

O Lord, our Lord,
How glorious is your name over all the earth!
You have exalted your majesty above the heavens.
When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and stars which you set in place—
What is man that you should be mindful of him
or the son of man that you should care for him?
You have made him little less than the angels.

and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him rule over the works of your hands,
putting all things under his feet.

—PSALM 8:2; 4-7

HOW/WHY MY UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH HAS CHANGED

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1 INTRODUCTION

My perspective about the church becomes clear thanks to this class; in particular how Tradition, Scriptures and Magisterium function in relationship to each other. The Church of which Christ is a foundation exists because the work of Jesus is incomplete. Therefore, in the interim time between Jesus' ascension to the right hand of the Father and until He comes again,¹ as he commanded in Matthew's Gospel 4:23, 9:35 and 22:33, the Church is chartered with the continuance of the ministry of Jesus and that is to teach in the name of Christ. This is called the Magisterium or the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. The Magisterium of the Church is confined within Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Tradition which together "form one sacred deposit of the word of God" (DV, 10). In other words, Tradition, Scriptures and Magisterium integrate into one deposit of faith to continue the work of Jesus in the church.

2 SACRED TRADITION

2.1 How were the unwritten Words of God handed over from generation to generation prior to the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament were written?

The answer must have been by word of mouth from one generation to the next. In other words, Sacred Tradition is the unwritten Words of God revealed to Hebrew ancestors, prophets and at the fullness of time in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit to the apostles and orally handed down to their successors.

2.2 Of what is Sacred Tradition comprised?

Sacred Tradition includes the creeds, liturgy, and the prayers of the church as well as the authentic teaching of the successors of the apostles such as "encyclical letters, apostolic letters, and apostolic exhortations"² and so on. Part of the Sacred Tradition that surely holds together the experience of Church as communion and that of Church as institution is

sacramental celebration³ in which Eucharist is the center. The church fathers at the Second Vatican Council stressed the significance of sacred tradition: "Now what was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase in faith of the People of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes." DV, 8

3 THE SCRIPTURES

3.1 How does God reveal God's Self to us?

Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and the prophets received God's revelation in the form of spoken words or in dreams and at the fullness of time, God's words and deeds were directly revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The revelation of God has been passed on from generation to generation prior to the inspired text of Scriptures was written.

3.2 How are Tradition and Scripture related?

Christians in the early centuries were taught their faith orally by the apostles long before there was the New Testament. Indeed, Jesus left nothing in writing except a few words on the sand which no one knew: "They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground." (Jn. 8:6) Scriptures however encapsulated most if not all of the apostle's teaching (sacred tradition). Even the Bible itself acknowledges the role of tradition as St. Paul utterly announced: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." In the second letter to Thessalonica (2:15), St. Paul reiterated the significance of tradition: "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." Christ

empowers his successors in Luke 10:16, "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me."

In short, the Bible is itself the fruit of tradition as sacred tradition is the primary source from which the Scriptures both the Old and New Testaments were formed, proclaimed and lived out through the ages.

4 MAGISTERIUM

4.1 Who is authorized to teach in the Catholic Church?

Jesus bestowed the teaching authority in his name to the apostles (Mt. 28:19, Mk. 16:16, Lk. 24:48), and "the successors of the apostles are the college of bishops teaching in union with the pope." (*Lumen Gentium*, 25) In the CDF's 1992 letter *Communio in notio*, on the Church as communion, Pope John Paul II declares that there are only two levels of authority: that of the worldwide Episcopal college and that of the individual bishops. Consequently, in order to exercise magisterial authority, the bishops sitting as an Episcopal conference must either unanimously approve a proposed teaching document, thus employing their individual teaching authority simultaneously for all their dioceses, or the bishops must approve the teaching document by at least a two-thirds majority of the member bishops who have a deliberative vote and then seek the Roman approval of the document. If it is approved by the pope's approval authority, it is dressed with the authority of the whole college of bishops.⁴

Without denying the teaching authority that Vatican II ascribed to the college of bishops as successors to the apostles, there are theological reasons as well as historical precedents for finding ways for others with theological, ministerial, or professional competence to have some part in the exercise of the Church's magisterium and this is referred as pluralistic sources of teaching authority.⁵ Thus in addition to priests and deacons, other forms of church

teaching are done by university theologians recognized by Thomas Aquinas as a distinguished teaching authority, catechists, and parents - the first and principal teachers of children.

The Spirit is limited to neither hierarchy nor text as it "blows wherever it pleases;" (John 3:8) it is present in the whole Church. As a community in the Spirit, all members of the Church are mutually interdependent - pastors, theologians, prophets, and faithful. The Church is a communion in its fundamental nature.⁶

4.2 What is "Infallibility"?

Infallibility preserves from error when teaching matters of faith and morals by the Pope and Ecumenical Council. The First Vatican Council proclaimed that when acting within clearly and rather narrowly prescribed limits, solemnly and officially for the benefit of the whole Church, defining doctrine to be held by the whole Church on matters of faith and morals, the bishop of Rome, known as the pope, possesses the infallibility that Jesus intended the Church to have in such matters. Example of this is in the definition of the immaculate conception of Mary and in that of her assumption.⁷ Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, however, marked a shift away from Vatican I's monarchical understanding of papal authority, towards a more collegial one. *Lumen Gentium* did not change the teaching of Vatican I, but placed it in a new context, balancing the office of the Roman Pontiff within the shared mission of the bishops who succeed to the role of the apostles. From this perspective, Church authority must be imagined differently; the Church must balance primacy with collegiality and therefore in matters of faith and morals, in union with the pope, the college of bishops speaks in the name of Christ also protects from error when teaching matters of faith and morals.⁸

4.3 What is the Church teaching?

Primary and secondary objects of authority and in some cases infallibility are three main categories of Church teaching. The primary object of faith is God's revelation proposed as

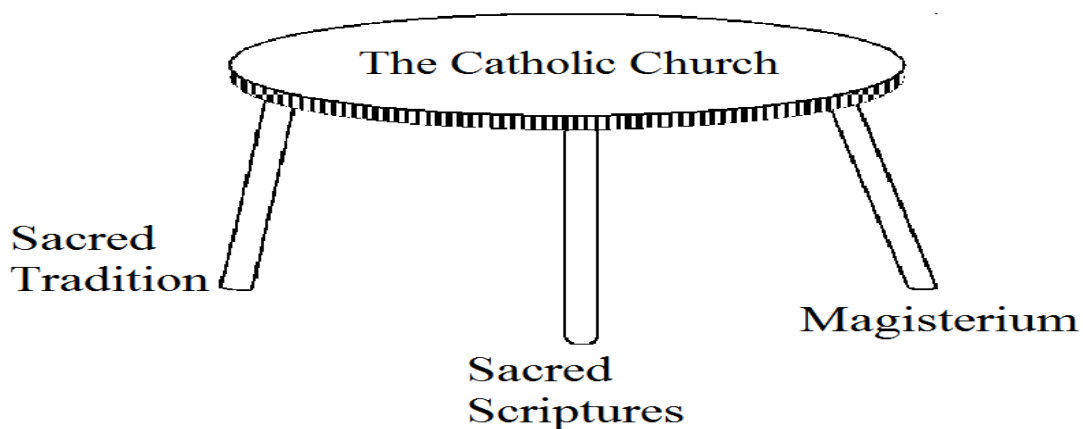
such by the Church. The proper response to divine revelation proposed by the Church is an act of faith in the God who reveals the assent of faith.⁹ A second category of doctrines is said to be definitively taught because they are linked to revelation by "historical necessity," even if there is no claim that they are revealed.¹⁰

The topmost truths taught by Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church are contained in the Apostles Creed - the twelve doctrines of faith. The Creed can be developed to further define Catholic faith; for example, by adding the three paragraphs to the creed, the Profession of Faith published in 1989 drew attention to diverse categories of Church teaching and also to the diverse forms of assent owed to each.¹¹ Magisterium also discerned the canon of Scriptures and the validity of tradition. However, the church fathers at Vatican II stressed that the Magisterium is not over, but under the Word of God - much like the President of the United States, who still lives under the law. Church teaching also includes encyclical letters, apostolic letters, apostolic exhortations, pastoral letters and synod. Other categories of teaching are Catechism, Bible commentaries, Theological reflection and so on.

The one element in the work of the redemption in which the Christian community is engaged is the need for unity and peace of hearts and minds and commitment to the common endeavor with others. In order that such unity and peace of hearts and minds may be achieved, the one essential and indispensable element is the renunciation of the self-willed stance that asserts independence of control and direction by others. This is why Church authority has such a quality of spiritual significance in Catholic tradition. Regardless, obedience to Church authority is not always simple and obvious but may be a matter of careful reflection and judgment. The Catholic ideal of obedience to Church authority is not that the individual should go back from this stage of growth but that there should be a further movement forward to greater maturity in which people are able to make a genuine community commitment as a result of ecclesial communion.¹²

5 CONCLUSION

To sum-up the intimate relationship between Tradition, Scriptures and Magisterium, I would like to borrow the words of the church fathers at the Vatican council II: "It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scriptures and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls" DV, 10. God has graciously bestowed on us these gifts for our salvation and as promised by Jesus that the gates of hell would not prevail the Church (Mt. 16:18). These three gifts are equally essential as we can envision the relationship of Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium as a three-legged stool shown below. Upon this stool, the Church is built and if any of the legs is removed, the stool falls, the Church collapses and disintegrates!



END NOTES:

¹ Monika Hellwig K., *Understanding Catholicism*, (New York: Paullist Press, 2002), 121.

² Richard Gaillardetz R., *By What Authority?*, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 80.

³ Helwik, *Understanding Catholicism*, 138.

⁴ John P. Boyle, *The Teaching Office of the Church*, in *The Gift of the Church*, ed. Peter C. Phan, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 359.

⁵ Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., *Towards a Truly Catholic Church An Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2005), 130.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Helwik, *Understanding Catholicism*, 135.

⁸ Rausch, *Towards a Truly Catholic Church An Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, 122.

⁹ Boyle, *The Teaching Office of the Church*, in *The Gift of the Church*, ed. Peter C. Phan, 364.

¹⁰ Ibid., 365.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Helwik, *Understanding Catholicism*, 39, 133 & 134.

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