

Dear Grace

Answers to Catholic Questions

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**Dear Grace,
My Protestant friends say that I should only follow what the Bible says and that Catholic tradition is not from God. What do I say to them?**

You need to tell them that Catholicism is not a religion of the Bible alone. This is one important area where we differ strikingly from our Protestant brothers and sisters in Christ who believe in “*Sola Scriptura*” – the Bible alone as authority. Jesus’ last command to his apostles before ascending to heaven was that they “go out and make disciples of all the nations ...teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.” He even added a promise – “I am with you always, until the end of the world” (Matthew 28: 19-20). At that point, Jesus did not give them a book to follow. That “book,” which contained the New Law – the New Testament – did not even begin to be written until 50-100 AD.

Some people have a tendency to treat the Bible as if it is a book that simply fell down from the sky one day, all written and bound just as we see it today. In reality, however, it was not until the year 393 AD that the books of the New Testament were accepted and approved by the Catholic Church at the Council of Hippo. For nearly 400 years, the early Church did not yet have an approved New Testament. So, what or who did the Church (the followers of Christ) follow for those first 400 years? It was the teaching of the apostles!... those whom Jesus had left in charge of His Church, telling them that He would be with them to the end.

Therefore, what Jesus left on earth to complete his mission was the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit. This oral teaching is what the Catholic Church calls Tradition with a capital “T.” It comes from the Latin word *tradere*, which means, “to hand down.” The

apostles handed down what they received from Christ Himself and Christ was God. Another important fact that many do not have clear is that for the first three-fourths of the entire history of Christianity, the only Christian Church was the Catholic Church. It was at the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century that the great division occurred – one that still remains to be healed.

Jesus told his disciples: "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me" (Luke 10:16). This oral teaching was accepted by Christians, just as they accepted the written teaching that came to them later. The Church, in the persons of the apostles, was given the authority to teach by Christ; the Church would be his representative. That is why He commissioned them, saying, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

It is the firm belief of the Catholic Church that God has revealed Himself to His creation through both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, and that these are interpreted by the only authoritative and authentic interpreter of the Word of God – the Church. The Bible itself tells us that the Church is “the pillar and foundation of truth” (Timothy 3:15). Why would it say that so clearly if it were the Bible alone that we should follow? Yes, the Bible is at the heart of our faith, but we have more than the “written” Word of God. In fact, John states for us that there are so many things that Jesus did, but if these were to be written down, the whole world could not contain all the books that would have to be written (John 21:25). We are truly blessed with our rich Sacred Tradition.

To fully understand the role of Tradition in the Church, one must study Church history. It is all there, and for many it would be a real eye-opener.

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