**Lightning Apologetics**

**SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION CONT’D…**

It comes as a big surprise to some that at no time in the history of the people of God was the concept of the “Word of God” bound only to the written page. From Adam and Eve to Moses (1400 B .C.), oral tradition was the *only* means of passing on the Word of God. And from Moses to the birth of the Catholic Church on the day of Pentecost, it was clearly understood by all in God’s covenant family that the “Word of God” was made up of Tradition that was handed down both orally and in writing. St. Paul exhorted us to “stand firm and hold fast to the tradition that you were taught, either by oral statement or by letter of ours” (2 Thess. 2:15).

Pope Benedict XVI explained that “Jesus did not present his message as something totally new, as the end of all that preceded it. He was and remained a Jew; that is, He linked His message to the tradition of believing Israel.” Receiving and handing on the Word of God in oral and written form is part of the ancient tradition of Israel.

Just weeks after the Israelites were freed from Egypt, they settled for one year at the base of Mt. Sinai. It was there that Moses received the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), and during the forty year period following the Exodus, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses put the Torah in writing.

The fact that God put His will into writing does not come as a surprise to most Christians, but what does cause surprise, particularly to Protestants, is the fact that the Jewish community of the Old Testament, as well as the people of Jesus’ time, all recognized that God gave Israel an oral law (oral tradition) in addition to the written law.

Rabbi Hayim Donin in his book entitled “To Be a Jew” explains that “we believe God’s will was also made manifest in the Oral Tradition or Oral Torah which also had its source at Sinai, revealed to Moses and then orally taught by him to the religious heads of Israel. The Written Torah itself alludes to such oral instructions. This Oral Torah—which clarifies and provides the details for many of the commandments contained in the Written Torah—was transmitted from generation to generation until finally recorded in the second century to become the cornerstone upon which the Talmud was built.” Jacob Neusner points out in his introduction to the Mishnah (the codified oral tradition of Judaism) that the oral Torah “bore the status of divine revelation right alongside the Pentateuch.” (Special thanks to Jeff Cavins for this information).

The Jewish community, from which Christianity sprang, has always understood the Torah to be both written and oral. Along with the written Torah, the oral Torah which Moses received at Sinai was “transmitted to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the men of the Great Assembly…(*Ethics of the Fathers 1:1)*. In nearly identical fashion, the Catholic Church has continued this tradition of the Word of God coming to His people in both written and oral form. It is fair to say that the new concept of God’s Word coming only in the written form (*sola scriptura)* was a foreign idea to the Jews both in Moses’ and Jesus’ day.

The Catholic teaching that “Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition form one sacred Deposit of the Word of God (DV 10) is not some new, cleverly-devised system, but a continuation of that ancient stream our forefathers stood in . The very idea of the Word of God being both written and oral flows from our Jewish roots. As Jeff Cavins put it, “It is part of the nourishing sap of the Olive tree (Israel), and those who stand outside of this tradition stand on the shores of the still-flowing ancient current.

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