

Hilary, Ambrose, Gregory, Innocent, John [Chrysostom], Basil, to whom I add, whether you wish it or not, the priest Jerome, omitting those who are still alive, have pronounced against you their opinion about the succession of all men which is bound by original sin, whence no one can rescue them except Him Whom a virgin conceived without the law of sin warring against the law of the mind .... What they found in the Church they held; what they learned they taught; what they received from the fathers they handed down to the sons. We were not as yet involved with you before these judges; they tried our case (Against Julian, Bk. 2, Ch. 10).

#### **St. Vincent of Lerins**

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical pravity; and I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or any one else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, 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.

But here some one perhaps will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation? For this reason, —because, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another... Therefore, it is very necessary, on account of so great intricacies of such various error, that the rule for the right understanding of the prophets and apostles should be framed in accordance with the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation.

Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense 'Catholic' which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally" This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church

throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors (Commonitory, Ch. 2).

He is the true and genuine Catholic who loves the truth of God, who loves the Church, who loves the Body of Christ, who esteems divine religion and the Catholic Faith, above every thing, above the authority, above the regard, above the genius, above the eloquence, above the philosophy, of every man whatsoever; who sets light by all of these, and continuing steadfast and established in the faith, resolves that he will believe that, and that only, which he is sure the Catholic Church has held universally and from ancient time. (Commonitory, Ch. 20).

From *The Teachings of the Catholic Church*, Edited by John R. Willis, SJ, Herder and Herder, New York, 1966.

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Pamphlet 292

## The Church Fathers on “Tradition”

“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter (2 Thess. 2:15). So wrote St. Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians. Against the Protestant Reformers the Council of Trent maintained that tradition as well as Sacred Scripture, was a source of the Church's teaching magisterium. Since earliest times sacred tradition has always been recognized as a true font of revelation. Indeed, Scripture alone cannot be the sole source of faith because the Canon of Scripture cannot be determined from the writings themselves, nor can their inspiration be so determined. But how is tradition safely transmitted? By means of the creeds, the writings of the fathers, the constant and unanimous consent of Catholic Schools on matters of faith, the ancient ecclesiastical monuments, the common belief of the faithful, but most of all by the solemn judgment of the Church which is always an infallible proof of divine tradition. Whether we regard tradition as the teaching authority of the Church, or the body of teaching itself, or the Church's act of teaching the deposit of faith, all three are involved in the history of the authentic transmission of God's revelation of Himself to man in the person of the God - Man Jesus Christ.

*Sacred tradition is also a true font of revelation.*

#### **St. Irenaeus**

For even creation reveals Him who formed it, and the very work made suggests Him who made it and the world manifests Him who ordered it. The Universal Church, moreover, through the whole world, has received this tradition from the Apostles. (Against Heresies, Bk 2, Ch. 9).

True knowledge is [that which consists in] the doctrine of the Apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved, without any forging of

Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither addition nor [suffering] curtailment" [in the truths which she believes]; and [it consists in] reading { [the Word of God] without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy; and [above all, it consists in] the pre-eminent gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy, and which excels all the other gifts [of God] (Against Heresies, Bk. 4, Ch. 33).

### **Tertullian**

For wherever both the true Christian rule and Faith shall be shown to be, there will be the true Scriptures, and the true expositions, and all the true Christian traditions (*The Prescription of Heretics*, Ch. 19).

We ... believe that there is only one God, but under the following dispensation, or *oikonomia* as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made (John 1:3). Him [we believe] to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her-being both Man and God, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and to have been called by the name of Jesus Christ.... That this rule of faith has come down to us from the beginning of the gospel, even before any of the older heretics, much more before Praxeas [a pretender] of yesterday, will be apparent both from the lateness of date which marks all heresies, and also from the absolutely novel character of our new-fangled Praxeas. In this principle also we must henceforth find a presumption of equal force against all heresies whatsoever-that whatever is first is true, whereas that is spurious which is later in date. But keeping this prescriptive rule inviolate, still some opportunity must be given for reviewing [the statements of heretics], with a view to the instruction and protection of divers persons; were it only that it may not seem that each perversion [of the truth] is condemned without examination, and simply prejudged; especially in the case of this heresy, which supposes itself to possess the pure truth, in thinking that one cannot believe in One Only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the very selfsame Person. As if in this way also one were not all, in that All are of One, by unity [that is] of substance; while the mystery of the *oikonomia* [or, dispensation] is

still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three Persons-the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Against Praxeas, Ch. 2).

### **St. Basil**

Nor do we speak of the Holy Spirit as begotten, for by the tradition of the faith we have been taught one Only-begotten: the Spirit of truth we have been taught to proceed from the Father, and we confess Him to be of God without creation. We are also bound to anathematize all who speak of the Holy Spirit as ministerial, inasmuch as by this term they degrade Him to the rank of a creature.... It is necessary to add yet this further, that they are to be shunned, as plainly hostile to true religion, who invert the order left us by the Lord, and put the Son before the Father, and the Holy Spirit before the Son. For we must keep unaltered and inviolable that order which we have received from the very words of the Lord, 'Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' (Mt. 28:19) (Letters, No. 125).

Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us 'in a mystery' by the tradition of the Apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force. And these no one will contradict;—no one, at all events, who is even moderately versed in the institutions of the Church. For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the ground that the importance they possess is small, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel in these matters especially, or, rather, should make our public definition a mere phrase and nothing more.... Which of the saints has left us in writing the words of the invocation at the displaying of the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing? For we are not, as is well known, content with what the apostle or the Gospel

has recorded, but both in preface and conclusion we add other words as being of great importance to the validity of the ministry, and these we derive from unwritten teaching. Moreover we bless the water of baptism and the oil of the chrism, and besides this the Catechumen who is being baptized. On what written authority do we do this? Is not our authority silent and mystical tradition? Nay, by what written word is the anointing of oil itself taught? And whence comes the custom of baptizing thrice? And as to the other customs of baptism from what Scripture do we derive the renunciation of Satan and his angels? Does not this come from that unpublished and secret teaching which our fathers guarded in a silence out of reach of curious meddling and inquisitive investigation? ... In the same manner the Apostles and Fathers who laid down laws for the Church from the beginning thus guarded the awful dignity of the mysteries in secrecy and silence, for what is bruited abroad at random among the common folk is not mystery at all (On the Holy Spirit, Ch. 27).

### **St. John Chrysostom**

'So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by Epistle of ours' (2 Th. 2: 15). Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by Epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther (Homilies on Second Thessalonians).

### **St. Jerome**

Don't you know that the laying on of hands after baptism and then the invocation of the Holy Spirit is a custom of the Churches? Do you demand Scripture proof? You may find it in the Acts of the Apostles. And even if it did not rest on the authority of Scripture the consensus of the whole world in this respect would have the force of a command. For many other observances of the Churches, which are due to tradition, have acquired the authority of the written law (The Dialogue Against the Luciferians, Ch. 8).

### **St. Augustine**

Holy and blessed priests, famous in their treatment of sacred doctrine, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Reticus, Olympius,