

RCIA Week 2

How Do We Know Christianity Is True?

“God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses...Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

St. Peter in Acts 2:32, 36

Who or what is God is?

No two systems make the same claims, and many flat-out contradict one another.

Belief in one religion generally excludes belief and participation in any other religion.

How do we know that we're right? How do we know Christianity is the true religion?

Some describe all religions and philosophies as “different paths up the same mountain.” But this idea invalidates all religions, for every major religion claims that it is the only path up the mountain.

- Christians believe you must believe in Christ.
- Muslims believe that we must listen to Muhammad.
- Buddhists and Hindus think Christians and Muslims and Jews are wrong.
- To say, “they are all the same” is to say, “they are all wrong.”

Two main points:

Christianity is different from every other religion because it makes a claim that is bolder than any other religion: that God himself was made flesh and entered human history.

God comes down to man. Man is weak, he needs a gift. How does anything rise except by something higher than itself coming down to it? How do chemicals get into plants? How do plants get into animals? And how do plants and chemicals and animals get into us? We go down to them, we take them up, we change their nature. And so Christianity starts by God coming down to man.

Venerable Fulton Sheen

Consider some of the founders of the world's major religions—Buddha, Muhammad, Lao-Tzu, even Joseph Smith. How many of them were foretold? If any of these men came from God, wouldn't God have told us about him? Would God who wants us to believe in him and follow him surprise us with a sudden apparition out of nowhere, shrouded in mystery?

Only Jesus was expected. For centuries before Jesus, there were prophets telling the Israelites about him. His arrival, his family, the virgin birth, the place of his birth, the location of his preaching, the tasks he would accomplish, the manner and timing of his death. The Old Testament is filled with countless signs that his coming.

Anyone can make a claim, and that person can easily be dismissed. But what about a promise made generations in advance that says, “God will be at this place, at this time in the future, and he will do these things,” and then have it all happen?

The Divinity of Christ

The central claim of Christianity—upon which all other claims depend—is the claim that Jesus is God:

The divinity of Christ is the most distinctively Christian doctrine of all. A Christian is most essentially defined as one who believes this. And no other religion has a doctrine that is even similar. Buddhists do not believe that Buddha was God. Muslims did not believe that Muhammad was God...

The doctrine works like a skeleton key, unlocking all other doctrinal doors of Christianity. Christians believe each of their many doctrines not because they have reasoned their own way to them ... but on the divine authority of the One who taught them...

If Christ was only human, he could have made mistakes. Thus, anyone who wants to dissent from any of Christ’s unpopular teachings will want to deny his divinity... And if Christ is divine, he has a right to our entire lives, including our inner life and our thoughts. If Christ is divine, our absolute obligation is to believe everything he says and obey everything he commands. If Christ is divine, the meaning of freedom becomes conformity to him.

Handbook of Catholic Apologetics, Peter Kreeft and Fr. Ronald Tacelli, S.J.

Christ’s divinity is the central issue of Christianity, and the Gospels clearly and emphatically assert that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be divine.

Either Jesus was right, or he was wrong. If he was wrong, he either knew he was wrong and was lying, or he believed he was right and was thus insane.

Jesus must be one of the three: a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord.

Well, then, why not liar or lunatic? But almost no one who has read the Gospels can honestly and seriously consider that option... Jesus has in abundance precisely those three qualities that liars and lunatics most conspicuously lack: (1) his practical wisdom, his ability to read human hearts, to understand people and the real, unspoken question

behind their words... ; (2) his deep and winning love, his passionate compassion, his ability to attract people and make them feel at home and forgiven, his authority, “not as the scribes”; and above all (3) his ability to astonish, his unpredictability, his creativity.

Fundamentals of the Faith, Dr. Peter Kreeft

Many simply dismiss Jesus as a good moral teacher and nothing more. But if he was a trustworthy teacher, why disbelieve him when he says he is God? If he is untrustworthy or wrong or bad because he said he was divine, then He is not a good teacher.

Some try to dodge the question by stating that the Gospels are unreliable as sources. We have more primary sources that detail Jesus’ resurrection from the dead than we do of Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon. Why would we take Caesar’s actions as bullet-proof history, but assume that “we can’t really know” what Jesus actually said or did?

The Roman historian Arrian is considered the most reliable and complete source for knowledge of the life of Alexander the Great, who lived a full four centuries before him. The Gospels were all written within a generation of Jesus’ death, and we can see that Jesus is no mere myth.

If Christ was who he said he was, then we can no longer live according to our own beliefs. Rather, we are obliged to listen to His commands and live according to what He wants of us.

This leads to our next question:

How Do We Know Catholicism Is True?

“You cannot have God for your Father if you do not have the Church for your Mother. God is one and Christ is one, and his Church is one; one in faith, one in the people cemented together by harmony into the strong unity of the body...”

St. Cyprian of Carthage, third century A.D.

Christ established a new and eternal covenant with us, his people, and that the Catholic Church is the living embodiment of that covenant.

From the very beginning of God’s revelation of himself to mankind, he consistently created covenants between himself and his people (Eden, Noah, Abraham, Sinai, David). These covenants explained who he was, what he wants, and how we can escape eternal death by bringing our lives into alignment with his holy will.

The prophet Jeremiah spoke of a future covenant that God would make with mankind. It would be the final covenant—one that would save Israel from its sin:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a

covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for **I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

This prophecy of a new and eternal covenant is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, **for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.**"

Matthew 26:26-28

Jesus Christ came to establish the New Covenant with His people, so that the whole world could be freed from death and sin through His own Passion and Sacrifice.

Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up...But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one.

Hebrews 9:1-2, 6-7

The Letter to the Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31 at length to show that Jesus as the new High Priest established the covenant that God had promised through his prophet. Hebrews finishes by saying:

"In speaking of 'a new covenant,' he has made the first one obsolete..."

Hebrews 8:13

The Catholic Church alone is the keeper of this new covenant established by God between himself and his people.

The Catholic Church fulfills the Old Covenant. Just as God established the laws and rituals of the Israelites and then had them carried out by an institution of priests and scholars, Christ founded the Church as an institution to enact and teach the New Covenant.

There are innumerable ways in which Catholicism fulfills the commands of Christ:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:18-20

Only the Catholic Church claims the divine (infallible) authority to teach the commands of Christ.

“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

Luke 10:16

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

John 20:19-23

The power to forgive sins is an essential mark of the Church’s divine authority.

“Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 18:18.

“Do this in memory of me.”

Luke 22:19

The Catholic Church who offers the Eucharist, the body and blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus, as instructed by Christ himself.

Jesus prayed for his disciples:

“That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.”

John 17:21

Only the Catholic Church is fully united in her doctrines, her moral and ethical teachings, her authority, her visible institution, and her historical continuity. Other Christian churches may be unified in some of these ways, but not all of them.

We know that Catholicism is true because it was established by Jesus himself to pass on his new covenant to all mankind.

What is the Church?

“If we would define and describe the true Church of Jesus Christ—which is the **one, holy, catholic, apostolic** Roman Church—we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression ‘the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ’—an expression that flows spontaneously from the repeated teaching of the sacred Scriptures and the holy Fathers.”

Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*

There are two major reasons why we need to understand what “the Church” is.

1. There are mistaken understandings that are common among those outside the Catholic Church. Many of our Protestant brethren believe that the Church is a purely invisible reality, or that there is no “institution.” The Church consists of a spiritual communion between persons who acknowledge Christ as their Savior. Similarly, many non-Christians see the Catholic Church as just another flawed, man-made institution.
2. There are mistaken understandings that are common among those within the Catholic Church. Many Catholics have a vague idea that the Church is spiritual and that she’s not a typical institution. But some expect her members to be living saints who never commit big sins. When scandals arrive, especially in the form of heinous sins committed by clergy, personal faith suffers, and Catholics leave the Church. Even the question, “Why be Catholic in the midst of this scandal?” is the wrong question. It shows that we never understood what the Church was in the first place.

In other words, don’t judge Jesus by Judas.

What Is the Church?

A concise definition:

The Church is that **visible society** of men upon earth which was founded by Jesus Christ, guaranteed by Him to exist all days until the end of the world, and sent by Him to teach all nations with His own authority...its members are bound together by the profession of the same and complete Christian faith, by the same Sacraments and worship, and by submission to the same spiritual authority vested in the successors of St. Peter—the present successor being the Bishop of Rome...

Fr. Charles Mortimer Carty

The Church is a visible reality that can be seen upon by all the world, not simply an invisible bond of Christian souls.

The Apostles understood this, and Our Lord made it clear in when He told them to bring certain problems to “the Church” as the final authority. See Matthew 18:15-17

“You cannot appeal to what you cannot see. Therefore, any idea that the Church consists merely of those who make an act of faith in Christ, whose number is known to God alone, cannot be sustained in the light of this text.”

Fr. Francis Ripley

The Church...is a society formed of living men, not a mere mystical union of souls. As such it resembles other societies. Like them, it has its code of rules, its executive officers, its ceremonial observances. Yet it differs from them more than it resembles them: for it is a supernatural society. The Kingdom of God is supernatural alike in its origin, in the purpose at which it aims, and in the means at its disposal...It is the society of those whom He has redeemed from the world...To the Church Christ has given the means of grace He merited by His life and death. She communicates them to her members; and those who are outside her fold she bids to enter that they too may participate in them. By these means of grace—the light of revealed truth, the sacraments, the perpetual renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary—the Church carries on the work of sanctifying the elect. Through their instrumentality each individual soul is perfected and conformed to the likeness of the Son of God.

The Catholic Encyclopedia

The Church Is Holy, Even When We Are Not

The Church contains both a supernatural reality and an earthly reality. Jesus founded Her to bring His gift of salvation to mankind and chose to dispense all graces through her. She is his Body, and he is her head. But this body contains imperfect members, who are in need of continuous purification and conversion.

So how can the Catholic Church possibly claim to be holy when she is made up of sinners? How can she claim to be perfect when some of her members (and even some of her leaders) have been found guilty of vile, scandalous, and gravely sinful deeds?

The Church is not holy because of her members. She is holy because her founder, Jesus Christ, is holy because the Holy Spirit (the Sanctifier) lives and dwells in her because Christ has made of her an instrument of sanctification

The Church, while possessing true sanctity from her divine source, is nevertheless always in need of reform and purification on account of the sinfulness of her members.

Imperfect Catholics (we ourselves) and our brothers and sisters in Christ do not damage the holiness that the mystical reality of the Church has in Christ.

However, because we are members of one body, and sin has real consequences, we do harm ourselves and other members of the Body by our sins.

By this we can understand why the four marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) are true, even when members of the Church cause division, sin grievously, dissent, or fail in their mission.

The Church is therefore holy, though having sinners in her midst, because she herself has no other life but the life of grace. If they live her life, her members are sanctified; if they move away from her life, they fall into sins and disorders that prevent the radiation of her sanctity.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 827

Jesus promised us that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church, but this implies that the Church will indeed come up against the very gates of hell.

Everything is well with the Catholic Church. But I do not say that everything is well with all the members of the Church...There is a human element in the Church, and that human element is ever liable to fail. But there is also a Divine element which can never fail.

Fr. Charles Mortimer Carty

This is challenging because people have difficulty separating the “office” of something from the person who holds it. They stumble into believing that “the Church is corrupt” when it is members of the Church who are corrupt.

This is not to overlook or minimize the sins of these members. Sin is the greatest evil. Sin is horrific. Each person will be held accountable to God for the sins they have committed.

Fruits of holiness are not, indeed, found in the lives of all the Church’s children. Man’s will is free, and though God gives grace, many who have been united to the Church by baptism make little use of the gift. But at all times of the Church’s history there have been many [saints] who have risen to sublime heights of self-sacrifice, of love to man, and of love to God.

The Catholic Encyclopedia

The Early Church and the Church We See Today

The Church that we see today is the same Church founded by Christ two thousand years ago. Some people say that the **hierarchy** of the Catholic Church is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures but are man-made inventions. But the Church is a living reality, and so experiences organic growth. It is not stagnant.

The bishops of the Church adapted to the vast increase in its members and its establishment in every country of the world, but the apostolic framework given by Christ remains to this day.

How would a small group of illegal sectarians gathering around an uneducated group of fishermen and tax collectors change or develop as it grew? How would that group—if it maintained its organic unity, its universal and structural cohesiveness—look in twenty years? In fifty years? When it became a legal entity? When it spread to other lands? When it grew to a billion strong? How would the demands of the Petrine office change? How would the leadership of this burgeoning household develop over time to handle the growth, the responsibilities, Judaism, Gnosticism, heresies, persecutions, the pressures of paganism, imperial Rome, schism, barbarism, Islam, the Enlightenment, the Reformation, Modernism, Communism, secular humanism, internal and external dissent? The office of Peter...has remained and flourished as the longest existing Western institution. It stands as the ideal contradiction: the weakest of men (Peter, for example) with no military might or soldiers in arms, yet outlasting the mightiest of kings and the strongest of empires...The oak is in the acorn and is the result of organic and necessary development.

Stephen Ray, *On This Rock*

Why Do Catholics Have A Pope?

“If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?”

St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, 251 A.D.

The Pope, as we well know, is undoubtedly the greatest obstacle in the path to ecumenism.

St. Pope Paul VI

Many people say that the papacy is unbiblical and that the word “pope” is not found in the Bible, but neither is the word “Trinity” or even the word “bible.”

“Pope” is derived from the Greek word páppas, which is an affectionate term for “father.”

It is certain that Christ appointed Peter to be the head or spiritual father of the whole Christian family.

We read in Isaiah,

“I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem,

and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

Isaiah 22:21-22

Catholics have a pope because Jesus gave us one, and we take him at his word.

Jesus came to save us, which included establishing a Church that would carry on His work when He had ascended to the Father.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Eli’jah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, **Simon Bar-Jona!** For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. 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 16:13-19

Jesus uses a deliberate play on words here. Simon’s new name is Peter, which means “rock.” When Peter was first introduced to Jesus, Jesus said to him: “You are Simon? You will be called Peter” (John 1:42). “Peter” was not a name, Jesus invented it. In the original Aramaic Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:18 are: “You are rock, and on this rock I will build my church.”

Jesus Gave Authority to the Apostles—and Primacy to Peter.

The twelve disciples were chosen by Jesus from among the rest and given a particular mission and authority. Of these twelve, Jesus selected a leader, one who would be the head of this hierarchy. That head is Peter and those who succeed him.

To no other apostle did Jesus speak so specifically, directly, and repeatedly, as recorded in the Gospels. In fact, Peter’s name is mentioned 191 times in the New Testament. Peter is repeatedly mentioned by name when the others are referred to simply as “disciples” or “the eleven.” Except for Christ himself, no other person receives nearly as much attention as Simon Peter does through biblical references.

Stephen Ray, *Upon This Rock*

Jesus spoke of giving Peter the “keys of the kingdom” as well as the power to bind and loose.

“This terminology had profound meaning for the first-century Jews”

Stephen Ray, *Upon This Rock*

Keys represented royal authority; binding and loosing represented judicial authority... Today we are far removed from the ancient Jewish mind-set. We think like democracy-loving Americans, not like first century Jews.

Stephen Ray, *Upon This Rock*

In the Eastern kingdoms, the sovereign king of the realm would delegate the authority and administration of his kingdom to a **steward**, who managed the kingdom—virtually ruling for the king—especially in his absence. This promise is directed to Peter alone.

As we will see, Jesus had chosen Peter to be the steward of his kingdom...Once the work of redemption had been completed and all authority had been given to Jesus, he passed the keys of authority over to Peter to administer the kingdom as a visible steward in his “absence”...

This is an amazing appointment, especially when interpreted in light of the scriptural and historical context. With the words and imagery of Isaiah—with the mental image of kings and kingdoms, keys and authority, officials and real delegation—Jesus appoints Peter as the visible and singular vicar or steward of his new kingdom. Peter is the visible representative (vicar) with a commission from Christ to lead and govern visibly the people of the new and eternal covenant during the absence of the visible Christ the King.

Stephen Ray, *Upon This Rock*

Peter’s headship was acknowledged by the other apostles as well as by the early Church.

...although all the Catholic Churches spread abroad through the world comprise one bridal chamber of Christ, nevertheless, the holy Roman Church has been placed at the forefront...by the evangelic voice of our Lord and Savior, who says: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”... The first see, therefore, is that of Peter the apostle, that of the Roman Church...

Pope Damasus, Decree of Damasus, 382 A.D.

Protestant theologians who have studied the matter conclude:

I cannot undertake to give even a sketch of the history of the Papacy. We shall have to admit that the Christian Church from the earliest times recognized the primacy of the Roman Bishop, and that all other great Sees at times recognized the supreme jurisdiction of Rome in matters of doctrine, government, and discipline...

C. A. Briggs, Presbyterian theologian

Why did Jesus establish the papacy?

The Pope is the center or the source of unity for the Church. Every basketball team has a captain, every police force has a captain, an army has a general. This is the way

humanity works. We look to a leader. We look to a source of unity in order to help us have a leader to follow, otherwise we tend to go in different directions... (Referencing Our Lord's repeated description of us as "sheep")

I spend a lot of time in Israel, and I've worked with flocks of sheep and it's very important that they have a shepherd that leads them because, if not, they'll go off into little groups of their own. They'll walk right up and sniff the nose of a wolf or fall into the river and drown.

Stephen Ray

Apostolic Succession Continues to This Day

The office, which is always distinct from the person who holds it, did not end with Peter's death. The Apostles replaced Judas by Matthias, and Peter and Paul and the other apostles ordained men to continue the sacred priesthood, the office of bishop, and therefore the papacy —has continued through the laying on of hands. We call this "apostolic succession."

And for this reason the apostles appointed as rulers in this society, took care to appoint successors...in order that the mission assigned to them might continue after their death...

Lumen Gentium 20

Peter's first successor: Linus. We know the name of every pope after Linus.

There is a record of every Vicar of Christ since Peter.

The ordination of every single Catholic bishop today, without exception, can be traced right back to one of the Apostles.

No one can doubt; indeed, it is known to all ages, that Peter, Prince and Head of the Apostles and Foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from Christ our Redeemer, and that to this day and always he lives in his successors exercising judgment.

The Council of Ephesus, 431 A.D.

It was Jesus who decided to establish a hierarchical Church and decided that we needed a pope. The fact that Our Lord wanted this is ultimately the only reason we need for its existence.

When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He chose for its cornerstone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob, a coward—in a word, a man. And upon this rock He has built His Church, and the gates of Hell have not prevailed against it. All the empires and the kingdoms have failed, because of this inherent and continual weakness, that they were founded by strong men and upon strong men. But this one thing, the historic Christian Church, was founded on a

weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible. For no chain is stronger than its weakest link.

G. K. Chesterton, Heretics

What Is Tradition?

“I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold fast to the traditions, just as I handed them on to you.”

1 Corinthians 11:2

The Church’s authority is intrinsically connected to **Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition**, and the passing on of the teachings of the Bible and the Apostles by the bishops of the Church in union with the pope (known as “the **Magisterium**”).

What is Tradition?

Sacred Tradition is the living transmission of the Gospel from Apostles to the present day. Sacred Tradition—with a capital “T”—is distinct from “tradition” (also known as “custom”) with a lowercase “t”.

Sacred Tradition is the continual process of handing down essential beliefs and practices both in word and in writing, from generation to generation—from the time of Jesus until the end of time.

“Small-t traditions” are non-essential practices that are nonetheless very common and even encouraged within the Church, such as praying before meals or the blessing of wedding rings during a nuptial Mass.

When the compilers of the New Testament were discerning whether certain books should be included in the Bible, they referred to whether those books contradicted Sacred Tradition. For example, did they proclaim Jesus as divine?

Sacred Tradition informs the teachings of our present-day apostles, the bishops.

When Venerable Pope Pius XII defined the Assumption of Mary as a dogma in 1950, he was not creating some new belief. He was defining and clarifying a belief about the Virgin Mary that has been known within the Church since its beginning.

“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.”

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.” “The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church 77-78

The Necessity of Tradition

The authority of Tradition is a logical and historical necessity. A convert from Protestantism explains:

The first Christians preached; they didn’t hand out copies of the New Testament (most of which was not yet written, much less established in its final form). Catholicism claims that its Tradition is neither more nor less than the preserved teaching of Christ as revealed to, and proclaimed by, the Apostles...

It must also be pointed out that the written word and mass literacy have been widespread only since the invention of the movable-type printing press, around 1440. Thus, it could not have been the primary carrier of the gospel for at least fourteen centuries. Christians before the time of the Protestant Reformation learned mostly from homilies, sacraments, the Liturgy and its year-long calendar, Christian holidays, devotional practices, family instruction, church architecture, and other sacred art that reflected biblical themes.

Dave Armstrong, A Biblical Defense of Catholicism

Sacred Tradition is an essential method of God’s revelation of Himself to us.

Man-Made Traditions vs. The Commands of God

Many non-Catholics reject Tradition as authoritative.

A common objection is that Tradition allows for the additions of “manmade” practices to the Faith.

Some see the traditions of Catholicism (such as our calendar of feast days and the use of incense at Mass) as things that were introduced and perpetuated by mankind rather than things that were given to us by God and say we would be better off removing them from our religious observance.

This rejection of Tradition is predicated on a false and unbiblical notion of the Church. Practices such as a rich liturgical calendar or the Rosary are only “the customs of man” if you believe that the Church is led solely by men and not by Christ.

The Catholic Church fully recognizes that some of Her traditions are made by man and not given directly from God, such as praying the *Stations of the Cross*, even though the *Stations of the Cross* are almost entirely comprised of Scriptural meditations. Still, the practice itself of praying through fourteen “stations” is neither biblical nor apostolic.

But the practice is a tradition that helps the faithful draw closer to the message of the Gospel and to Jesus Christ. They are a tradition that the Church fully promotes and passes on, even though it is “man-made.”

Development of Doctrine

Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong. Right is right, even if nobody is right.

Ven. Abp. Fulton J. Sheen

Truth, by its nature, cannot change. The Church does not and cannot change that which is true. However, that doesn’t mean that doctrines and dogmas can’t develop. The essence of a teaching doesn’t change even if our understanding of a teaching can deepen or become more clear.

For example, the Church has always understood that the Eucharist is the Body of Christ, containing His body, blood, soul, and divinity. However, it was not until clarification was needed—largely because this teaching was called into question by grave heresy—that the Catholic Church began using precise words such as “transubstantiation” to define how the Eucharist becomes Christ’s body and blood.

The Second Vatican Council explained the development (not “change”) of doctrine:

The tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts, through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For, as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.

Dei Verbum

Together, the Magisterium (the authority of the Church), Sacred Tradition, and Sacred Scripture form a single deposit of divine authority.

Coming up next:

The Bible

The Sacred Liturgy, the Mass