**Lightning Apologetics**

**SACRED SCRIPTURE IS TRADITION?**

Unfortunately, many Catholics have left the Church as a result of questions like these put to them by well-meaning but misguided “Bible Christians.” We’ve covered “sola scriptura” before in our apologetics articles, that being that Sacred Scripture is the sole source of revelation. Perhaps the greatest difference between Catholics and Protestants is in the way that the two groups view the means of receiving divine revelation. The typical Protestant view is that the only reliable, infallible source of divine revelation is the Scriptures. This tradition of relying on the Scripture as the sole means of receiving God’s revelation is fairly recent, only being introduced in the 16th century by the Protestant Reformation.

Catholicism, on the other hand, is not a “religion of the book.” Rather, it is the religion of the “Word” of God (CCC #108). The Church did not come out of the Bible; the Bible came out of the Church. The Catholic Church teaches that both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred Deposit of the Word of God (Dei Verbum 10). The Gospel (the good news) of Jesus Christ is the source of all saving truth and moral discipline, and as such it must be conveyed to all generations. Therefore, Jesus commanded His Apostles to preach the Gospel. So it was first preached as a living voice which didn’t come from a pen, but from the lips of Christ. The doctrine of the Church in the beginning was not a collection of writings. It was called the “Word of God,” or the “Word of salvation.” The first Apostles and disciples of the church were called ministers of the Word. Our Blessed Lord did not write His teachings, nor were the Gospels written immediately after His death. They were written only when the Church emerged from her infancy and brought her great zeal across Asia Minor to Greece and as far as Rome. Christ did not tell His Apostles to write His teachings. Christ did not write because He was not an author, but an Authority. When a man leaves a literary work behind him, there is a tendency to forget the man and to concentrate on his writings. Socrates never wrote his teachings. He was known through his disciples and therefore his personality remains a living one. Plato on the other hand is known mostly for his writings, only secondarily in his person. Not that there is any comparison between Socrates and Christ, but the fact is Christ did not want to give grounds to the temptation to look upon His written word or words that were written about Him. He wanted us to take hold of His Person. He would not set His doctrine upon paper but in the members of His New Covenant. The very first task of the Apostles after His death was to follow Christ’s command to preach. Our Lord had many first-hand witnesses of His Resurrection all around Him. So the Apostles began to preach the Gospels, *orally.* The earliest converts were gathered around the Apostles to receive the revelation from their own lips. They were taught by men who had seen, heard and touched Christ. They learned about Christ and His Gospel from those who had lived with Him intimately for three years. It was thirty years or so after the death of Christ that the first canonical (inspired) Gospels were written. The written text was a help, not an obstacle to the leaders of the Church.

The Church, therefore, existed before the Gospels. It was the Church that composed the Gospels. It was in the Church that the New Testament was written. Therefore, during the first thirty years the Church knew Christ’s message mainly through the Apostles and others and this is the meaning of the word “Evangel” or “Gospel.” “Good tidings or Good News”. Not a good book, but good tidings of salvation brought by the servants of the Word. So keep in mind that the teaching of Christ was not put into writing until the first witnesses were beginning to disappear.

This means that Scripture itself is a tradition – it is part of the greater category of Tradition (2 Thess. 2:15). Both means of transmitting the Deposit of Faith, Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. They both flow from the same divine source, and share a common goal; to make present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ (CCC #80). The English word “tradition” comes from the Latin “tradere,” meaning “to hand on.” When the Church speaks of Sacred Tradition She is speaking of the “handing down” of the Sacred Deposit of the Faith.

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