apostles, the first bishops of His Church, Christ said: *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* (John 20.21-23) And, *"Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* (Matthew 18.18)

Therefore, Catholics confess their sins to their priests because Catholic priests act as God's duly authorized instruments.

When Catholics confess their sins to a priest they are, in reality, confessing their sins to God, for it is He who, in the final analysis, does the forgiving. A Catholic's sins are only forgiven if the confession is sincere.

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