

# The Destruction of the Christian Tradition (Part 1)

by

Rama P. Coomaraswamy

Source: *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 12, No. 1-2. (Winter-Spring, 1978). © World Wisdom, Inc.  
[www.studiesincomparativereligion.com](http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com)

*Rama P. Coomaraswamy first published The Destruction of the Christian Tradition in 1972. The series of essays that appeared in Studies was accomplished by choosing extended and representative portions of the book and then presenting them in five parts. A later edition of the same book, published by World Wisdom in 2006, was done under the guidance of Mr. Coomaraswamy and includes some revisions. Readers are encouraged to refer to this volume should they need a fuller context for some of the facts and observations in these articles.*

---

*Many American Catholics over 30 remember living in that history-heavy church as if living in a spiritual fortress—comforting at times, inhibiting and even terrifying at others. But it was a safe and ordered universe with eternal guarantees for those who lived by its rules. THAT FORTRESS HAS CRUMBLED.*

*TIME Magazine, May 1976.*

## Introduction

RECENT events within the Catholic Church have clearly resulted in great confusion, and if this ancient structure can no longer stand as a monolith in which each component part speaks “with one voice”, there is little doubt but that the various factions that claim Catholicity would agree in stating that something is seriously wrong. In America alone some ten thousand priests and thirty-five thousand nuns have abandoned their religious vocations. Annulments (referred to by some as “Catholic divorces”) are approximating the level of ten thousand a year. Weekly

Mass attendance has dropped to well below the fifty per cent level and monthly confession below the seventeen per cent mark. The priesthood is no longer attracting youth in its ranks and many seminaries have been closed. Conversions which once approached the level of almost two hundred thousand a year in the United States are now virtually at a standstill. According to the “Boystown Project” from the Catholic University of America “nearly seven million young people from Catholic backgrounds no longer identify themselves with the Church” (*National Catholic Register*, March 27th 1977). What is perhaps of even greater importance is that those who continue to call themselves “Catholic”, are by no means unanimous as to what this term means. As Archbishop Joseph L. Bernadin, president of the U.S. Bishop’s Conference has noted, “many consider themselves good Catholics, even though their beliefs and practices seem to conflict with the official teaching of the Church” (*Time*, May 24th 1976). This man speaks with both personal experience and authority, for he has also stated that it was his “belief that it was legitimate for theologians to speculate about the removal of doctrines that have already been defined, and to request the magisterium to remove such doctrines from the content of the Faith” (*The Wanderer*, St. Paul, Minn., June 17th 1976).

There are of course those who see in all this only signs of hope and “progress”. They claim that those who have left are “deadwood”, and that the Church is better off without them. They compare the Church to a grain of wheat that must die and be born again; that the *Angst* and chaos are essential if the Church is going to have “relevance” for modern man; that all that is happening is under the guidance of the “Holy Spirit” which desires to have the Church “adapt” herself to what is euphemistically called “the times.” Having previously claimed that the changes were necessary “to bring the masses back to the Church”, they now proclaim that they “are not interested in the numbers game”. Others view the situation in a quite different light. They see in all the changes not so much an “adaption” as a “capitulation”; they do not see the world becoming Christianized, but rather, a Church becoming secularized; they ‘do not see the “vines” as being pruned so much as their being uprooted and destroyed. They see the present situation as one that St. Paul predicted as preceding the coming of the Antichrist—“for that Day shall not come, except there come a falling away first” (2 *Thes.* 2:3). They liken the present situation to that described and prefigured in Maccabees:

In those days went there out of Israel wicked men, who persuaded many, saying, Let us go and make a covenant with the heathens that are round about us; for since we departed from them, we have had much sorrow. Then certain of the people were so forward herein, that they went to the King, who gave them licence to do after the ordinances of the heathen... (and *they*) made themselves uncircumcised, and forsook the holy covenant, and joined themselves to the heathen...

The great majority however remain bewildered and confused. Bred in an atmosphere which led them to accept with trust whatever came to them from their clergy, they tend to find excuses

for all they do not understand. Like Paul VI, some admit that “the smoke of Satan has entered into the Church”; they however refuse to look for the source of the fire.

Now, whatever the causes of the present situation may be, it is certain that prominent among them must be the changes that have occurred within the Church itself. These are clearly identified as those affecting the Liturgy (and especially the Mass), and the teachings (or as they are called, the “new directions”) that have resulted from the Second Vatican Council and the “Post-conciliar” Popes. The present study will attempt to discuss in some depth the nature of these changes and their implications.

Before doing so however, certain principles have to be understood that relate to the fundamental nature of the Church, her authority to “teach”, and the manner in which she does so. Those who still believe in the possibility that God in His Mercy gave us a Revelation, will have no difficulty in accepting these concepts. Others who cannot, or will not accept such a premise, must, if they wish to understand what is happening to this Church, at least concede the existence of this premise, for if there is no Revelation, there is no Church. With this in mind we shall initiate our text with a study of the nature of the Church’s teaching function. From there we will proceed to consider the sources of the Church’s teaching and the manner in which they are conveyed to the faithful. It will be in the light of these basic facts that we then proceed to examine Vatican II, with its “new directions”, and the liturgical changes that followed in rapid sequence.

It is hoped that as a result of this approach, even those who do not agree with the author’s stance will come to see what even Louis Bouyer has called “The Decomposition of Catholicism” is all about. As St. Gregory of Tours said, “Let no one who reads my words doubt but that I am a Catholic.” Despite the fact that under normal circumstances it would be redundant, I must qualify this further by stating that my stand is that of a “traditional Catholic”, (Is there any other kind?) and not that of a “liberal,” “modernist”, or “Post-conciliar” one. To paraphrase the Abbe Gueranger, the reader should clearly understand that I am in no way trying to propagate any personal views of my own. I am only attempting to state the traditional Church’s teaching as it has always been (*in saecula saeculorum*), and to show wherein the New Church has departed from this. If the reader does not happen to like what the Church has always taught, that is too bad. He will however, never understand the present situation unless he recognizes that, as Louis Evely has said:

The present crisis of the Church consists in its division between two irreconcilable groups: the ‘old ones’, who cannot or will not admit liturgical disciplinary and conceptual changes; and ‘the young ones’ who are repelled by the old ceremonies, beliefs, and practices. It is impossible to speak to both groups at once. Every priest today finds that his parish is really two parishes. What awakens faith, or at least stirs interest among young people, scandalizes their elders to the point that they lose what little faith they have left. And to lead older people from the

traditional faith to one which is more personal requires so much time, so much patience and so many precautions that the young people have not the patience to listen to, let alone read anything about it (they read so little of anything, for that matter).

*If the Church is to Survive.*<sup>1</sup>

The reader is further assured that in the exposition of the teachings of the traditional Church, wherever direct quotation is not given, the statements have been checked and approved by competent authority.

### **The Nature of the Church's Magisterium**

*The Church teaches and has always taught that there is a divine Tradition, that it is the sum of truths which, having been divinely revealed to the Apostles, has been handed down without error through the genuine magisterium of Pastors.*

*Tanqueray, Dogmatic Theology.*

When Christ first established His “visible” Church on earth, and sent out the Apostles—”Going therefore teach ye all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (*Matthew, xxviii: 19-20*)—He told them that they should “feed His sheep,” and do so “in His name.” He established then, a “teaching authority” that was to act on His behalf, and since that time this “Magisterium” or “teaching authority of the Church” has always taught that which He (and His Apostles) gave to them as a “deposit.” Defenders of the “Post-conciliar Church”<sup>2</sup> often state that this Magisterium of the Church, to which all Catholics owe assent, resides “in the Pope and Bishops in union with him.”<sup>3</sup> Now, such a statement must be understood correctly. Taken in isolation, and especially when used to defend the changes in doctrine and rites that this New Church has introduced, it is a classical example of *suppressio veri* and

---

<sup>1</sup> Louis Evelyn is one of the most popular authors in the Post-conciliar Church, and according to Father Greeley’s survey, one of the most frequently read authors by the modern clergy. A former priest, he is now laicized.

<sup>2</sup> The term “Post-conciliar” was utilized by Pope Paul VI’s representatives sent to remonstrate with Archbishop Lefebvre at Ecône to describe the “New” Church. Included in this category must be all those who accept the teaching of Vatican II and the man-originated rites of the *Novus Ordo Missae*. All such are “in obedience” to the New Church. Traditional Catholics, needless to say, will not accept anything in Vatican II that contradicts the traditional teaching of the Church, and refuse to accept the new “rites” which among other things dare to change the form of the Words of Consecration, the very words given us by Christ.

<sup>3</sup> As the French Bishops stated in their Congress at Lourdes in 1976, a meeting convened to discuss the terrible crisis facing the Church in France: “The unity of the Church comes before everything else and is guaranteed *only* (italics mine) by being at one with the Pope. To deny this is to exclude oneself from this Unity.” The documents of Vatican II use a similar phraseology.

*suggertio falsi*. The statement is true, but it must be understood that the Pope and the Bishops in union with him are themselves, in their function as *depositi custodies* (guardians of the “deposit” of the Faith as in 1 Tim. vi:20), bound not to depart from or to go against that which was delivered to the Church by Christ and the Apostles. To speak of “Revelation,” is to say that it is a “precious pearl” to be preserved.

The Church has always taught that an individual Pope can stray from sound doctrine in his personal and public life. Should this be the case prior to his election, the election is deemed invalid,<sup>4</sup> should he openly embrace doctrines that contradict this deposit after his election, he would become a public heretic, and as such he would no longer be Pope.<sup>5</sup> Such is only logical since, as soon as he would publicly embrace heresy, he would cease to be a member of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Paul IV, in his Apostolic Constitution *Cum ex Apostolatus Officio* (1559) states: “If ever it should happen that a reigning Roman Pontiff, having deviated from the faith, or having fallen into some heresy prior to his nomination as... Pope..., the election is null and void, even if all the Cardinals have unanimously consented to it. It cannot become valid... despite the crowning of the individual, despite the signs of office that surround him, despite the rendering of obeisance to him by all, and no matter how long the situation continues, no one can consider the election as valid in any way, nor can it confer, nor does it confer, any power to command in either the spiritual or temporal realms... All the words, all the actions, all their resolutions, and all that results from them, have no juridic power and absolutely no force of law. Such individuals... elected under such circumstances, are deprived of all dignity, position, honour, title, function and power from the very beginning...”

<sup>5</sup> As Cardinal Saint Bellarmine says, “*Papa hereticus est depositus.*” A Pope may of course be in error on a given point, but may retract when his error is pointed out. (He has theologians to consult with so as to avoid such mistakes). What is required is that he persist in an error after he knows it is heretical. This adds the sin of “obstinacy” to that of heresy. Several popes have been guilty of heresy, but most, thank God, have recanted prior to death. Pope Honorius I was condemned by the Third Council of Constantinople, the Sixth Ecumenical Council, in these terms: “After having taken account of the fact that they (his letters to Dergius and Sergius’s writings) are not in conformity with Apostolic dogma, and the definitions of the Holy Councils and all the Fathers worthy of approbation, and that, on the contrary, they uphold false and heretical doctrines, we reject them absolutely and denounce them as a grave threat to the salvation of souls... It is our judgment that Honorius, formerly Pope of Rome, has been cast out by God’s Holy Catholic Church and made anathema...” Pope St. Leo (d. 683) on whom fell the necessity of confirming such statements, wrote “We declare anathema those who instigated these new errors... (including) Honorius who was shown to be incapable of enlightening this Apostolic Church, by the doctrine of Apostolic Tradition, in that he allowed its immaculate faith to be blemished by a sacrilegious betrayal.”

Pope Paschal II (1099-1118), having been imprisoned by the Emperor Henry V, was forced to make concessions and promises that were impossible to reconcile with Catholic doctrine. When released, he failed to annul these statements (relating to investiture by temporal rulers), and St. Bruno, Guido of Burgundy, Archbishop of Vienne (the future Pope Callistus II), as well as St. Hugh of Grenoble (among others) stated to him “should you, in spite of our absolutely refusing to believe it possible, choose an ‘alternative path and refuse ratification of our decision (that you must retract), may God protect you, for were this to be the case, we should be forced to withdraw our allegiance from you.” The Pope retracted.

Church, and how could one who is not even a Catholic be the Pope, to say nothing of being Christ's representative and a "Pontifex" or "bridge" between this world and the next? The oft quoted maxim of St. Ambrose to the effect that "where Peter is, there is the Church" is valid only in so far as the Pope—or the principle of the Papacy—is itself rooted in orthodoxy or "pure faith and sound doctrine".<sup>6</sup> When it is not, then, as Cardinal Cajetan taught, "Neither is the Church in him, nor is he in the Church." Cornelius Lapide, S.J., puts it bluntly: were the Pope

to fall into public heresy, he would *ipso facto* cease to be Pope, yea, even to be a Christian believer.

Now, we do not give assent to the "teaching authority of the Church" because the Pope wishes it, but rather, we obey the throne of Peter because the *Magisterium* obliges us to do so. Our obedience to the Pope is strictly speaking a function of our obedience to tradition, for, as the theologians say, "The power of jurisdiction is subordinate to the magisterial power." And also: "For magisterial power, the faith is an absolute necessity."<sup>7</sup> Neither his "primacy" nor his "infallibility" can be absolutely proven from Scripture, and for him to depart from tradition is for him to deny the very basis of his authority and his function. We "obey" him because he speaks the "truth." He is not the source of this "truth", but rather its preserver. The source of both his authority and the truth is God.<sup>8</sup>

If we are to be in submission to the "teaching authority of the Church," it is essential, in these latter days, when so many of our shepherds are walking "after their own (pseudo-intellectual) lusts," when they have become "men speaking perverse things", "vain talkers and seducers... erring and driving into error..."<sup>9</sup> that we define this and related entities with clarity. Our failure to do so will only result in our giving assent to what is false, or else in our ascribing to "obedience" a greater value than to truth itself. The Church has never asked us to submit to

---

<sup>6</sup> "Pure faith and sound doctrine" is the *Catholic Encyclopaedia's* definition of the term "orthodoxy". The modernist attempt to paint orthodoxy as a sort of fanatical rigidity is to forget that there are certain things about which we are meant to be fanatically rigid. If we were not meant to be rigid about the truth, we would not have had any martyrs.

<sup>7</sup> Guérard des Lauriers, *Dimensions de la Foi*, Ed. Cerf, Paris, 1952.

<sup>8</sup> Vatican I teaches as *de fide* that "the Holy Spirit is not promised to the successors of Peter so that, through His revelation, they might bring new doctrines to light, but that, with His help, they may keep inviolate and—faithfully expound the revelation handed down through the Apostles, the deposit of Faith..." (*Denzinger* 1836).

<sup>9</sup> These phrases are Scriptural, and are cited from the introductory paragraphs of Pope Saint Pius X's Encyclical Pascandi against the modernists. The *didaskaloi* (as in the second letter of Paul to Timothy) have, to paraphrase St. Vincent of Lerins, "always been with us, are with us now, and always will be with us."

error, or to illegal and sinful commands in the name of obedience.<sup>10</sup> As St. Ignatius of Antioch stated in sub-Apostolic times:

Do not err, my brethren... if a man by false teaching corrupt the faith of God, for the sake of which Jesus Christ was crucified, such a one shall go in his foulness to the unquenchable fire, as shall also he who listens to him.

*Ep. ad Eph.*

## The Magisterium Defined

Donald Attwater defines the Magisterium as:

The Church's divinely appointed authority to teach the truths of religion, "Going therefore teach ye all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (*Matt.* xxviii: 19-20). This teaching, being Christ's, is infallible...<sup>11</sup>

This *Magisterium*, or "teaching authority of the Church", is termed "solemn" or "extraordinary" when it derives from the formal and authentic definitions of a General Council, or from the Pope him-self: that is to say, dogmatic definitions of Ecumenical Councils, or of the Pope's teaching *ex cathedra*.<sup>12</sup> Included under the category of solemn are "symbols or professions of faith", such as the Apostle's Creed, the Tridentine or Pianine Profession, and the Oath against Modernism

---

<sup>10</sup> As St. Francis de Sales said, "Obedience is a moral virtue which depends upon justice." (Faith, Hope and Charity are theological virtues, and therefore of a higher order). Even the Jesuit vow of obedience States "in all things, except what your conscience tells you would be sinful." As St. Thomas Aquinas says, "It sometimes happens that the commands issued by prelates are against God. Therefore, in all things are prelates not to be obeyed... Not in all things are prelates to be followed, but only in those things which accord with the rules which Christ has laid down." As St. Catherine of Siena wrote to Pope Gregory XI: "Alas Holy Father, there are times when obedience can lead directly to damnation." She proceeded to quote to him the Scriptural passage: "If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into a pit." (*Letters*)

<sup>11</sup> *Catholic Dictionary*, Macmillan: N.Y., 1952.

<sup>12</sup> It is only in his *ex cathedra* pronouncements that it is impossible for a genuine Pope to teach heresy. (To claim that a Pope cannot be a heretic is to state that he no longer has the use of his free will.) According to Cardinal Newman, a Pope speaks *ex cathedra* or infallibly "when he speaks, first, as the Universal Teacher; secondly, in the name and with the authority of the Apostles; thirdly, on a point of faith or morals; fourthly, with the purpose of binding every member of the Church to accept and believe his decision." Further, Cardinal Newman states, "another limitation is given... in the *Pastor aeternus*... the proposition defined will be without any claim to be considered binding on the belief of Catholics unless it is referable to the Apostolic depositum, through the channel of either Scripture or Tradition..." (*Letter to His Grace, the Duke of Norfolk*). It is pertinent that Paul VI himself specifically excluded his *Novus Ordo* and the documents of Vatican II from the realm of *ex cathedra* teaching.

required by Pius X since 1910 (and for obvious reasons no longer required by the New Church). Finally, included under theological censures are those definitions that go contrary to heretical propositions (Tanquerey, *Manual of Dogmatic Theology*).

The “ordinary” or “universal” Magisterium is that which is carried on daily through the continuous preaching of the Church and refers to the universal practices of the Church connected with faith and morals as is exercised in the “unanimous consent of the Fathers, the decisions of the Roman Congregations concerning faith and morals, in the consensus of the faithful, in the universal custom or practice associated with dogma (and above all in the Roman liturgy or traditional Mass), and in the various historical documents in which the faith is declared.” It is termed “Pontifical” if the source is the Pope, and “universal” if it derives from the Bishops (in union with him). It is termed “living,” not because it “evolves” in the manner that modern man erroneously ascribes to all living things, but because it exists today as a viable entity within what the theologians call the “visible” Church. Its sources, from which it by definition must not defect, are Scripture and Tradition. By these the Pope and the Bishops in union with him, are bound. As a standard theological text puts it:

The Pope is only the interpreter of this truth already revealed. He explains, he defines, but he makes no innovation.<sup>13</sup>

What is involved in our giving assent to the teaching authority of the Church is a recognition of the fact that, as Father Hecker says, “The Church is God acting through a visible organization directly on man, and through man, on society.”<sup>14</sup> It is a recognition of the fact that Christ is God, that He gave us a Revelation, and that the Church preserves it intact. It is a conscious submission—not blind, but with full awareness—to God Himself acting through the organization he established on earth. The Catholic Church is not a congregation of persons agreeing together; it is not a School of Philosophy; it is not a Mutual Improvement Society; it is not even *a* church among other churches. It is *the* Church Universal—the Living Voice of God, in Christ’s revelation unto all people, through all time. It is for this reason, and this only, that it teaches as the Master taught—not as the Scribes and Pharisees, but as one “having authority”. It is for this reason that it proposes for our belief not only those things that are *de fide*—that is to say, directly revealed by God and so defined by the Church, but also those things that logically result from what God has revealed. It is in God’s name that the Church makes the awful demand she does upon the faith of man—a demand that cannot be merely waived aside as being incompatible with

---

<sup>13</sup> Exposition of Christian Doctrine—Course of Instruction written by a seminary professor of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. McVey: Phil., 1898.

<sup>14</sup> Rev. I. T. Hecker, *The Church and the Age*, Catholic World: N.Y., 1887.



the so-called rights of private judgment—unless one is prepared on the same principle to deny that there can be any authoritative revelation of God’s truth at all.<sup>15</sup>

In the last analysis man must, in religious matters, rely upon some authority. Either this derives from himself and can be characterized as “private judgment”, or else it is to be found outside of him, and then is dependent upon some objective “teaching authority”.<sup>16</sup> Clearly the basis for the prevailing religious views of the modern world—be they Protestant or “modernist-Catholic”—is private judgment, which is to say that paramount authority resides in that which at any given moment commends itself to the individual or group most strongly.<sup>17</sup> Now, such a principle by its very nature represents a revolt against the Church, for it proclaims that what the Church teaches (and has always taught) is not true, simply because it is not what the private individual or group would teach and hold to be true. Private judgment always starts out by accepting some of the teachings of the established faith and rejecting others—it is only a matter of time before the “New” faith suffers in turn from the same principle. (As St. Thomas Aquinas said, “the way of a heretic is to restrict belief in certain aspects of Christ’s doctrine selected and fashioned at pleasure” (*Summa* II-II, 1.a.1.). Soon sects give rise to other sects, and before long all truth and falsehood in religion becomes a matter of private opinion, and one doctrine becomes as good as another. Again, it is only a matter of time before all doctrinal issues become irrelevant (who can ever agree about them anyway?). What follows is that morality loses its objective nature, and being based on “social contract”, can alter in accordance with social needs.<sup>18</sup> Man,

---

<sup>15</sup> The statements of John-Paul I to the effect that the Catholic Church has no special rights (*Time*, Sept., 4 1978) become absurd in the face of the above facts. Consider these words taken from Scripture: “Unless he hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican.” What kind of “ambassador of Christ” is this who would concede and barter away “rights” that are not even his? If the Church’s rights are to be equated with those of other churches and “ecclesiastical communities”, then by what authority does the Church command our obedience? His statement is nothing but an affirmation of the Protestant principle of “private judgment” in religious matters.

<sup>16</sup> It should perhaps be pointed out that atheists and those who deny there is any such thing as a “religious issue” are also exercising private judgment, or else blindly submitting to the private judgment of others—or to that of the state. It is no worse to follow’ the blind than to be blind oneself.

<sup>17</sup> “Groups,” or “ecclesiastical communities” may agree on broad issues, but never in detailed doctrine. The Protestant denominations early found beliefs—the latter of which their followers were free to “pick and choose”. It is this same basic idea that underlies the modern “ecumenical” movements. As long as we are “baptized in Christ”, we are free to believe anything we want.

<sup>18</sup> Consider the following statement given out in June 1978 by the Catholic Theological Society of America: Any form of sexual intercourse, including both homosexuality and adultery, could be considered acceptable, so long as it is “self-liberating, other-enriching, honest, faithful, socially responsible, life-serving and joyous”. Far closer to the Catholic position is the statement of the Rev. Jesse Jackson, a black activist leader in Chicago: “One has to have an ethical base for a society. Where the prime force is impulse, there is the death of ethics. America used to have ethical laws based on Jerusalem.

not God, becomes the criteria for truth, and the centre of the universe; doing “good” to others becomes his highest aspiration, and “progress” his social goal. The idea of “sin” is limited to what “hurts” our neighbour or the “state”. What need is there for God, for truth, for doctrines, for authority, for the Church and for all the “claptrap” of the ages that has held man back from reaching his worldly “destiny”. All that is asked of modern man is that he be “sincere”, and that he not disturb his neighbour excessively. If he has any religious sense at all, it is his “private affair”. Man’s “dignity”, which traditionally was due to the fact that he was “made in God’s image”, now is said to derive from his independence of God. In reality, man has made himself his own God (as Paul VI said, “honour to man... king of earth,... and today, prince of heaven!”); he lives by his own morality and only accepts the truths that he himself has established. (It used to be said of the Protestants that “every man was his own Pope”.) A satanic inversion has occurred and man cries out as once did the Angel of Light—“I will not serve” any master other than myself.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, all this occurs in stages. What is remarkable is the similarity of pattern seen in all “reformation movements”. What starts out as the denial of one or two revealed truths (or of truths derived from revelation), progressively ends up in the denial of them all.<sup>20</sup> Similar also are the various subterfuges by which this is achieved. Almost all reformers declare that they are “inspired by the Holy Spirit” (Who can, after all, argue with the Holy Spirit?), and end up by ignoring or denying His existence. All claim to be returning to “primitive Christianity”, which is nothing other than Christianity as they think it should have been all along. All, or almost all, claim that they are adapting the Faith to the “needs” of modern man, which is nothing other than to appeal to the pride and arrogance of their followers. All quote Scripture, but selectively and out of context, and never those parts that disagree with their innovative ideas—thus it follows that they reject the traditional interpretation given to the sacred writings by the Church Fathers

---

Now they are based on Sodom and Gomorrah, and civilizations rooted on Sodom and Gomorrah are destined to collapse.”

<sup>19</sup> Doctrinal truths revealed by God are attacked in the name of “reason”, and the responsibilities that free will imposes on us are obliterated in the name of “grace”. (What else is “justification by faith,” but the denial of the need for “good works”, those acts we “willfully” perform. Surely grace will abandon us in proportion to our refusal to co-operate with it). Reason, once the “handmaid” of Revelation, having no “husband”, becomes subservient to our “feelings.” Those who have any “religious sense” left at all base it on their “feelings”—“welling up from the depth of the unconscious under the impulse of the heart and the inclination of a morally conditioned will” to use the jargon of the times. Feelings of course are easily manipulated, and when not under the control of reason, are simply “passions”. What results is that religion, no longer being “super-natural”, becomes “infra-rational”. Man is truly reduced to the level of a beast.

<sup>20</sup> “To refuse to believe in any one of them (the teachings of the Church) is equivalent to rejecting them all.” Pope Leo XIII, *Sapaentiae Christianae*.

and the Saints.<sup>21</sup> All mix truth with error, for error has no attractive power of its own. All attack the established rites, for knowing that the *lex orandi* (the manner of prayer) reflects the *lex credendi* (the manner of believing), once the latter is changed, the former becomes an embarrassment to them.<sup>22</sup> All use the traditional terms of religion: love, truth, justice and faith, but attach a different meaning to them. And what are all these subterfuges but means of introducing their *private* and *personal judgments* on religious matters into the public domain. Finally, none of the reformers fully agree with each other (except in their rejection of the “fullness” of the established faith), for error is “legion” and truth is one. As one mediaeval writer put it, “They are vultures that never meet together except to feast upon a corpse.”

The Church has of course always eschewed the use of “private judgment” in religious matters. Man’s “liberty” lay not in his freedom to decide for himself just what was true or false, but in his freedom to accept or reject the truth that Christ taught. It is a saying of common wisdom that no man should be his own advocate or physician, lest his emotions should interfere with his judgments. If we are careful to obtain authoritative advice and direction in the management of our physical and economic well-being, it becomes absurd for us to relegate the health of our soul to the whims of our emotions. As Socrates said, being deceived by ourselves is the most dreadful of all things, for when he who deceives never departs from us even for a moment, but is always present, is it not most awful? As soon as we make ourselves rather than God speaking through the Church, the criterion for truth, we end up by making man *qua* man the centre of the universe and all truth becomes both subjective and relative. This is why Pope Saint Pius X said: “We must use every means and bend every effort to bring about the total disappearance of that enormous and detestable wickedness so characteristic of our time—the substitution of man for God” (*E Supremi Apostolatus*).<sup>23</sup>

Those who see the futility of resolving religious issues on the basis of their personal and subjective opinions, and who seek objective and external sources for the Truth, must inevitably turn to the various “churches” for a solution to these problems. Of all the various “ecclesiastical communities” that hold out the possibility of finding objective truth, only one has consistently rejected “private judgment” as a source of truth. Only one proclaims that God Himself (through

---

<sup>21</sup> Satan is the past master at quoting Scripture out of context as is illustrated by Christ’s temptation in the desert.

<sup>22</sup> Paul VI’s statement to the effect that his *Novus Ordo Missae* “has imparted greater theological value to the liturgical texts so that the *lex orandi* conformed better with the *lex credendi*” is a frank admission that either the liturgical texts in use for hundreds of years by the Catholic Church did not possess the degree of theological value which was desirable, or that his New “mass” reflects a change in the *lex credendi*.

<sup>23</sup> There is of course an area in which “private judgment” can be legitimately used, namely, the application of principles to a given situation, or areas where the Church has never specifically spoken and where it allows for differences of opinion. It cannot however be used to abrogate the principles as such.

Christ and the Apostles) has revealed the Truth, and only one can demonstrate that it has retained this “deposit” intact from Apostolic times down to the present times.<sup>24</sup> This is of course, the “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”. *Oneness* or “unity” exists as a characteristic of this Church because its members “agree in one Faith,” all have “the same Sacrifice (rites),” and all are “united under one Head”.<sup>25</sup> It is not the agreement of the faithful with *any* faith the hierarchy may teach, or their use of *any* rite the hierarchy may advocate, but rather the agreement of both the laity and the hierarchy (who one hopes are also to be numbered among the faithful) with *the* faith and *the* rites that Christ gave us. The personal beliefs and the private rites that the hierarchy advocate, unless they be “orthodox” do not make up the “deposit,” but rather, it is the “deposit” which the hierarchy is in existence to preserve. The hierarchy exists because the “deposit” exists, and not the other way round.<sup>26</sup> As Cardinal Newman said:

The Church is founded on a doctrine—the Gospel of Truth; it is a means to an end. Perish the Church Catholic itself (though, blessed be the promise, this cannot be), yet let it perish *rather* than the Truth should fail. Purity of faith is more precious to the Christian than unity itself. If Rome has erred grievously in doctrine, then it is a duty to separate even from Rome.

*How to Accomplish It.*

---

<sup>24</sup> Whatever the disagreements that exist between the Orthodox Churches and traditional Rome may be, it should be quite clear that there would be full agreement between them with regard to the position we take in this book. The “Orthodox” Churches are precisely that—Orthodox. They accept the first Seven Ecumenical Councils and teach all the truths necessary for salvation. Their rites are Apostolic and unquestionably valid. It is pertinent that the Greek Orthodox Church in North America has seen fit to issue an encyclical warning the faithful against being involved in the Ecumenical movement of the Post-conciliar Roman Church which is called by them quite correctly “secularized Christianity”.

<sup>25</sup> No Protestant Church can date its origin prior to the time of the Reformation. True, they can point out earlier instances where “private judgment” has been proclaimed as the source of truth—after all, even in the Garden of Eden the serpent existed. On the basis of whose judgment did Judas act, if not on his own? The Protestants can claim to be returning to “pure” and “primitive” Christianity. From where did they learn of Christ if not in the documents that the Church preserved? Who, after all, preserved the Bible for the hundreds of years between the time it was written and Luther? The same questions can be put to the Post-conciliar Church with regard to their brand of Christianity.

<sup>26</sup> To refuse to obey a Pope who asks us to do what is against the Laws of God, is not so much to “attack” the Pope as to “defend” the Papacy. Such unfortunately, however, is not the attitude of the present post-conciliar hierarchy. For example, when the Most Rev. Paul Gregoire, Archbishop of Montreal, deprived Father Normondin of his parish because he insisted on offering the traditional Catholic Mass, he said: “My own conscience imposes serious obligations to obey my superior, the Pope. I prefer to be wrong with him rather than to be right against him.” Either the Archbishop does not know his theology, or he is not a Roman Catholic.

If we as Catholics owe assent to the “teaching Magisterium of the Church”, it is precisely because the Church is teaching that which was entrusted to it by its Master. (It also teaches as true those things which are virtually revealed, that is to say, derived from what is revealed by the use of reason; and things that are true because they are connected with revelation and witnessed to as such by the Church Fathers and the Saints.) Hence it logically follows that it is *de fide* that:

All those things are to be delivered with divine and Catholic faith, which are contained in the word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church, either by a *solemn* judgment, or by her *ordinary* and *universal magisterium*, proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed.

Vatican I, Session III.

### **The Nature of Revelation**

What then are the primary sources to which we as Catholics owe assent, and with which the Pope and his Bishops must themselves be in union? They are the sources of Revelation, which are, according to a *de fide* statement, Scripture and Tradition. “It would be true in a sense, to say that there is but one source of Revelation (apart from God Himself), namely, divine Tradition—understanding thereby the body of Revealed Truth handed down from the Apostles... Nevertheless, since a great and important part of that tradition was committed to writing and is contained in the inspired books of Holy Scripture, it is the custom of the Church to distinguish two sources of Revelation, Tradition and Scripture.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the fact that the books of the Old and New Testament are “inspired” at all, and the contents of the “canon” or list of books admitted as Scripture (as opposed to the Apocrypha) cannot be demonstrated from the Bible, and is entirely based on Tradition.<sup>28</sup> As St. Augustine said, “I should not believe the Gospel, unless I were impelled thereto by the authority of the Catholic Church.”<sup>29</sup> It is only just that such should be the case, for the Church existed long before the Scriptures were written (St. Matthew’s Gospel, the earliest, was written eight years after the death of Our Lord; the Apocalypse many years later), and as the Apostle John himself tells us, it was neither reasonable nor possible for every last word and action of Our Saviour to be committed to writing.<sup>30</sup> Cardinal Manning puts it well in saying:

---

<sup>27</sup> Canon George D. Smith, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, McMillan: N.Y., 1949.

<sup>28</sup> *Exposition of Christian Doctrine*, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> *Contra ep. fundament.*, c. 5: Protestants who claim that Scripture is the only source of the Christian revelation are put in the anomalous position of denying the very authority that gives Scripture its authenticity, namely Tradition and the “visible” Church which has “canonized” and preserved the sacred books intact. This occurred in the year 317.

<sup>30</sup> “But there are also many other things which Jesus did; which if they were written, every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written” (John, xxi:25).

We neither derive our religion from the Scriptures, nor does it depend upon them. Our faith was in the world before the New Testament was written.

The primacy of Tradition has been a constant teaching of the Church, and is indeed, as Tanquerey states, the “principal source of Revelation.”<sup>31</sup> He summarizes this teaching by saying:

Tradition is more extensive than Scripture, and embraces truths which are not at all contained in Scripture or are contained there only obscurely; also Tradition is more essential to the Church than is sacred Scripture, for revealed truth at first was handed down orally by the Apostles, it was always proclaimed orally, always and everywhere it is to be proclaimed...

Scripture is of course, one of the primary sources from which we can come to know the Christian tradition. As such it has always been greatly venerated by the Catholic Church. If the great hand-written and illuminated Bibles were in mediaeval times “chained” in the Churches, this is but similar to the practices today in any rare-book collection or library. If they were preserved in the Latin original, this was but to prevent the introduction of error into the established text. They were from the earliest days of the Church read in both the liturgical language and the vernacular—this we know from the history of St. Procarp who was martyred in the year 303, and whose function it was at Mass to translate the sacred text into the spoken tongue--a custom that prevails to this day wherever the traditional Mass is said. Nor is it true, as Luther and the Protestants claim, that the Church “kept the Bible from the laity”. For example, there were at least nine German editions of the Bible published prior to Luther’s birth and many more in Latin. The same was true in other countries.<sup>32</sup> What the Church was and is concerned about is that the translations be accurate lest any distortion of the original deposit of the faith should creep in. And indeed, how wise she is! The *New American Bible*, the English version of the Scriptures that the New Church advocates be used in all North American Churches (and which is fully acceptable to the Protestants and carries the “Papal blessing” of Paul VI) consistently translates the phrase *resurruxit* and *surrexit* as “Christ has been raised,” rather than the correct “Christ is risen.”<sup>33</sup> The distinction may seem minor, but Christ was not raised by

---

<sup>31</sup> It has been argued that the insistence on Tradition is a “post-Tridentine” phenomenon. Listen to the words of St. Epephanus (circa 370): “We must also call in the aid of Tradition, for it is possible to find everything in Scripture; for the holy Apostles delivered to us some things in writing and others by Tradition.” St. Basil similarly speaks of dogmas being found—”some in doctrinal writings, others handed down from the Apostles... both of which have the same religious force.”

<sup>32</sup> cf. Catalogue of Bibles in the Caxton Exhibition at South Kensington in England in 1877.

<sup>33</sup> Those interested in the problem of the false translations fostered on the faithful by the New Church are referred to Ronald D. Lambert’s “Experiment in Heresy”, *Triumph* (Wash., D.C.) March 1968, and Gary K. Potters “The Liturgy Club”, *Triumph*, May 1968. An excellent discussion by a non-Christian is to be found in “The Survival of English” by Ian Robinson, Camb. Univ. Press, Cambridge, England 1977.

another. “If Christ be not risen (being God, in and of Himself)... then is our faith in vain” (1 *Cor.* xv). Her other concern is that the obscure passages in Scripture be understood correctly—that is, after the manner of the Fathers, the Doctors and the Saints. How could she take such care to preserve the Scriptures intact and not also be concerned about their proper use? How else would we have a loving Mother act?<sup>34</sup>

But Scripture, while perhaps the most important, is by no means the only channel through which Tradition is preserved and passed on to us. Other organs of the Magisterium also subserve this function—above all the Liturgy (the traditional Mass, the Breviary, the Sacramental rites and traditional prayers), the Councils, the writings of the sub-Apostolic Fathers and the historical documents of the Church. It is the “traditions” of the Church which, just as much as Scripture, preserve for us the original “deposit”. Hence it follows that, as St. John of Damascus said, “he who believeth not according to the Tradition of the Catholic Church... is an unbeliever”, and as St. Augustine said, “it is madness to quit the traditions of the Church.” And how could these saints say otherwise when the Apostle himself instructs us:

Stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle... Hold the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and in love, which is in Christ Jesus...

### **Just What is Meant by the Word “Tradition”**

Etymologically tradition simply means “that which is transmitted” or “handed on”. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1908), “traditional truth was confided to the Church as a deposit which it would guard and carefully transmit as it had received it without adding to it or taking anything away...” As to the hierarchy, as Cardinal Franzelin put it in his work *De Divina Traditione et Scriptura*, “the Lord chose a body of men to whom he entrusted his Revelation. He sent them to preach this truth and he threatened punishment on those who would not listen to

---

<sup>34</sup> It was after the fifteenth century Lollard (early Reformation) cry in England—“An open Bible for all!”—meaning by an “open Bible”, the incorrect and mischievous translations being spread—that Arundel, the Archbishop of Canterbury at the Council of Oxford in 1406 stated that “no one on his own authority should translate into English any portion of Holy Scripture.” Anyone with even a superficial acquaintance of mediaeval sermons, knows how full of Scriptural quotations they were—many were indeed, nothing but the stringing together of one passage after another taken from this sacred source. “This fancy,” says St. Chrysostom, “that only monks should read the Scriptures, is a pest that corrupts all things; for the fact is that such reading is more necessary for you (the laity) than it is for them” (*In Matth. Hom. ii.*). The Church however taught: “Let the reader beware how he makes the Scripture bend to his sense, instead of making his sense bend to Scripture” (*Regula cujusdam Patris ap Luc. Hols. Cod. Reg.*). In passing, it is worthy of note that the English translation that Wycliffe used (d. 1384) was in fact a Catholic translation that existed prior to his movement. (This Bible is kept at the British Museum and the contention was proved by Cardinal Gasquet.)

them... entrusted with this mission, the Apostles and their appointed successors have taught all generations the revealed truth which comes from Christ.”

It should of course be abundantly clear that the Christian Revelation was complete with the death of the last Apostle. There is no such thing as “ongoing revelation”. The teaching of the Magisterium is quite clear on this issue:

The Revelation made to the Apostles by Christ and by the Holy Spirit whom He sent to teach them *all truth* was final, definitive. To that body of revealed truth nothing has been, or ever will, be added.

It should also be clear that this restriction on the hierarchy applies as much to the Pope as it does to any other member of the body of the faithful. As Cardinal Hergenrother states (in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*) “He is circumscribed by the consciousness of the necessity of making a righteous and beneficent use of the duties attached to his privileges... He is also circumscribed by the spirit and practice of the Church, by the respect due to General—Councils, and to the ancient statutes and customs.” Now this Revelation is given to us in Scripture and Tradition, and is preserved for us in the writings of the “Fathers” and the “traditions” of the Church. It is passed on to us through the various “organs” of the Magisterium, of which the Pope himself is but one. It behoves us now to consider in greater detail, the nature of “tradition”.

Almost all the theological texts initiate their discussion of this subject with the following *de fide* statement taken from the Council of Trent:

... our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, first promulgated with His own mouth, and then commanded to be preached by His Apostles to every creature, as the fountain of all both saving truth and moral discipline; and seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand; (the synod), following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety and reverence all the books of both the Old and the New Testament—seeing that one God is the author of both,—as also the said traditions, those appertaining to faith as well as to morals, as having been dictated either by Christ’s own word, of mouth or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession... If anyone... knowingly and deliberately condemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema.”

*Session IV.*

Despite the distortions that mistranslation and private interpretation leaves Scripture open to, and despite the fact that the various Protestant sects reject certain of the Biblical books of the



Catholic Canon (as Luther repudiated both the Epistle of St. James and the Book of Ester), the meaning of the term remains relatively clear.<sup>35</sup>

Such however is not true with the term “Tradition” which has been used in such a wide variety of contexts, and with reference to different aspects of the divine *depositum*. There are those who would limit its use to the divinely revealed dogmas not contained in Scripture, while others apply the term to cover the whole spectrum of Catholic teaching and practice. In order to clarify the issue theologians have defined Tradition as *dogmatic* or *disciplinary* from the point of view of its subject matter, and *divine* or *divine-Apostolic* from the point of view of its origin. It is *divine or divine-Apostolic* to distinguish it, on the one hand from *ecclesiastical traditions*, which are the precepts and customs long observed in the Church, and which, even if they might be revelatory, can only be traced back to post-Apostolic times, and on the other hand, from *human-Apostolic traditions* which trace their origin to the Apostles indeed, but not in their capacity as channels of Revelation.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> As St. Alphonsus Liguori, a doctor of the Church states, “Traditions are necessary that the Church may determine the true sense of the passages. of Scripture.” The “private” interpretation of Scripture is by no means a “new” or even a “reformation” problem as is shown by the words of St. Irenaeus (circa 175) who notes that “others however retain the Scriptures, but are so conceited by their false knowledge that they alter its true sense.” (*Adv. Her.* III, 12, 12).

The Church has traditionally taught that Scripture is to be understood in four ways. To quote Dante (*Convivio*), “The first is called the literal and is the one that extends no further than the letter as it stands; the second is called the allegorical, and is the one that hides itself under the mantel of these tales, and is a truth hidden under beauteous fiction... The third sense is called moral, and this is the one that lecturers should go intently noting throughout the scriptures for their own behoof and that of their disciples... The fourth sense is called the anagogical, that is to say ‘above the sense’; and this is when a scripture is spiritually expounded. All this is but a scholastic summary of the saying of the ancient Jewish fathers to the effect that “the Torah is like an anvil, when it is struck, a thousand sparks fly.”

Protestants and modern exegetes (with their stress on pseudo-scholarship (philological; historical and psychological interpretations) in essence restrict themselves to the “literal” sense of Scripture. They see the writings of the Fathers who were far more concerned with the other senses as “flights of fancy”, and “imaginative ramblings”. The youth of today in rejecting religion are often rejecting the absurdities that result from a strictly literal and “fundamentalist” approach of those who, to use the words of Augustine, understood Scripture only in its “carnal” sense.

In passing, as Belloc notes, these literalists refuse to take the words “This is my body” in any way other than non-literally.

<sup>36</sup> Tradition is further classified as *objective* when referring to dogmatic truths, and *active* by some in reference to the “customs, precepts, disciplines and practices”, and by still others when referring to the various organs of transmission such as the rites of the Church and the teaching Magisterium. It is called *constitutive* if it is established by the Apostle and *continuative* if of later origin. With regard to its relationship with Scripture, it is termed *inherent* (if what is handed on is clearly stated in Scripture),

Several points can now be made: First of all Tradition (with a capital T) as a source of Revelation refers to immutable things which cannot be rejected or changed. Second, such Traditions include both Truths and Disciplines which have as their source Christ and the Apostles. Third, it is extremely difficult if not impossible at this distance in time to distinguish between what is “sub-Apostolic” Tradition and what is truly divine-Apostolic, and between what is human-Apostolic from what is divine-Apostolic. Thus, for example, in the Canon of the traditional Mass, apart from the words of Consecration, we are by no means sure which parts are of divine-Apostolic origin, and which parts can be considered human-Apostolic or ecclesiastical tradition. It must be remembered that, as Cardinal Bellarmine states in his *De Verbo Dei*, Tradition is called “unwritten”, not because it was never written down, but because it was not written down by the first author. It may be reasonably assumed that the sub-Apostolic authors to whom “innovations” were anathema, codified many “customs, precepts, disciplines and practices” that were truly Apostolic in origin. Further, it must be stated that ecclesiastical traditions, while not carrying the same weight as Apostolic ones, certainly deserve our greatest veneration, and to reject them on the grounds that they are not “divine”, is as absurd as to reject the canons of the Ecumenical Councils because they did not derive from Christ Himself.<sup>37</sup> Hence it follows that as St. Peter Canisius states in his *Summa Doctrinae Christianae*: “It behoves us unanimously and inviolably to observe the ecclesiastical traditions, whether codified or simply retained by the customary practice of the Church.” All these points are summed up in the following, taken from a standard theological text:

There are many regulations which have been handed down with Apostolic authority, but not as revealed by God. They are merely Apostolic Traditions, in

---

*declarative* (only stated in an obscure manner in Scripture and needing the help of Tradition to be understood) and *constitutive* (if not in any way to be found in Scripture).

<sup>37</sup> The Fathers of the Council of Trent were quite specific that “truths and disciplines are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions” but failed to specify these in an exact manner. The following passage from Rev. J. Waterworth’s *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Burns Oates, 1848) is pertinent:

“These regulations having been completed, the private congregations proceeded to consider divine and apostolical traditions—such doctrines that is, and practices, as, taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, have not been recorded in the sacred writings, but have been transmitted in various ways from age to age. Numerous congregations, both particular and general were held on this subject. On the existence of such traditions all were agreed; but whilst some insisted that the received traditions should be distinctly specified, others were as urgent that they should be approved of in the most general manner possible, even to the exclusion of the distinctive term apostolical, for fear of seeming to repudiate such usages and rites as could not be traced to that source... In the general congregation of the 5th April, the Bishop of Chioggia raised a more intemperate opposition; regarding the traditions as laws, not as revelations; and pronouncing it impious to declare them as of equal authority with the written word. This sentiment had no approvers, but excited the indignation of the whole assembly...”

contra-distinction to divine-Apostolic Traditions. This distinction, though clear enough in itself, is not easy of application, except in matters strictly dogmatical or strictly moral. In other matters, such as ecclesiastical institutions and disciplines, there are various criteria to guide us; e.g. (1) the distinct testimony of the teaching Apostolate or of ecclesiastical documents that some institution is of Divine origin...; (2) the nature of the institution itself—for instance the essential parts of the sacraments... Where these criteria cannot be applied and the practice of the Church does not decide the point, it remains an open question whether a given institution is of Divine right and belongs to the Deposit of the Faith. In any case, we are bound to respect such traditions, and also those which are merely ecclesiastical. Thus in the Creed of Pius IV (*Creeds are part of the solemn magisterium—Ed.*) we say: “I most steadfastly admit and embrace Apostolic and Ecclesiastical Traditions and all other observances and institutions of the said Church... I also receive and admit the received and approved ceremonies of the Catholic Church used in the solemn administration of all the Sacraments.”<sup>38</sup>

Among the Traditions which are clearly of Apostolic origin are included “the inspiration of the books of the Old and the New Testament, the power of the sign of the cross, the determination of the precise number of the sacraments, the baptism of infants, the validity of baptism administered by heretics, the substitution of the Sunday for the Sabbath, the Assumption of the most Blessed Virgin, etc.”<sup>39</sup> One can add to this list the “form” and “matter” of the sacraments, especially that of the Holy Mass, and the establishment of the Episcopate as the legitimate descendants of the Apostles. It is this later act that carries with it the concept of tradition (with a small t), for the legitimate pastors of the early Church established the ecclesiastical traditions—the “precepts, customs, disciplines and practices”, not as men establishing human customs, but either as codifying those they had received or learnt from the Apostles, or as members of that one body fashioned by God Himself, and animated and directed by His Holy Spirit. “Hence their testimony is not the testimony of men, but the testimony of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>40</sup> As it states in the Epistle to Diognetus, Christians “have no earthly discovery transmitted to them, and are not careful to guard any mortal invention.”

One is hardly surprised to find the majority of Church Fathers failing to make a clear distinction between what is Apostolic (strictly speaking) and what is ecclesiastical in tradition. Cardinal Tixeront in his text on *The History of Dogma* states: “St. Leo uses the word Tradition in its primitive sense of teaching and custom transmitted by word of mouth or practice.” He states

---

<sup>38</sup> *A Manual of Catholic Theology*, based on Scheeban’s “Dogmatic” by Joseph Wilhelm and Thomas Scannell, Kegan Paul: London. 1909.

<sup>39</sup> *Exposition of Christian Doctrine*, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> *A Manual of Catholic Theology*, op. cit.

elsewhere in the same text that St. John Damescene, “like St. Basil... admits as a rule of faith, besides Scripture, certain unwritten traditions that have come down from the Apostles, and certain ecclesiastical customs that must be accepted as authoritative.” St. Jerome also conceives of tradition in a broad context: “The traditions and customs of the Church can make up for the silence of Scripture (on many points) as may be seen in many (of her) practices” (*Dialogus contra luciferanos*, viii). Such an understanding is also reflected in Father Barry’s *The Tradition of Scripture* (1911) where he states “Catholics assuredly mean by Tradition the whole system of faith and ordinances which they have received from the generations before them... so back to the Apostles of Christ.”

The Councils also reflect the mind of the Church on this issue. Thus Canon III of the Council of Carthage and Canon XXI of the Council of Gangra state that it is “insisted that the unwritten traditions shall have sway.” The Seventh Ecumenical Council states that “if anyone disregards any ecclesiastical tradition, written or unwritten, let him be anathema,” and “let everything that conflicts with ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, and that has been innovated and done contrary to the examples outlined by the saints and the venerable Fathers, or that shall hereafter at any time be done in such a fashion, be anathema.”<sup>41</sup> The Second Council of Nicaea also condemned “those, who dare, after the impious fashion of heretics, to deride the ecclesiastical traditions and to invent novelties of some kind.” Such also is the attitude of the saints and the popes. St. Peter Damian (a “doctor” of the Church) writes that “it is unlawful to alter the established customs of the Church... remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set.” St. John Chrysostom says, “Is it Tradition? (If so) ask nothing more.” As Pope Benedict XV said, repeating almost verbatim one who held the Apostolic seat a thousand years before (Pope Sylvester), “Do not innovate anything. Rest content with the Tradition.” Not one Church Father, not one saint or doctor of the Church, and not one Pope (prior to the present era) has ever decried or attempted to change the ecclesiastical traditions. All this is a far cry from the teaching of the New and Post-conciliar Church whose erstwhile leader, Paul VI tells us: “It is necessary to know how to welcome with humility and an interior freedom what is innovative; one must break with the habitual attachment to what we used to designate as the unchangeable tradition of the Church...” (*La Croix*, Sept. 4, 1970). Judas could not have put it better!

In order better to understand the relationship between *Divine Tradition* and *Ecclesiastical Tradition*, we may draw a parallel between what is termed *de fide definita* or *de fide catholica* (truths divinely revealed by Christ or the Apostles and declared by the Church to be such) and

---

<sup>41</sup> It is pertinent to note that “The Profession of Catholic Faith from Converts” required by the traditional Church states “I admit and embrace most firmly the apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions and all the other constitutions and prescriptions of the Church.” (*Collectio Ritus*, 1964). St. John Fisher taught that “Those apostolic traditions which are not recorded in Scriptures must none the less be observed. In addition to these traditions, the ‘customs received by the universal church must not be rejected by any Christian.” (*Life*, E. E. Reynolds).

what is termed *de fide ecclesiastica* or *de Proxima fidei* (revealed truths not as yet formally so defined by the Church). As Father Faber has said:

there are three kinds of faith, *human*, which rests on human authority, and as such is uncertain and obnoxious to error; *divine*, which rests on divine authority, and *ecclesiastical* faith, which rests on the authority of the Church defining anything with the assistance of the Holy Ghost, through which she is preserved from the possibility of error; and this faith is infallible with a participated and borrowed infallibility, inferior in degree to divine faith, but with a certitude raising it far above human faith. If therefore anything be shown to be *de fide ecclesiastica* it is not only entitled to our acceptance, but it even overrules all opposition, as a man, though not formally a heretic, would, to use, the common phrase, be rash, scandalous, and impious if he asserted the contrary.”<sup>42</sup>

Ecclesiastical traditions can of course be modified by appropriate authority, but “modification” is vastly different from the abrogations and changes that have of late been introduced into the “Post-conciliar” Church. The true Church and Faith are characterized as “living” and the vine that Christ established can always sprout forth new branches. It is not the newness of the leaf, but the “sap” that runs in its veins that maintains both spiritual health and traditional validity. The fact that the feast of Corpus Christi may have been established in the late Middle Ages (such was hardly a possibility in the time of Nero) changed nothing in the Revelation that Christ gave us. Our ways of showing respect and honour to the Sacred Species may be modified, but this in no way changes our traditional reverence for the Body of Christ. (Such an “introduction” is in no way to be compared to the distribution of the Eucharist by unconsecrated hands under modern circumstances, to the removal of tabernacles from altars and to the promulgation of rites that allow for a Protestant understanding of the Sacrifice. Such acts represent no “flowering forth” of the vine, but rather desecrations and clear cut breaks with tradition). Thus, customs can be introduced into the practice of the Church which are “traditional” such as the Feast of the Sacred Heart<sup>43</sup> or the Rosary.

---

<sup>42</sup> Listen to the words of St. Bruno: “With one evil will unanimously against Christ, they make a covenant that they may destroy his tabernacles. These are the transitory and fallible multitude of the Idumeans, the earthly and blood-thirsty multitude of false Christians, who though initiated in the ecclesiastical sacraments are yet worldly... and cruel against the good and true Ishmaelites. (*Expos. in Ps. lxxxiii*).

<sup>43</sup> In writing of this Feast, Gerard Manley Hopkins said: “This is what the Church does or the Holy Ghost who rules the Church: out of the store which Christ left behind him he brings from time to time as need requires some doctrine or some devotion which was indeed known to the Apostles and is old but is unknown or little known at the time and comes upon the world as new. Such is the case with worship of the Sacred Heart.” (*Sermons*)

Such practices are in no way “innovations”, for they have their roots in sound doctrine, and are as it were, the reverberations which the original deposit, like a stone cast into a quiet pond, inevitably sends forth.

A further extension of the concept of “tradition” is to be found in the various “organs” that are used to transmit the “customs, precepts, institutions, disciplines and practices” of the Church to our generation. Thus Franzelin, the papal theologian to the First Vatican Council, describes what is handed down as “objective tradition”, and the process of handing it down as “active tradition”. Primary among these “organs” are the Solemn Magisterium (dogmatic definitions of the Roman Pontiff’s, of Ecumenical Councils, Professions of the Faith and theological censures); and the Ordinary and Universal Magisterium (which includes among other things the universal customs or practices associated with dogma and above all the traditional Roman Liturgy).<sup>44</sup>

Clearly the traditional Mass combines all these aspects of tradition. Indeed, as Pope Pius XI said, “it is the most important organ of the Ordinary Magisterium of the Church” and of “the teaching of the Church.”<sup>45</sup> It is a “theological *locus* of the first importance in knowing the living tradition of the Church.”<sup>46</sup> Its content is partially of Divine origin, partially of Apostolic origin and partially of Ecclesiastical derivation. It has undergone various modifications throughout the ages, but never changed its essential nature. As one theologian has put it, “were any of the early Christians to rise from their tombs in the catacombs, they would recognize in the Catholic worship of our time (needless to say, one is referring to the traditional Mass, and not the *Novus Ordo Missae*), not merely the elements, but also some details of the form of worship to which they were accustomed.”<sup>47</sup> Its Canon is as the Council of Trent teaches, “composed out of the very words of the Lord, the traditions of the Apostles, and the pious institutions of the holy Pontiffs.” To quote Dr. Nicholas Gehr (*The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*):

Christ’s example was the norm for the Apostles at the celebration of the Sacrifice. They did, first, only that which Christ had done before. According to His directions and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they observed other things besides, namely, according to circumstances, they added various prayers and observances, in order to celebrate the Holy Mysteries as worthily and as edifyingly as possible. Those constituent portions of the sacrificial rite, which are

---

<sup>44</sup> Later theologians have labelled “objective” tradition as the “remote rule of faith”, and the magisterium or “active” tradition as the “proximate rule of faith”. Still others have reversed the terms “remote” and “proximate”. Pius XII, used the phrase “proximate and universal norm for every theologian” with regard to the Magisterium (A.A.S. XLII, 1950, 567), but at the same time made it clear that the Magisterium is the “guardian and interpreter of revealed truth,” and not “a separate source of truth.”

<sup>45</sup> *Rev. Greg.* 1937, p. 79.

<sup>46</sup> A. M. Henry, O.P., *An Introduction to Theology*, Fides, Ill., 1952.

<sup>47</sup> *Ecclesia: The Church of Christ*, Ed. A. H. Mathew, Burns Oates, London: 1906.

found in all the ancient liturgies, have incontestably their origin from Apostolic times and tradition; the essential and fundamental features of the Sacrificial rite, introduced and enlarged upon by the Apostles, were preserved with fidelity and reverence in the Churches founded by them. certain ceremonies, for instance, the mystical blessings, the use of lights, incense, vestments and many things of that nature, she (the Church) employs by Apostolic prescription and tradition

No wonder then that the Abbé Guéranger states:

It is to the Apostles that those ceremonies go back that accompany the administration of the sacraments, the establishment of the sacramentals, the principal feasts... The Apostolic liturgy is found entirely outside of Scripture; it belongs to the domaine of Tradition...

And no wonder that, as Louis Bouyer has said (prior to Vatican II):

The Roman Canon, as it is today (in the traditional Mass), goes back to Gregory the Great. There is not, in the East or in the West, a Eucharistic prayer, remaining in use to this day, that can boast of such antiquity... TO JETTISON IT WOULD AMOUNT TO A REJECTION OF ANY CLAIM ON THE PART OF THE ROMAN CHURCH, TO REPRESENT THE TRUE CATHOLIC CHURCH.<sup>48</sup>

The Magisterium then, as a whole as well as in its constituent parts, is, as the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states, “the official organ of tradition”. Our faith is totally dependent upon tradition and cannot under any guise depart from it. “Tradition is thus the faith that the Church (i.e., the magisterium) teaches, for she has received it from the Apostles, and it is the norm of Truth.”<sup>49</sup> And how could it be otherwise, for as Cardinal Saint Bellarmine says in his *De Verbo Dei*, one of the characteristics of tradition is that it is “perpetual—for it was instituted that it might be continuously used till the consumation of the world...” Among the customs of the Church that he lists as examples of “continuous usage” from the time of Christ to his day are “the rites of administering the Sacraments, the feast days (Easter, etc.), the times of fasting, the celebration of the Mass and the divine office, *et alia generis ejusdem*.” Admittedly, Bellarmine takes little pains to distinguish between what is “divine” and what is “ecclesiastical” in tradition—rather he describes it as an integral whole in which the distinctions are between the “matter” and the “form” it takes. And indeed, the distinctions that we are forced to make between what is Divine, what is Apostolic and what is “merely” Ecclesiastical, have about them a certain

---

<sup>48</sup> Father Bouyer is now found to be speaking on the opposite side of the issue.

<sup>49</sup> *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*. Letouzey et Ane, Paris: 1911-49.

air of artificiality.<sup>50</sup> Thus it is that Bousset defines Tradition as the “interpreter of God’s law,” and the “unwritten doctrine coming from God and preserved in the feelings and universal practice of the Church,”<sup>51</sup> and Deneffe states that:

in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries many theologians say it quite clearly: Tradition is the Church preaching... Indeed, some say: TRADITION IS THE CHURCH MAGISTERIUM.<sup>52</sup>

The “traditions” are not opposed to Tradition, but are the legitimate offspring of it, and like Christ, the Son is father to the parent. Thus it follows that one can speak of tradition in a still broader sense as the total influence of a Catholic society and culture upon the souls of its members. For example, however offensive it may be to modern eyes, the crawling of the Mexican peasant on her knees to venerate Our Lady of Guadalupe can be called “traditional” with complete legitimacy. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1908) expresses this well. “This concept of tradition,” it states, “is not always clear, but we endeavour to explain it to ourselves in the following manner: We are all conscious of an assemblage of ideas or opinions living in our mind... a common sentiment... a common spirit... The existence of tradition in the Church must be regarded as living in the spirit and the heart, thence translating itself into acts, and expressing itself into words and writings... This sentiment of the Church is peculiar in this, that it is itself under the influence of grace. The thought of the Church is essentially a traditional thought.” And why is this so? It is because those who are deeply steeped in their faith, whose patterns of life conform to the established and formal “traditions”, find that their every act and thought is correspondingly influenced. Generosity, gentleness, courtesy, dignity and a whole host of similar qualities that reflect the divine virtues become a normal part of living. Such are not the qualities of the ‘modern world, for “the spirit of our times” derives from a very different source, an origin that can well be described as “Anti-traditional.”

Tradition then is a term that can be applied to the entire Christian *ethos*, and as such can be envisaged as a stately tree. Its roots are divine and are often not clearly seen. They blend into its trunk which is solid, firm and clearly visible—conforming to its “ecclesiastical” and “visible” nature. The branches can be likened to the various “organs” of the Magisterium through which the “sap” of the Holy Spirit constantly flows. The leaves, the flowers and the fruit complete the

---

<sup>50</sup> The faithful Catholic finds no need to make these distinctions because he is prone, almost by the very nature of his soul, to accept what is divine, divine-Apostolic and Ecclesiastical with the same reverence and love. He would no more think of changing his rites than would a devout Moslem, Hindu or Buddhist. Is the traditional Mass any less “Catholic” than Scripture.

<sup>51</sup> *Défense de la tradition des saints Peres.*

<sup>52</sup> *Der Traditionsbegriff*, quoted by J. P. Mackey, *The Modern Theology of Tradition*, Herder: New York, 1963.



analogy—a living organism always changing with the seasons, always growing, occasionally losing a branch or bough, and yet always remaining essentially the same.

Now, if we have treated of the subject of Tradition at great length, it is because the present situation demands a deeper understanding of the concept. The New and “Post-conciliar” Church, despite its attempts to disguise the situation, represents a RUPTURE WITH TRADITION of almost APOCALYPTIC proportions. It is, to use the words of Pope Saint Pius X in his Encyclical *Pascendi*, against the modernists, “using all its ingenuity in an effort to weaken the force and falsify the character of tradition, so as to rob it of all its weight and authority.”<sup>53</sup> In so far as this New Church teaches falsely (either by omission or commission) and replaces the “customs, institutions, precepts, disciplines and practices” of the traditional Church, not with alternate Apostolic actions, but with “forms” of purely human origin, it follows in the footsteps, not of Christ, but of the Protestant reformers such as Luther, Calvin and Cranmer. As to its Magisterium, it can hardly be the “official organ of tradition” when it sets out to introduce among the faithful, entirely new rites modelled after the heretical forms of worship such as are used by those who avowedly hate the true Church and deny her basic teachings. Nor can this “New” and “Post-conciliar” Magisterium proclaim as “true” what the traditional Magisterium has defined as “false” without in doing so denying the very possibility of truth, to say nothing of the inerrancy and indefectibility of the Church. Where do we, and how do we demonstrate that a given Tradition is Divine (such as the Assumption of Our Lady), if it is not by means of the very “traditions”? To deny the traditions is to deny the inspired character of the Scriptures, to deny the rites of the Church, to deny the wisdom of the Fathers, the saints and the Popes, to deny many of the Sacraments, and indeed to deny all that is truly cultured in the present world.<sup>54</sup> Tradition is, as the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* states, “the faith that the Church teaches, for she has received it from the Apostles, and it is the norm of truth.” “Even,” as St. Athanasius stated many years ago, “if Catholics faithful to tradition are reduced to a handful, they are the ones who are the true Church of Jesus Christ.” And such must be the case, for as St. Irenaeus taught, “the magisterium was not instituted to receive new truths, but to guard, transmit, propagate and

---

<sup>53</sup> As might be imagined, it was the modernist Loisy who used the loophole of “modification” (the traditions can be modified, but not changed) to attack the unified concept of Tradition. To quote him, “What disquiets the faithful as far as Tradition is concerned is the impossibility of reconciling the historical development of Christian doctrine with the claim, made by theologians, that it (Tradition) is immutable.” Let us have no illusion. The faithful were not disquieted: Loisy was, as are the modernists in control of the New Church.. Then as today, they claimed that they were attacking Tradition in the name of the “faithful”.

<sup>54</sup> It is to be readily admitted that the “Post-conciliar” Church has retained many “traditions”, as indeed, in fact, the Protestants also did. The point is that they have “picked and chosen” those which they retain which is nothing other than to use “private judgment” as to what should be kept. Listen to the words of Paul VI: “It is for the Pope, the College of Bishops (and) the Ecumenical Council (Vatican II) to decide which among the innumerable traditions must be considered as the norm of faith.” Surely we should accept and revere all the traditions, and not just those we borrow.

preserve revealed truth from every admixture of error and to cause it to prevail.” Tradition is What the Magisterium teaches and must for all times remain the “rule of faith”. When doubt arises, the fathers and the saints have always turned to this source for clarification.

I have often then enquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of the Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical depravity, and I have always and in almost every instance received an answer to this effect: That whether I or anyone else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they arise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways: first by the authority of the Divine Law, and ‘then, *by the tradition of the Catholic Church.*

St. Vincent of Lerins.

To argue that we need only accept what in tradition is clearly “divine,” is similar to arguing that Catholics need only believe what has been proclaimed by the Church as being *de fide*—a point to which we shall return later. It is to attack the “trunk” of the tree and to presume that the “roots” will survive in spite of this. To divorce tradition from custom is to divorce faith from practice; to separate Christ’s teaching from His actions, to consider the Apostles and their immediate spiritual descendants as inferior to ourselves in wisdom, and to refuse to Truth its legitimate manner of expression. To separate the Church from her traditions is to disrupt her “unity”, and to proclaim that she is no longer to wear the “wedding garments” that characterize her as the “Spouse of Christ”. To claim that we are other than traditional Catholics is to state that we are not Catholics at all. Faced as we are with innovation upon innovation, let us always ask with St. Chrysostom: “Is it tradition?” and let us also state with him that we “ask for nothing more.” Unless the New Church can claim and proclaim with her founding Apostles *Ego enim accepi a Domino quad et tradidi vobis*—“For I have received of the Lord that which I have transmitted unto you...,” then it is not the Church that Christ founded. As Cardinal Cajetan has said: “Note well that God’s teaching alone is readily the rule of faith. Although the universal Church cannot err in her faith, she is, however, not herself the rule of faith: the divine teaching upon which she is founded alone is.”

And we charge you, brethren, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother walking disorderly, and not according to the tradition which they have received of me.

*II Ther. iii:6.*

*(To be continued).*

The extracts that constitute the essay above were taken from a book by Rama Coomaraswamy entitled *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*, first published in 1972, but which is currently available from World Wisdom books (2006).

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

*For though God created man at the beginning in His own image, and made him more glorious and perfect than other creatures, and breathed into him a living and immortal soul, yet by the fall the image of God was defaced, and man was changed into the very reverse of what God had intended that he should be.*

The Sophic Hydrolith.