

## THE SOURCE OF TRUTH AND UNITY IN THE CHURCH - PART III

### Introduction

"Continue in what you learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

As we have already seen, this scripture of which Paul is speaking must be the Old Testament since the New Testament had not yet been written nor its canon authentically established. This scripture furnishes no argument whatever that the Sacred Scriptures, without Tradition (which means simply the oral preaching and teaching and the practice of the early Church that has been "handed down"), is the sole rule of faith. The Scripture is useful; it is not said to be sufficient. The Apostle himself requires the help of Tradition: "So, brethren, stand firm and hold fast to traditions that you were taught by us, either *by word of mouth* or *by our letter*" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). This has all been established in Parts I and II.

The most important evidence, then, of which Church is the one that Jesus Christ established must be based on its continuity with the apostolic teaching, reflected in both the oral and written tradition of the Apostles and their disciples and in the teaching and preaching of the early Church Fathers. As we saw in Part II, St. Vincent of Lerins summarized this as "That which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all." He also set forth a threefold test of legitimate inquiry: universality, antiquity, and open, frequent, and persistent consent (Vincent of Lerins, *The Vincentian Canon*, 434). Since the schism of the Eastern Church in 1054, and especially since the Reformation, no church, sect, or cult, liturgical, fundamentalist, or evangelical, has claimed this continuity except the Church whose See is in Rome, (erroneously called the Roman Catholic Church as if there were other legitimate Catholic churches). The closest exception was the Church of England in 1920.

Ever since Martin Luther dubbed the Catholic Church the "Whore of Babylon", and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* of 1643 called the Pope "that Antichrist, the man of sin, and son of perdition that exalts himself in the Church against Christ and all that is called God", many others have uttered these and other slanderous accusations as from the mouth of a parrot, without serious and open-minded analysis or thought. Perhaps it is time for an objective review of this Church, first to see what it really teaches, and then whether what it teaches is in continuity with the criteria set down by St. Vincent of Lerins above. Many who condemn the Church of Rome do so without ever having taken the time or made the effort to study seriously what it really teaches and believes. Hopefully, the following will provide the opportunity for those who are open, and not already convinced by pre-conceived ideas, misinformation, or prejudices passed on by their own teachers and preachers, or by their own lack of study.

### The Transmission Of Divine Revelation

God has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, in whom he has established his covenant forever. The Son is his Father's definitive Word; so there will be no further Revelation after him.

"God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), that is, of Christ Jesus (cf. John 14:6). Christ must be proclaimed to all nations and individuals so that this revelation may reach to the ends of the earth. God graciously arranged that all things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety throughout the ages and be transmitted to all generations (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20; 3:16-4:6).

Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up, commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel that had been promised beforehand by the prophets and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the Gospel, they were to communicate the gifts of God to all people. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline (cf. Matthew 28:19 & 20; Mark 16:15).

In keeping with the Lord's command, the Gospel was handed on in two ways:

--*orally* by the Apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received - whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the holy Spirit;

--*in writing* by those Apostles and other men associated with the Apostles who, under the inspiration of the same holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church, the Apostles left bishops, or overseers, as their successors. They gave them their own teaching authority (cf. St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3, 3, 1, Part II). Indeed, the Apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time (cf. Acts 20:28; St. Clement of Rome, *Epistle To The Corinthians* 42, 44, Part II).

This living transmission, accomplished in the holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes (cf. St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1, 10, 1-2; 5, 20, 1).

The Father's self-communication, made through his Word in the holy Spirit (in a way that the two cannot be separated so that there cannot be one without the other), remains present and active in the Church: God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the Spouse of his beloved Son. And the holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church - and through her in the world - leads all believers to the full truth and makes the Word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness (cf. Colossians 3:16).

The Church, "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15), faithfully guards "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (cf. Jude 3). She guards the memory of Christ's words; it is she who, from generation to generation, hands on the Apostle's confession of faith. As a mother who teaches her children to speak, and so to understand and communicate, the Church, our Mother, teaches us the *language* of faith in order to introduce us to the understanding and the *life* of faith.

Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. Both of them, flowing out from the same divine wellspring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and to move toward the same goal. Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own "always to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the holy Spirit. Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God that Christ entrusted to the Apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching. As a result, the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.

The Tradition here in question comes from the Apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the holy Spirit. The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living tradition. Tradition, it must be noted, is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical, or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time. These are the particular forms, adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified, or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium, or teaching authority.

The diverse liturgical traditions have arisen by the very reason of the Church's mission. Churches of the same geographical and cultural area came to celebrate the mystery of Christ through particular expressions characterized by the culture: in the tradition of the "deposit of faith", in liturgical symbolism, in the organization of fraternal communion, in the theological understanding of the mysteries, and in various forms of holiness. The Church is catholic, capable of integrating into her unity, while purifying them, all the authentic riches of cultures.

The Apostles entrusted the "Sacred deposit" of faith (cf. 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:12-14), contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, to the whole Church. By adhering to this heritage, the entire holy people, united to its pastors, remains always faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. So, in maintaining, practicing, and professing the faith that has been handed on, there should be a remarkable harmony between the bishops and the faithful.

The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. Yet, this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God but its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and expounds it faithfully. It draws from this single deposit of faith all that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed.

The Christian economy, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.

Thanks to the assistance of the holy Spirit, the understanding of both the realities and the words of the heritage of faith is able, thus, to grow in the life of the Church:

--through the contemplation and study of believers who "ponder these things in their hearts" (cf. Luke 2:19; 51). The tradition of Christian prayer is one of the ways in which the tradition of faith takes shape and grows, especially through the contemplation and study of believers who treasure in their hearts the events and words of the economy of salvation and through their profound grasp of the spiritual realities they experience;

--it is, in particular, theological research that deepens knowledge of revealed truth. In the work of teaching and applying Christian morality, the Church needs the dedication of pastors, the knowledge of theologians, and the contribution of all Christians and people of good will. Faith and the practice of the Gospel provide each person with an experience of life "in Christ", who enlightens and makes him or her able to evaluate the divine and human realities according to the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10-15). Thus, the holy Spirit can use the humblest to enlighten the learned and those in the highest positions;

--from the intimate sense of spiritual realities that believers experience, the sacred Scripture "grow with the one who reads them: (cf. St. Gregory the Great, *Homily on Ezekiel, 1, 7, 8*);

--from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth.

It is clear, therefore, that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the one holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.

### **The Church And Unity**

This is the sole Church of Christ that we profess in the Creed to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. To believe that the Church is "holy" and "catholic", and that she is "one" and "apostolic" (as the Nicene Creed adds), is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the holy Spirit. In the Apostles' Creed, we profess "one Holy Church", and not to believe *in* the Church, so as not to confuse God with his works and to attribute clearly to God's goodness all the gifts he has bestowed on his Church. These four characteristics, inseparably linked with one another, indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. The Church does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities.

The Church is one because of her source: the highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the

unity of the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the holy Spirit. The Church is one because of her founder: for, the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all people to God by the cross...restoring the unity of all in one People and in one Body. The Church is one because of her soul: it is the holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity. Unity, therefore, is of the essence of the Church.

From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great diversity that comes from both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of the People of God, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures is gathering together. Among the Church's members, there are different gifts, offices, conditions, and ways of life. The very differences that the Lord has willed to put between the members of his Body serve its unity and mission. For, in the Church there is a diversity of ministry but unity of mission. To the Apostles and their successors, Christ has entrusted the office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing in his name and by his power. Christ is himself the source of ministry in the Church. He instituted the Church. He gave her authority and mission, orientation and goals. In order to shepherd the People of God and to increase its numbers without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a variety of offices that aim at the good of the whole Body. The holders of office, who are invested with a sacred power, are, in fact, dedicated to promoting the interests of their brethren so that all who belong to the People of God may attain to salvation. But, the laity, also, are made to share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ; they have, in the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God.

No one -- no individual and no community -- can proclaim the Gospel to himself or herself: "Faith comes from what is heard" (Romans 10:17). No one can give himself or herself the mandate and the mission to proclaim the Gospel. The one sent by the Lord does not speak and act on his or her own authority but by virtue of Christ's authority, not as a member of the community but speaking to it in the name of Christ. No one can bestow grace on himself or herself; it must be given and offered. This fact presupposes ministers of grace, authorized and empowered by Christ. From him, they receive the mission and faculty ("the sacred power") to act in the person of Christ the Head. The ministry in which Christ's emissaries do and give by God's grace what they cannot do and give by their own power is called a "sacrament" by the Church's Tradition. Indeed, the ministry of the Church is conferred by a special sacrament.

It belongs to the sacramental nature of ecclesial ministry that it has a collegial character. Every bishop exercises his ministry from within the Episcopal college, in communion with the bishop of Rome, the successor of St. Peter and head of the college. So also, priests exercise their ministry from within the presbyterium of the diocese, under the direction of their bishop. When Christ instituted the Twelve, he constituted them in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from among them (cf. Luke 6:13; John 21: 15-17). Just as, by the Lord's institution, St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles constitute a single Apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, are related with and united to one another.

As we saw in Part I, the Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the "rock" of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock (cf. Matthew 16:18 & 19). Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve; Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. Through a revelation from the Father, Peter had confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord then declared to him: "You are Peter (*Kepha*), and on this rock (*kepha*) I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Christ, the "living stone" (1 Peter 2:4), thus assures his Church, built on Peter, of victory over the powers of death and hell. Because of the faith he confessed, Peter will remain the unshakeable rock of the Church. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it (cf. Luke 22:32). The office of binding and loosing that was given to Peter was later also assigned to the college of Apostles united to its head (John 21:15-17). This pastoral office of Peter and the other Apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.

The Pope, the Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful. "For, with this church, by reason of its preeminence, the whole Church, that is the faithful everywhere, must necessarily be in accord" (St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies III, III, 2*, Part II). Indeed, "from the incarnate Word's descent to us, all Christian churches everywhere have held and hold the great Church that is here [at Rome] to be their only basis and foundation since, according to the Savior's promise, the gates of hell have never prevailed against her" (St. Maximus the Confessor, *Theological Works*). The Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, the "power of the keys" from Peter and from Peter's successors, which he can always exercise unhindered.

Bishops, with priests as co-workers, have as their first task "to preach the Gospel of God to all people" in keeping with the Lord's command (cf. Mark 16:15). They are heralds of faith who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers of the apostolic faith, endowed with the authority of Christ. In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on to the Apostles, Christ, who is the Truth, willed to confer on her a share in his own infallibility. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The exercise of this charism takes several forms.

The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility by virtue of his office when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful -- who confirms his brethren in the faith -- he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals...The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter's successor, they exercise the supreme Teaching Office, above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church, through its supreme Magisterium, proposes a doctrine for belief as being divinely revealed and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions must be adhered to with the obedience of faith. This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself.

Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the Apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and, in a particular way, to the bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church, when, without arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing it in a "definitive manner," they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to better

understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching, the faithful are to adhere with religious assent which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it.

Finally, the bishops, as vicars and legates of Christ, govern the particular churches assigned to them by their counsels, exhortations, and example, but, over and above that, by the authority and sacred power which, indeed, they ought to exercise so as to edify, in the spirit of service which is that of their Master. "Let all follow the bishops as Jesus Christ follows his Father, and the college of presbyters as the Apostles; respect the deacons as you do God's Law. Let no one do anything concerning the Church in separation from the bishop" (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter To The Smyrnaeans*, 8:1, Part II).

--compiled by Patrick J. Hession from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

### **CARDINAL JOHN HENRY NEWMAN'S DILEMMA**

Before the publication of his classic *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, it was fashionable to espouse anti-Catholic and anti-papist sentiments in England. Newman starts his *Apologia* with an account of the beginning of his life. He was born to middle-class parents in London. At age 15, he came to Trinity College, Oxford, where he spent the next 29 years studying and teaching.

What sharply separated Newman from the Catholic Church is that Newman believed from his youth that "the Pope is the Antichrist." In fact, at Christmas in 1824, he preached a sermon to that effect. Newman says that he followed distinguished Protestant authorities in believing that Gregory I, around the year 600, was the first Pope who sold out to the devil, and the Council of Trent in the 16th century cemented the Catholic alliance with Mephistopheles. Further, Newman believed that Catholics practiced idolatry in their worship of the Virgin Mary and the saints.

During the 1830's, Newman developed his well-known *Via Media* (middle course), a sort of midpoint between Catholicism and Anglicanism. Newman's basic argument during this point in his life was that both Catholics and Anglicans descended from the same authentic religious roots -- the "primitive" Church of St. Augustine and St. Athanasius. But, both had departed from the original wisdom, Newman believed: the Catholic Church by "adding on" doctrines such as the Assumption of Mary into heaven; the Anglican Church for having cut itself off from the true Church through schism.

The issue for Newman, then, was Catholicity versus Apostolicity. This ideal religion would embody both, would be universal and yet legitimately descended. Newman's *Via Media*, then, was to nudge both the "errant" theologies in the direction of what he considered the true Church, one that abjured the "errors" of both Catholicism and Anglicanism while retaining their good points.

What caused Newman to abandon the *Via Media* and move headlong toward Catholicism? Why did Newman leave what he himself termed "the happiest time of my life" in order to join a controversial group of papists? The first reason was a realization of a fundamental problem at the core of Protestantism. Protestants say that they only trust in the word of the Bible, but nowhere does the Bible ask them to do this. It is the Church Tradition that has, from the onset,

directed believers to the Scripture as the inerrant word of God.

Newman's study of the ancient Church controversies, the heresies of the Monophysites and the Arians, brought him something of an epiphany about Anglicanism. Newman found, "It was difficult to [find arguments to condemn] the Popes of the 16th. century without condemning the Popes of the fifth."

This was confirmed in Newman's Arian study. He saw that the arguments of the reviled heretics were identical in substance, and very nearly in form, to those of his current-day Protestant friends, except that his contemporaries tried to distinguish themselves from the early-Church heresies and claim a legitimate lineage back to Christ and the Apostles.

Previously, Newman had regarded the choice between the Church and the Anglican Churches as one between universality and antiquity. But, his study of St. Augustine, then as now a beacon that all Protestants cherish because of his emphasis on justification by faith, convinced Newman how wrong he had been. St. Augustine was one of the prime oracles of antiquity, and yet Newman read of his reverence for the Popes, his apparent conviction that one could not be saved outside the Roman Catholic Church, and the passion with which he fought those who tried to revise the teachings of the Church and polarize it.

From the end of 1841, Newman's *Apologia* tells us, "I was on my deathbed as regards my membership with the Anglican Church." He did not leave for four more years. But, in 1842, Newman resigned his tutorship and chaplaincy at Saint Mary's and moved to a retirement center at Littlemore. The reason was plain. Newman was not ready to become a Catholic yet, but he did not feel comfortable preaching in an Anglican church.

Gradually, Newman writes, "I came to see that the Anglican Church was formally in the wrong and that the Church of Rome was formally in the right; so, no valid reason could be assigned for continuing in the Anglican, and no valid objections could be taken to joining the Roman." In 1843, Newman published a retraction of his previous anti-Catholic statements.

Still, one doubt persisted on Newman's mind. For years, he had defended what he calls "the dogmatic principle," or the principle of absolute truth, through the *Via Media*, and many had listened. "It is not easy, humanly speaking, to wind up an Englishman to a dogmatic level," Newman admits, and thus to persuade so many that the *Via Media* was preferable to theological liberalism was quite an accomplishment. But, "in breaking the *Via* to pieces," Newman wondered, "would not dogmatic faith be broken up altogether?"

On October 9, 1845, Father Dominic Barberi, a missionary priest from Italy, received Newman into the Catholic Church. Newman left Oxford in 1846 and was not to visit it for at least 30 years. The next year, Newman went to Rome and was ordained a Catholic priest.

--Dinesh D'Souza, edited by Patrick J. Hession