

## Is Catholic Tradition in the Bible?

Kerry Duke

Catholics believe some things that are not in the Bible. For example, the Catholic Church teaches that Mary, the mother of Jesus, remained a virgin all her life. Roman Catholics admit that the Bible does not say this. At the same time they agree that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

This puzzles and frustrates non-Catholics who believe the Bible is the sole standard in Christianity. We ask, "If it's not in the Bible, then how can you believe it like it's the Word of God?" To those who believe the Bible is the authority in Christianity, teaching something outside the Bible as if it's the Word of God is a serious matter. And yet, we are even more confused because this doesn't bother Catholics when you bring it to their attention. Why? It's because Catholics believe there is another source of the Word of God. They call it sacred Tradition or just Tradition. And, they don't say this is human tradition. They claim this teaching is given by the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures. According to Catholicism, the Bible is *some* of the Word of God, but not all of it. The other part is Sacred Tradition. So Protestants and other non-Catholics talk about the Bible. Catholics talk about the Bible and Tradition. So what do they mean by this word, and how do they try to prove it?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a statement of Catholic beliefs. It says this about what they call Tradition: "In keeping with the Lord's command, the gospel was handed on in two ways: *orally* 'by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received...*in writing* 'by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.'"

The Catechism continues: "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 and all that she believes."

The *Catechism* goes on to say that there are "two distinct modes" of the transmission of the Gospel down to our time. One is Sacred Scripture which is "the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit." And the other is holy Tradition which "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." These "successors" of the apostles, according to Catholics, are the bishops working with the Pope in what is called the Magisterium.

Let's continue. The *Catechism* says that, as a result, the 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." That is why Catholics can have such a cavalier attitude when their beliefs are not in the Bible. They don't believe that Bible authority is always necessary because they think they have revelation from God which is not in the Bible!

Why do they believe this? How do they attempt to prove it? Ironically, they often go to

the Bible!

Here are some of the verses they say prove the existence of oral law or tradition in the NT.

First, Catholics point to verses that quote what inspired or uninspired men had said, or believed, but there is no other record in the Bible of these statements. Yet, they are quoted on the same level as Scripture. For time's sake, we will limit these examples to the NT.

One case is Matthew 2:23. "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'" Catholics tell us that these words "He shall be called a Nazarene," are nowhere in the OT Scriptures. Therefore, they insist, this must be an oral tradition that was passed down from the prophets.

But there is more to this verse. Nazareth was in Galilee. The people in Galilee did not have a good reputation among other Jews, especially Jews who lived south of Galilee, and even more especially in Jerusalem. Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had little or no respect for people from Galilee. When Nicodemus admonished the Pharisees to be just toward Jesus, they answered, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee" (John 7:52). Even the common Jews had a bad view of Galileans, especially those from Nazareth. When Philip told Nathanael about Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). We even see this attitude years later when Paul was accused of being the "ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5). Jesus grew up in Nazareth. He was a Galilean. People judged Him because of where he was from.

The words "He shall be called a Nazarene" are probably a summation of what the OT prophets said about Jesus, not a direct, word-for-word quotation. Isaiah said, "He is despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53:3). Some of that rejection was due to his being from Nazareth. The Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messiah would be looked down upon and mistreated. Psalm 22, Psalm 69:4, and other passages show this. "He shall be called a Nazarene" is the Holy Spirit's way of summarizing this general truth. It is a paraphrase, a condensed statement of what the prophets said on this point; and, it was inspired by the Spirit who guided Matthew to write.

There are other passages that are more relevant to the Catholic view, however. Some verses refer to something that was said in OT or NT times that was not recorded in Scripture:

- In Acts 20:35 Paul said to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Where are these words in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? They are not in these books. It is possible that Paul, by inspiration of the Spirit, is summarizing Jesus' teaching on giving. It may be like the language we saw in Matthew 2:23 ("He shall be called a Nazarene"). This would mean that the words attributed to Jesus in Acts 20:35 are a general, indirect reference to what He taught on the subject, not to any one statement He made. But it is also possible that Jesus said these exact words and that this is an example of the Spirit inspiring Paul to record Jesus' statement for the first time in the Scriptures.
- Another case is II Timothy 3:8, where Paul said that "Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses." There is an ancient Jewish tradition that says these men were Pharaoh's magicians when Moses came to Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. But the names of these men are not in the Bible. How did Paul know their names? Catholics say there must have been a divinely preserved body of oral traditions equal in authority to the Holy Scriptures and that this is an example. But that does not follow. The Jews may have passed down the names of these men by tradition just as they passed down other matters of history. There are references in the New

Testament which show that the Jews of that time had knowledge of history that we do not have today. This is why the Samaritan woman knew about Jacob's well (John 4:6, 12). It is why Peter could say that David's tomb "is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). These locations were common knowledge. The same may have been true of the names of these magicians of Pharaoh. Or, it could simply be that the Holy Spirit revealed their names to Paul and inspired him to write them. Why do Catholics refuse even to admit this possibility? Why do they automatically assume that these names were part of some sacred body of oral tradition? The answer is that they are desperate to prove a doctrine that has no proof—biblical or otherwise.

- There are several examples in the book of Jude. One is Michael the archangel disputing with the devil about the body of Moses in v. 9: "Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" A similar reference is found in the *Book of the Assumption of Moses*. But not even Catholics accept this writing as inspired. So why would they use this as an example? If they don't recognize this apocryphal book as Scripture, then it is just secular history at best and mythology in some parts at its worst. But where did the writer of the *Book of the Assumption of Moses* get his information? Catholics again assume that a body of traditions guarded by a magisterium in the Old Testament was Jude's source of information. This account of the dispute between Michael and the devil is true or the Holy Spirit would not have inspired Jude to write it. But, again, Jude may have known this because of common historical information not based on some imaginary magisterium, or, simply because the Spirit revealed it to him. The fact that an apocryphal writing overlaps with Scripture in some point does not prove that they are both revelations from God. Another example is the prophecy of Enoch in vv. 14-15. "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." The words of Jude are very close to the *Book of Enoch*. But Catholics also say that book is not canonical, that is, not a part of what they consider inspired Scriptures. The *Book of Enoch* is also filled with all kinds of fantastic myths and legends.

There are other examples, but these will suffice. We have already said that prophets, and apostles, and the Lord Himself said many things that are not recorded in Scripture. But *how can we know* what they said? The Catholic Church wants us to believe that there was a magisterium from the beginning in the OT and into the NT and down to our time that can tell us what these unrecorded teachings are. QUESTION: Why should we believe the Catholic Church on this matter any more than we believe God gave Joseph Smith golden plates that unlocked secrets of the past and future? What proof do Catholics give that the Magisterium is guided by the Spirit? NONE! They misuse these Scriptures. They quote the church Fathers. But they never give the kind of proof the apostles of Christ gave — "signs of an apostle" (II Cor. 12:12). They just want us to accept this claim on blind faith.

NT writers and speakers sometimes quoted non-inspired men. Paul quoted Cleanthes and other Greek poets in Acts 17:28. He cited Epimenides in Titus 1:12. These are not cited as sources of authority but as historical references. Even if Jude quoted from non-inspired sources, that would not mean those sources were in any way authoritative. It would only mean they sometimes spoke the truth. But there is no proof that Jude was quoting these books at all.

The main difference between the Catholic teaching on this point and biblical teaching is this: the Holy Spirit, speaking through inspired men, identified these unrecorded statements even of prophets and the Lord, and inspired the writing of the quotations of these statements. The Holy Spirit could as easily quote what Enoch said without a written record of it as He could quote what Jesus said. The fact that these apocryphal books happened to contain some fragments of truth that coincided with the facts of history is irrelevant. The bottom line is that the Holy Spirit is the author of the book of Jude. And, the Bible has abundant proof within itself that it is inspired. The fulfillment of prophecy is just one of those evidences. The Roman Catholic Magisterium has no evidence that it speaks from God at all.

So while Catholics are right in saying that NT writers sometimes refer to statements that are true that were not previously recorded in the Bible, they are completely wrong in asserting that some kind of Magisterium was necessary to validate their truth. That is pure assumption, and it is furthermore false.

Catholics also tell us that oral tradition is directly mentioned in the NT. One of these passages is I Corinthians 11. In verse 2 he said, "Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you..." But what traditions? Paul explains, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" Paul wrote in the same way about the resurrection of Christ in I Corinthians 15:3-4. The Lord's Supper and the doctrine of the resurrection, like many other truths, had been passed down as inspired teaching.

The fact that Paul used the word "traditions" in I Corinthians 11:2 gives nothing to support the Catholic view. This is from the Greek word *paradosis*, which means literally *giving over* something. What is being transferred from one person to another or from one generation to another depends on the context.

It can refer to Jewish traditions (as we've already seen). When Jesus argued with the Pharisees about washing hands before eating, the Bible uses this word in Matthew 15:2,6 and in Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9 and 13. This rabbinical tradition was an established rule in Jewish belief, but it was wrong. The Pharisees said this tradition was binding. Jesus said it was nothing but a doctrine of men, not God.

But, the word "tradition" can also mean *legitimate* requirements of the law of Moses which were once binding but no longer apply. In Colossians 2:8, Paul warned Christians not to be led away with "the tradition of men." What were these traditions? Verse 16 tells us: "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or new moon or sabbaths." These were binding under the law of Moses, but, as Paul said in verse 14, that law had been nailed on the cross. But, Judaizing teachers in the church were trying to bind these observances on Gentile Christians. The interesting thing about this passage is that the word tradition refers to written teaching in the OT Scriptures, not to some mysterious, unbiblical, unverified oral saying.

Paul also mentioned that he had been "zealous for the traditions of my fathers" in Galatians 1:14, which seems to be a general reference to his beliefs as a Pharisee, whether those traditions were written in the Scriptures or spoken by the rabbis.

We also see this word in II Thessalonians, but before we look at those examples, let's go back to I Corinthians 11. Paul used the Lord's Supper as an example of a right tradition. He

quotes Jesus' words that the Lord spoke when He established the communion or the Lord's Supper the night before He was crucified. Obviously, the teaching of the Lord's Supper was spoken and taught for years before it was written in Scripture. So it was and is tradition; it was both an oral and written tradition in the first century. But the important point is that, what the apostles *taught in word* about the Lord's Supper is the same as what they *wrote in Scripture* about it!

Now let's see how this word is used in the book of II Thessalonians. Paul said, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (II Thess. 2:15). Then in chapter three he wrote, "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (II Thess. 3:6). These are favorite verses of Catholics on the subject of tradition. But what do these verses actually mean?

The word "tradition" or "traditions" is the same word we find in I Corinthians 11:2—*paradosis*—and, it has the same meaning. It refers to the teachings of the gospel. It is no different from the word "doctrine" in Romans 16:17. II Thessalonians 2:15 mentions "the traditions which you were taught"; Romans 16:17 mentions "the doctrine which you learned." It is also the same as the word *gospel*. In I Corinthians 15:1 Paul wrote about "the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received"; in II Thessalonians 3:6 he wrote about "the *tradition* which he received from us." There is nothing secret or mysterious about this tradition. It is simply the teaching we read in the NT. What Catholics *must show* and *cannot prove* is that the *oral* teaching of these doctrines was different from *written* teaching in Scripture in its content and application.

Catholics attempt to make a point about the wording in II Thessalonians 2:15. Paul said to keep these traditions, whether they were taught "by word or our epistle." Catholic defenders say this proves that there was oral law *and* written law. Again, what they falsely claim is that the oral or spoken doctrine was different from the written form of that doctrine in Scripture. What we are saying is that whether the apostles preached in public, taught individuals in private, or wrote in letters to churches, their inspired teaching was the same! Teaching by word of mouth and teaching by inspired writing were just two different ways of giving the same information. The methods or avenues of communication were different, but the content of the teaching was the same.

The Bible stresses the uniformity of this teaching. In I Corinthians 4:17, Paul wrote, "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." In his instructions about marriage in I Corinthians 7:17, he said, "But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches." In I Corinthians 16:1 he wrote, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."

Then in II Timothy 2:2 Paul told Timothy, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." The ironic part about this passage is that Catholics try to use this verse to prove Sacred Tradition! But they ignore what Paul said! There are four generations, so to speak, in this teaching process: (1) Paul, who was the original teacher; (2) Timothy, whom Paul taught; (3) faithful men that Timothy was to teach; and (4) others that would be taught by these men. Notice again what Paul

actually said: “And **the things that you have heard** from me among many witnesses, commit **these** to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Timothy was to teach exactly what Paul taught him, not something different. Faithful men were to do the same. The things Paul taught were not to be changed by successive generations under the guise of some “doctrine of development.” Paul said each generation is to teach what HE TAUGHT! Do Catholics do this? Let’s see. Paul told Timothy (and Titus) that a bishop must be the husband of one wife (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7). Yet the Catholic Church says that a bishop must NOT be married! Paul taught that the office of elder and bishop is the same (Titus 1:5). Yet the Catholic Church says they are not! Paul warned Timothy about those who would forbid others to marry (I Tim. 4:3), and yet this is exactly what the Catholic Church tells its clergy! It is amazing that Catholics will refer to II Timothy 2:2 when they have no intention of teaching what Paul said on these matters!

Again, what Catholics cannot prove is that the Holy Spirit revealed additional and *needed* truth that is not recorded in the Bible. And how do they attempt to prove that this so-called body of divine truth exists? By selectively quoting uninspired sources and by appealing to their own leaders!

But let’s look at a parallel to II Thessalonians 2:15, since this is a favorite Catholic verse on this subject. Notice the wording earlier in this same chapter in **II Thessalonians 2:2**. Paul warned these Christians “not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either **by spirit or by word or by letter**, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Paul was warning these Christians about false teachers concerning the day of the Lord. He said there were 3 ways they may have been approached:

1. “*By spirit*” - that is, by a certain false teacher. The word spirit is used in the same way in I John 4:1—“Beloved, do not believe every *spirit*, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many *false prophets* have gone out into the world.” So, a spirit here is a *false teacher*; it *specifically* means false prophets.

2. “*By word*” means word of mouth in general. People talked about the theories that false prophets taught. They circulated this false doctrine in their everyday conversations.

3. “*By letter*, as if from us” means that false teachers might have written letters to churches; they pretended that one of the apostles wrote these letters. This is why Paul ended this book of II Thessalonians by saying that his own handwritten signature was the mark of every genuine epistle of his (II Thess. 3:17).

The point is this: “by spirit”, “by word”, and “by letter” are simply 3 ways of saying the same thing. A *spirit* refers to a false teacher specifically; by *word* means talk among people in general; and by *letter* means in writing. But the message was the same. In the same way, the gospel was taught with the spoken word and the written word until the Bible books were completed, and the doctrine in both forms was the same; only the avenues differed. Catholics are guilty of twisting the Scriptures when they try to make the oral teaching of the apostles different in content from the writing of those apostles.

Catholics also claim that Jesus specifically recognized an authoritative body of men in Israel who had the power to declare the meaning of the OT. One passage they cite is Matthew 23:1-3: “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.’” The key words are the seat of Moses or Moses’ seat. The word seat is from *kathedras*. Catholics use the similar Latin expression when they speak of the pope speaking *ex cathedra*. Teachers often sat when they taught in Bible times, and the scribes and Pharisees were the main teachers of the people.

Catholics tell us that this proves that the Scribes and Pharisees had the same authority to bind and loose law as Moses. They further claim that the Catholic Magisterium serves in the same role today as authoritative judges of the Word of God. Furthermore, Catholics point to verse 3 as proof. Jesus told even his disciples to do “whatever they tell you.” They contend that this must refer to Jewish men who were necessary to declare the meaning and application of Scripture, and that the Catholic Magisterium is just as necessary today.

What does Jesus mean in these words? First, remember the larger context. When Jesus came to Jerusalem in Matthew 21, the Jesus leaders immediately confronted Him. Ironically, they asked who gave Him authority to teach and work among the people (Matt. 21:31). From that point the conflict escalated between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. After several confrontations in chapter 21 and 22, Jesus unloaded some of the most severe words of rebuke found anywhere in the Bible in Matthew 23. That is what Matthew 23 is: a scathing denunciation of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Then He immediately followed this rebuke by pronouncing the judgment of God upon these rebellious Jews in Matthew 24 — which is a prediction and promise of the destruction of Jerusalem which happened less than 40 years later.

This is the tone of Matthew 23. Everything in this chapter is a rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees; so why should we think He begins by recognizing them as truly authoritative teachers of the law of Moses? Jesus had already had encounters with them about their teaching: in Matthew 12 He refuted their teaching about the sabbath; in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 He condemned their Corban tradition (which is mentioned in detail in the Mishnah). So when He says to do “whatever they tell you” in verse 3, He cannot mean to do whatever they teach without exception. He can’t mean to observe their ridiculous rules about the Sabbath or Corban. Jesus must mean to do whatever they *rightly* tell you to do—whatever the Scriptures said to do. He must mean to observe the things they said that were consistent with the law of Moses. Notice: this means that ordinary Jews were able and obligated to judge and test what the scribes and Pharisees taught. How? By comparing what they said to the Scriptures that were read in the synagogues and taught even in the homes of Jews, according to Josephus!

So, what does He mean by the scribes and Pharisees sitting in the seat of Moses? The Lord is speaking with godly sarcasm, with a tone of irony. The scribes and Pharisees *acted like* they were on the same level as Moses. They were full of pride. That is the context. Read verses 5-12. This is the tone of Jesus’ words about these Jewish teachers. He nowhere said these Jews and their traditions had authority from God. The scribes and Pharisees *claimed* to have this authority; they *behaved* like they were the only ones who could give an authoritative interpretation of the law. When Jesus said they sit in the place of Moses, He was talking about how they acted, not who they were. These were the people Jesus spoke of in this same chapter when He said, “Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel” (v. 23). He also called them serpents and a brood of vipers in v. 33! It is straining and twisting Jesus’ words to say that the seat of Moses in verse 2 is literally a position of religious authority in Israel. It is even worse for Catholics to pervert this passage to say their Magisterium has the same kind of authority today!

Let’s expand on the point we made about verse 3. Jesus must mean to do whatever the scribes and Pharisees said that was *right*. This means the *common people* could know true teaching from false teaching! It also means the *common people* could know truth from error by themselves *without these Jewish* authorities and even *against* what those rabbis said. If the common Jews then could know - by their own reasoning ability — when the rabbis were wrong, then common Catholics and non-Catholics can know by their own natural ability to reason that

Catholic leaders are wrong in their teaching! — This means the priests, the bishops, and the Pope!

Did you know that the Catholic *Catechism* teaches that all men have the natural ability to know that the true God exists, that they can know this by the light of nature and human reason which God gave them? Now if anyone can know God exists, and he doesn't need the Catholic Magisterium to understand this, then why can't any person use that same reason God gave him to know the truth revealed in Scripture? And, if by reason we can know the true God from false gods, they why can't we use that same reason to know true teaching from false teaching in the light of Scriptures?

Here's a question for Catholics about the Magisterium: You say that members of the Magisterium may make mistakes in their *unofficial* capacity. Question: How do you *know* they have erred? Did the Magisterium tell you every time they made mistakes? Or is it possible that you can actually test what they say and make righteous judgments without them? Isn't this what is taught in I Thessalonians 5:21 and Acts 17:11?

Let's summarize the Roman Catholic doctrine of "Sacred Tradition." According to Catholicism, the idea of oral tradition involves these elements:

- *Jesus and the apostles spoke many words that are not recorded in the Bible.* This is true. In Acts 2:40, Peter told the crowd on Pentecost day, "And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.'" The Bible does not record these other words. We also read in II Thess. 2:5 that Paul told the brethren, "Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?" We have never said that the Bible contains every single word that inspired men said. However, we deny that these unrecorded statements of inspired men, even if they could be identified, would add anything that is needed for life and godliness beyond what the Scriptures already contain. Catholics are guilty of faulty reasoning on this point. They assume that words of inspired men outside the pages of Scripture must teach something that is different, not just in the form of the wording, but in the substance of its meaning. For instance, Paul may have said to Christians in an unrecorded inspired sermon, "Remember, as I have written, that a bishop must be the husband of one wife, not many." The wording would be different from I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:7, but the meaning, especially since the statement would have been inspired by the Spirit, would have been the same. But Paul would not have said in such a sermon that an elder (who is a bishop) must not have a wife. That would be a contradiction.
- *Catholics also tell us that these Traditions are the "Living Word" of God, and that they are just as authoritative as the written Word of God.* In fact, they claim that without Tradition, the Bible is a "dead letter." This is false. Read II Timothy 3:16-17. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Does that sound like the Bible is a "dead letter"? Paul told the church at Corinth, "The things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37). Paul's epistles didn't depend on some "Living Tradition" for their authority; they were authoritative in themselves because they were of God. It is arrogant folly to insist that the voice of God in Scripture does not carry authoritative meaning unless it has the verification and clarification of an outside body of teaching that has NO verification from God.



- *Catholics also say that those who heard the apostles knew better what the apostles taught than we do today, so we should listen to them.* According to Catholics, this is another reason why we should interpret the Bible in light of Tradition, not without it. But notice the shift: The apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit, but men who were not inspired, such as the early church fathers, were not. And we are supposed to take the words of these uninspired men as gospel?
- *Catholics claim that only the Catholic Magisterium can tell us what those traditions are, what they mean, and when they are binding.* In other words, in the end, all the Catholic talk about believing in three sources of authority—the Bible, tradition, and the Magisterium is just smoke. The real source of authority in the Catholic Church is the Magisterium (the Pope and the college of bishops).

The truth is that the Roman Catholic Church took this idea from the ancient Pharisees. This group of Jews arose before Jesus was born. They believed that God gave two laws to Moses at Mt. Sinai: (1) the written law, the “law of Moses” and (2) oral law—the power to make new laws or suspend old (written) laws according to the circumstances. Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived from 37-100 A.D., wrote about this. He said, “The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses...” We also read about these oral traditions in the NT in Matthew 15. “Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ‘Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread’”(Matthew 15:1-2). The main reason Jesus had so much conflict with the Pharisees is because He used the Scriptures as His authority, but the Pharisees used their traditions and, to a much lesser extent, the Scriptures as their authority.

The Mishnah is an important text in Judaism. It records the traditions of the Jews from about 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. It is a compilation of the sayings of rabbis on a wide range of questions about the law. One of these tractates, *Aboth*, the fathers, tells us the Jewish view of oral law. It started, they said, with Moses. “Moses received the law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue...” *Aboth*, 1.1. This refers to the “Oral Law” which was considered divine and authoritative.

The parallels to Catholic claims are striking. The reasoning was the same: the written law did not address new situations the Jews faced in each generation. Therefore, the oral law was necessary. This is exactly what Catholics say about the need for the Magisterium. Also, in Judaism, certain men were needed to interpret and apply the written and oral law. These were the “elders.” Their role and work were basically the same as the Catholic Magisterium.

So, ancient Jews believed in Scripture, tradition, and a body of rabbis or elders who interpreted and applied the written and oral law. Catholics teach that Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium are all necessary to know the will of God.

One of the problems with oral law is that it was believed to supersede and override the written law, the Scriptures. The Mishnah states that this was the way it should be. “Greater stringency applies to the words of the scribes than to the words of the Law” (the written law) (*Sanhedrin*, 11.3). Jesus condemned this practice. He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition...making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do” (Mark 7:9, 13).

The Catholic Church follows the same pattern as the Jews in claiming oral revelation in addition to written revelation. And, though they vehemently deny that their traditions are the same as those that Jesus condemned in the New Testament, the truth is *they are the same*. They are both manmade and false.

And, just as in the Judaism of the Pharisees, there is a body of men who claim to have the authority to decide what these Scriptures and Traditions mean and how and when they apply. That group of men is the Magisterium, the Pope and the college of Bishops. The difference between the Catholic Magisterium and the Jewish elders or rabbis is that the Catholic Church claims the Holy Spirit guides them in their decisions. The Magisterium is the final arbiter. “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone.”

In the end, Catholics have no evidence at all for their doctrine of sacred Tradition and Magisterium. The only thing they can do is:

- Misuse the Scriptures we have discussed (and others)
- Quote the church Fathers
- Quote each another

***Is this proof?***