

Communion

Lesson 7

- I. Tradition
 - a. The Catholic Church has always maintained that its own traditions are **vehicles** of divine revelation. In other words, divine revelation is communicated to the church by tradition, Scripture, and the teaching authority of the church.
 - b. The word tradition refers to the whole process by which the church "**hands on**" its faith to each new generation. This handing on occurs through preaching, catechism, teaching, devotions, doctrines, and indeed the Bible itself.
 - c. Tradition always involves a movement **away** from what Scripture reveals in an attempt to clarify or amplify a doctrinal position. Over time, these Traditions become woven into the fabric of the belief and practice of the Church.
 - d. The Catholic Church recognizes that there is Tradition (**uppercase**) and tradition (lowercase). Tradition (uppercase) is the living and lived faith of the church; traditions (lowercase) are customary ways of doing or expressing matters related to faith.
 - e. If a tradition cannot be rejected or lost without a central **distortion** of the gospel, it is considered part of Tradition itself. If a tradition is not essential, that is, not clearly taught, then it is subject to change or even to elimination.
 - f. While many within the church have confused "*tradition*" with "*Tradition*" the process of sorting out the differences involve the official teaching **authority** of the church, scholarly authority of theologians, and the lived experience and wisdom of the Christian community itself.
 - g. One matter that is deemed to be essential to the faith and which has been handed down through Tradition is the **Real** Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
- II. The Argument from Tradition
 - a. The argument from Tradition alleges that the dogma of the real presence of Christ may be traced as a **constant** belief from the Council of Trent all the way back to the early Apostolic Church.
 - b. In support of this statement, the church offers the writings of many of the post-apostolic fathers, including Ignatius, Irenæus, Justin, Cyprian, and **Tertullian**.
 - c. For example, in an article relating to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, according to Tertullian: "The flesh **feeds** on *THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST*, so that the *SOUL TOO* may fatten on God." (Resurrection of the Dead 8:3)
 - d. However, scholars who oppose this doctrine and who have reviewed these same writers find certain **difficulties** within the documents written by these post-apostolic fathers.
 - e. These difficulties result from the use of "symbolical" and "allegorical" language, obscurities, and inaccuracy of expression which cast reasonable **doubt** on the intent of the author.
 - f. These Fathers even use the terms "symbol" and "figure" and "type" in referring to the Eucharist and yet Catholic theologians still affirm that the "symbol" is in a real sense what it **symbolizes** (the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood).
 - g. Since the technical debate over the presence of Christ in the Eucharist did not take place until hundreds of years after the post-apostolic fathers, it is **speculative** at best for one to assume that he knows precisely what they meant and what they believed.
 - h. While many of the later patristic writers indeed expand on the traditional views of this doctrine, their writing is so **exaggerated** and fanciful that it cannot be relied upon as an official statement of the Roman Catholic Church.
 - i. It is apparent that many of the Fathers simply supported the idea of Jesus' real presence in the communion, **not** that the elements were literally transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ.
 - j. And yet others, for example, St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. **350 AD**) used the words "figure" and "antitype" in their Catechetical lectures concerning the Eucharist, suggesting that they apparently believed in the real presence: "*Let us, then, with full confidence, partake of the Body and Blood of Christ. For in the figure of bread His Body is given to you, and in the figure of wine His Blood is given to you, so that by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, you might become united in body and blood with Him. For thus we become Christ-bearers, His Body and Blood being distributed through our members. And thus it is that we become, according to the blessed Peter, sharers in the divine nature [2 Pet 1:4].*" (*Catechetical Lectures 22*)
 - k. Precisely what **Augustine** believed continues to be the subject of a spirited controversy. Scholars favoring the Roman Catholic position offer his statements as proof of his belief while opponents offer his contradictory statements in rebuttal.
 - l. At the time of the Reformation, the testimony of Martin Luther supports the idea that the **majority** of Christians of his day believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Luther's view was later modified to what has become known as the doctrine of consubstantiation.
 - m. So from the position of the Roman Church, the dogma of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist has some support from the point of view of **Tradition**. However, this support cannot be said to be unequivocal.

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- n. Instead, an objective assessment of the belief held by the early church suggests that it is possible that many believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. But this is far from certain and it still does not prove transubstantiation.

III. The View of the Reformers

- a. The Reformation was an attempt to correct several issues and errors that had developed over the centuries in the Roman Church. Chief among them was their error of elevating Tradition to a level equal with Biblical revelation.
- b. Luther was the only one among the reformers who clung to the old Catholic doctrine, and he was diametrically opposed by Zwingli of Zürich, who was convinced that the Lord's supper was a symbolic ritual.
- c. Many others who had sided with the reformers, including the Arminians, Mennonites, and Anglicans also adopted Eucharistic views that did not differ substantially from that of Zwingli.
- d. In the meantime, at Geneva, Calvin was seeking to bring about a compromise between the views of the Lutheran literal and the Zwinglian figurative interpretations of the presence of Christ.
- e. Calvin did this by suggesting that instead of the substantial presence in one case or the merely symbolical in the other, that the alternative was possible by calling the Lord's presence a "dynamic" presence.
- f. This consisted essentially in the idea, that at the moment of reception, the efficacy of Christ's body and blood is communicated from heaven to the souls of the predestined communicants and spiritually nourishes them.
- g. In Lutheran circles it was not until the Formula of Concord in 1577 that the "Calvinistic" ideas were finally rejected from the body of Lutheran doctrine.
- h. The Council of Trent met these widely divergent views of the reformers with the dogmatic definition that has remained unchanged, to wit: that the God-man is "truly, really, and substantially" present under the appearances of the bread and wine.

IV. The Three-Fold Trap

- a. While Catholic theologians may disagree with this characterization, the first problem encountered by the Roman position lies in the dogma which insists that Tradition is in itself, like Scripture, an authentic form of revelation.
- b. What this means is that if any essential item of doctrine is taught or believed by the early church fathers it is to be considered de facto revelation.
- c. Since Roman Catholic theologians are convinced that the early church fathers believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist this has become an acknowledged Tradition essential to the faith.
- d. This position taken by the church ignores the danger specifically identified by Jesus with regard to man-made traditions which shape religious practice. *Matt 15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? KJV*
- e. It is a clear teaching of Scripture that mere mortal men often err in their understanding of the things of God; some intentionally pervert what God has said for their own purposes and thereby foolishly depart from the way of God. *Mark 7:13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. KJV*
- f. Secondly, it appears that the Roman Catholic exegesis of the passages dealing with the Lord's Supper was shaped by the doctrine of transubstantiation rather than the doctrine being shaped by the plain meaning of Scripture.
- g. In the place of offering a simple prayer of Thanksgiving to the Father, Roman theologians have inserted the inference that Christ miraculously transformed the bread in his hand into his own body in front of his disciples. *Matt 26:26 and as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. KJV*
- h. And thirdly, by insisting on the infallibility of the Pope in matters of doctrine, the Catholic Church has put itself in the untenable position of making it impossible to acknowledge error on the part of earlier Popes in matters of practice and belief.
- i. Since Popes and their councils have on several occasions ratified the doctrine of transubstantiation and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, it is impossible for the church to ever rectify its error.

V. Application

- a. Traditions often emerge in religious practice when concepts are vague and ill-defined. They become so deeply ingrained that we do not even recognize that they are traditions as opposed to explicit Biblical revelation.
- b. What traditions have you adopted as your own practice and belief which shape your Christian life?
- c. To what extent are you confident that the religious traditions you hold to are actually consistent with Biblical revelation?

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A young newly-wed man asked his young bride to prepare him one of his favorite Sunday meals, and coincidentally, one of her best recipes, a pot roast.

Dutifully, the young wife, wanting to please her spouse, went out and bought a generous portion of beef and all the assorted potatoes and vegetables that would surely delight any man's palate.

The next Sunday arrived and the wife busied herself with the detailed preparation of her husband's favorite meal while he sat observing her every loving move. When she carefully cut off the ends of both sides of the roast and discarded the trimmings, he asked her why she had done that.

Without so much as a thought, she replied, "oh, that's the way my mother taught me to do it."

Baffled and curious the husband pressed for more complete information from his wife, "But why did you trim the ends off? Does that add something to the flavor in the cooking?"

I don't know why but that is the way my mother always did it. Now, I am curious let's call my mom and ask her.

The husband dialed up his mother-in law and put the phone on speaker. When her mom's voice came over the speaker phone, the now curious daughter asked her the same question "Why do we trim the ends off the pot roast before putting it in the oven?"

Mom's answer was the same as the young wife's: That is the way my mother taught me.

Yes, replied the daughter we have both learned well the important lessons which produce a great pot roast but what purpose is served by lopping off the ends of the roast?

"I don't know said her mom, why don't you call grandma, I'm sure she can tell you.

Now like a hunting dog on the scent of a game-bird, the husband and wife dialed up grandma for an explanation of the practice. When they explained their curiosity as to why she cut off the ends of the pot roast before sticking it in the roasting pan and then in the oven, her response stunned them.

She just laughed. After her laughing subsided and she was able to respond she said The reason I cut off the ends was because we were poor and we never had a roasting pan that was big enough to roast that big old piece of meat so I cut off the ends so I could get it in the only pan I had.