

## Reflections on *Sola Scriptura* and Catholic Tradition

By Dave Armstrong defending [\*Crossing the Tiber\*](#)

Dave Armstrong's Website is [Biblical Evidence for Catholicism](#)

All adherents of a Christian view who attempt to defend it utilize Scripture in that regard. All Christian parties reverence Holy Scripture and accept its inspiration and unquestioned authority. If a Catholic, in defending his views, doesn't cite Scripture to support his opinions (or change of heart, in the case of a convert), then it is said that Catholics hate the Scripture to such an extent (or are so ignorant of it) that they don't even *cite* it as evidence for their side, etc. Moreover, it is often maintained that the Catholic Church has always *suppressed* the Bible and vernacular translations, etc. (false charges also, as I document on my Scripture and Tradition page).

But if a Catholic holds to the inerrancy of Scripture (as they should, since their Church teaches this), and believes that the Bible is entirely consistent with Catholic doctrine (as all Christians who value Scripture believe about their own views), then we hear the charge of eisegesis and special pleading, because (when it comes right down to it), the critic of Catholicism *knows* (and assumes that everyone *else* "knows") that Scripture doesn't support Catholicism!

But what do these sorts of "arguments" *prove*, anyway? Exactly nothing. It is a form of the "your dad's uglier than mine" tactic of schoolchildren. It is obvious that the discussion boils down to competing interpretations of Scripture. Protestants ought to respect such a biblical and hermeneutic discussion, given that they are perpetually arguing amongst themselves over that very thing. So why pick on Catholics who hold to a different interpretation of various biblical passages, as if they are especially prone to eisegesis and an alleged "tortured hermeneutic"?

I would submit that the standard Protestant views involve much more biblical difficulty and contradiction than Catholic ones, but that is another whole series of discussions on individual doctrines. As for Catholics depending on Church Tradition; well, of course we do; it is part of our system (and the Bible's outlook - so we would argue - far from contradicting it). But we are consistent in our own views, whereas Protestants supposedly eschew all "tradition" and stick to the Bible Alone, all the while accepting (consciously or not) all sorts of strictly man-made traditions handed down to them by their fathers Luther or Calvin or the Anabaptist Founders.

Scripture Alone falls into this category. There is nothing more "merely traditional" or arbitrary or less apostolic than beliefs which spring into existence 1500 years after Christ, whose exponents have the chutzpah to describe as "apostolic" and "biblical" viewpoints and doctrines, even though it can't be documented that anyone of note believed them for those intervening 1500 years. This forces many Protestants to assert the quasi-Mormon notion of a very early and widespread - almost completely victorious - *apostasy* or "falling away" or "radical corruption" of Christendom, until such time as Martin Luther broke through the darkness and brought the glorious gospel back again.

Catholics and Protestants agree that the biblical argument for the Trinity is largely an indirect, deductive one. That is clear in the very structure of my extensive paper on the subject (largely written in 1982, as an evangelical): *The Holy Trinity: Biblical Proofs*. At least it is stated in a cursory way in Matthew 28:19 (not a disputed passage in terms of manuscripts, as far as I know):

- *Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (NRSV)*

But when it comes to *sola Scriptura*, no similarly descriptive verse can be found - not even anywhere close. I think the equivalent (if it in fact existed) would read something like:

- *Do not take heed of any written or oral traditions, as sufficient for the purposes of doctrine or action, since the written word of God in Holy Scripture is your ultimate and final authority, above any church or tradition.*

No such verse even remotely approaching this can be found (and many directly contradicting it, *can* be cited). Why would such a direct statement *not* be in the Bible, if this principle is so supremely important? Verses simply reiterating the trustworthiness and goodness of Scripture are not enough to prove this case. They are only compelling in a logically circular way: they *harmonize* with a *sola Scriptura* outlook, but they do not *establish* it or provide any evidence in favor of it, for they are just as harmonious with the Catholic view also.

Instead, Scripture informs us (RSV; emphases added):

- 1 Corinthians 11:2 *I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the **traditions** even as I have delivered them to you.*
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15 . . . *stand firm and hold to the **traditions** which you were taught by us, either by **word of mouth**, or by letter.*
- 2 Thessalonians 3:6 . . . *keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the **tradition** that you received from us.*

Tradition in the Bible may be either written or oral. It implies that the writer (in the above instances St. Paul) is not expressing his own peculiar viewpoints, but is delivering a message received from someone else (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 11:23). The importance of the tradition does not rest in its *form* but in its *content*.

- 1 Thessalonians 2:13 . . . *when you received the word of God which you **heard** from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God . . .*
- 1 Timothy 3:15 . . . *the **church** of the living God, the **pillar and bulwark of the***

*truth.*

Other Bible translations render *bulwark* alternately as *ground*, *foundation*, or *support*.

In his two letters to Timothy, St. Paul makes some fascinating remarks about the importance of oral tradition:

- 2 Timothy 1:13-14 ***Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me . . . guard the truth which has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.***
- 2 Timothy 2:2 ***And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.***

St. Paul says that Timothy is not only to receive and *follow the pattern of his oral teaching*, in addition to his *written instruction*, but to teach others the same. The Catholic Church seeks to do this with regard to the entire “Deposit of faith” (or, the *apostles’ teaching* - Acts 2:42), in accordance with St. Paul.

Therefore, the commonly-asserted dichotomy between the gospel and tradition, or between the Bible and tradition is unbiblical itself and must be discarded by the truly biblically-minded person as (quite ironically) a corrupt *tradition of men*. We deny that *sola Scriptura* is taught even *indirectly*, analogously to the Trinity.

Protestants are so entrenched in their *sola Scriptura* presupposition (like a fish in water) that they oftentimes cannot -- literally -- grasp any critique of it. Yet it is logically elementary. The Bible simply does not pit itself against either Church or Apostolic Tradition. All are clearly of a piece, as unarguably seen above. Everyone must try to step outside their own premises momentarily, if they are to hope to understand an opposition viewpoint. That is just as true of Catholics as it is of Protestants or any other view, religious or otherwise. It may be painful and difficult, but this is the necessary requirement of logical, constructive discourse, including biblical discussion.

An example of a verse a Protestant might produce as a “proof” of *sola Scriptura* would be Isaiah 40:8: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.” Indeed, the Word of God does stand forever, but this passage does not say that it stands *alone*, in alleged dichotomy against Church and Apostolic Tradition. That is the hidden assumption which makes Protestants think such verses are compelling for their viewpoint. They are not. I could state that “the Washington Monument stands forever.” Would that mean that there are no *other* monuments or edifices? I could say that “the [United States] Constitution stands forever [as an American legal document].” Would that therefore mean that there would be no Congress to enact new laws in accordance with it, or President to preside over the executive branch of government, or a Supreme Court to interpret whether such laws are harmonious with the Constitution? Of course not.

Likewise, Scripture does not rule out a Church and Tradition, by which *it* is interpreted as well. That's why the Church Fathers always appealed not solely to Holy Scripture, but to the history of doctrine and apostolic succession, which for them was the clincher and *coup de grace*, in arguments against the heretics. Groups such as the Arians, on the other hand, believed in Scripture Alone, *precisely* because they couldn't trace their late-arriving doctrines back past Arius (d.c. 336). So if there is an analogy here (in terms of authority structure alone) it is as follows:

- Arians-----> Protestants
- Fathers-----> Catholic Church

Reasoning such as this (his own, in fact, having previously written a book about the Arians) was what led John Henry Cardinal Newman to accept the Catholic Church as the Church established by Christ, because its formal, authoritative principle had never changed, whereas Protestantism involved a radical, a-historical change of principle, which he deemed a "corruption" rather than a legitimate development. And reading his book *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* was what led me (and many, many others) to the Catholic Church as well.

Likewise, we see the utter inadequacy, as a "proof" of this passage: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). This is clearly fallacious in terms of *sola Scriptura*, because Jesus' words are not *confined* to Scripture, according to that same Scripture, and - I would say - common sense itself. Jesus was not a "talking Bible machine" (verses: RSV):

- John 20:30 *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.*
- John 21:25 *But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*
- Acts 1:2-3 . . . *the apostles . . . To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. {see also Luke 24:15-16,25-27}*

The most frequently-used "proof" is 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God . . ." Again, there is no disagreement from us that Scripture is inspired. That is a *non sequitur* in Catholic-Protestant discussions (except where theologically liberal parties are concerned, on both sides). The *official* Catholic record in upholding *that* truth is far better than the Protestant one, I dare say. It was liberal Protestantism which gave us the legacy of Higher Criticism and scholars mercilessly tearing down the Bible (now even to the extent of asserting that it sanctions sodomy, abortion, etc.). This verse proves nothing whatsoever in terms of *sola Scriptura*.

We are told that there are "countless" verses of this sort which -- taken together -- prove

*sola Scriptura*. I have seen a great many brought forth myself, in my many dialogues on the subject, and have refuted them with little difficulty, as they almost always involved the same elementary logical fallacy.

The Bible certainly *is* a unique revelation -- again, no argument from us there -- but it is not the only *authority* for the Christian. It guides the Church and Tradition, which in turn preserve it, but they are all harmonious, and do not contradict each other (as is plainly evident in reading Fathers such as St. Augustine or St. Irenaeus). Christian truth and authority is a three-legged stool; take any one leg away and it falls over. Apostolic Tradition is true and biblical precisely because it is protected from error by God just as Holy Scripture itself is. The Protestant believes, in faith (and quite rightly) that Scripture is inspired; God-breathed, and therefore preserved from error by God, even though he used fallible, sinful men to write it.

The Catholic agrees, but also asserts and believes that God can protect His Church from error as well, even though he uses fallible, sinful men for *that* purpose also. And if sinful men such as David and Peter could write *inspired* Scripture: the very words of God, then it is utterly plausible that God could grant the gift of *infallibility* (far lesser in degree and kind than inspiration) to men in certain well-defined situations. The second scenario is easier to believe than the first. Yet somehow Protestants have no problem adhering to the first, while vehemently denying the second proposition as “impossible,” “implausible,” “unbiblical,” etc. Papal, conciliar, and ecclesiastical infallibility are separate discussions altogether. The reader can consult my Church and Papacy pages for discussion on those closely-related, yet distinct topics.

Tradition, like the Bible, or Word of God, is also presented as immutable in Holy Scripture (in the sense that *all* truth is immutable), since it is spoken of as delivered “once and for all” to the saints (Jude 3). Likewise,  $2 + 2 = 4$  stands forever. So does  $a = a$ , and the theory of gravity (as long as this present universe exists). Every created soul, for that matter, “stands forever,” as they will never cease being. The preached gospel stood forever as truth before it was ever encapsulated in Scriptural form. “Tradition,” “word of God,” and “gospel” are synonymous in Paul’s mind. It is foolish and unbiblical to even try to separate them. Yes, we have the magnificent, extraordinary Bible and it is written down, and uniquely inspired, and has been maintained in its textual purity (so we know from evidences like the Dead Sea Scrolls), yet its *interpretation* in a doctrinal sense is obviously an ongoing process, as indicated by verses such as John 16:13a:

- *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth . . .*

And Jesus has promised that His Church will always prevail, and will not defect from the truth (Matthew 16:18), and Paul has stated that it is the “pillar and bulwark of truth” (I Timothy 3:15). That ought to be sufficient to establish our contentions, but since Protestants can’t even agree as to what the Church *is*, let alone which variant amongst themselves (if any) can lay claim to *being* the Church, they must -- of necessity -- downplay the notion of **the** (visible) Church, because it only condemns their own lack of unity and true ecclesiastical authority.

Therefore, they adopt Scripture Alone (for what other choice do they have, given their internal chaos?), and the unbiblical notion of a *merely* invisible church of the elect and regenerate. That *might* be fine and dandy if these were scriptural concepts to begin with, but since they are not, then Protestants -- ironically -- have adopted unbiblical man-made traditions as their guiding principles. The weak and groundless nature of Protestant “proof texts” for *sola Scriptura* bears this out more than a thousand essays like this ever could.

We did need the written form of revelation, but we also need the authoritative *interpreter*, just as all written documents require. The self-evident “clearness” of Scripture is a myth. Nothing illustrates this better than the hundreds of Protestant sects. This is what necessitates a real, binding teaching authority. Yet Protestants still insist on proving this claim that the self-evidently “clear” Scripture can serve as this supposedly sufficient “authority.”

Apostolic Tradition in the early Church was not strictly word-of-mouth because inspired, revelational Holy Scripture was there from the onset of Christianity (though its *exact* parameters were disputed for 350 years) as the Guide. All things worked together. The Fathers appealed to Scripture (just as all Protestants do) but also (and finally) to the apostolic Tradition (as Catholics do), since all the heretics appealed to Scripture too. The deciding factor was the history of Christian doctrine, since history and Tradition had always been a central element of both Judaism and Christianity (this was nothing new).

But on the other hand, “errant” and sinful men certainly *could* pass on inerrant truth, if indeed that was God’s intention (He being all-powerful and Sovereign over His creation), just as sinful and errant men managed to write an inspired, inerrant Bible, as God’s “agents,” as it were. Protestants just don’t have enough faith that God can preserve anything beyond His Bible. When it comes to a collective and ongoing body of men (the Church), the average Protestant balks and in effect accepts the absurd notion that God *couldn’t* preserve and protect *that*, simply because sinful men are involved. Yet they accept that very premise (sinful men being involved) concerning the Bible. So the self-contradictions multiply . . .

We deny that Scripture is *exclusive* of Church and Tradition, because **it itself** denies this, as shown above. The Bible needs to be interpreted. So the Catholic accepts in faith Catholic dogmatic pronouncements from popes and Councils. This is not essentially different from the role of Creeds and Confessions in Protestantism. The Calvinist, e.g., accepts the *Westminster Confession* as an extremely authoritative document, which possesses a *practical* infallibility, if not in a strict sense. Calvinists still refer to it (along with Calvin’s *Institutes*) in a magisterial, almost reverential fashion, and I don’t see them disputing its authority. Likewise with the Lutherans and the *Augsburg Confession* and *Book of Concord*, etc.

Now, how is this intrinsically different in principle (or at least in practical outcome, at the very least, which is more what I am referring to) from the Catholic’s adherence to Trent

and Vatican I and II? All Christians have their authoritative traditions and a lens through which they view Scripture. It is foolish to deny this. We are up-front about our first principles. Many Protestants, however, seem to want to play epistemological and hermeneutical games, as if no one else can see the evident logical fallacies and lack of biblical support involved in their so doing.

The usual Protestant fallacious premise in this discussion is that Tradition and the Bible are *inherently opposed* to each other, so that if one exists, the other is unnecessary and disposable (one of many many Protestant false and unbiblical dichotomies). In other words, many Protestants axiomatically assume the (false) premise that the Bible precludes Tradition. Therefore, they reason that in the opposite scenario of Tradition being present and authoritative, the Bible therefore necessarily becomes **unnecessary**. But that is no more true or biblical than its logical opposite. We crush this false dilemma by asserting that the Bible itself presupposes both Tradition and the written revelation (as well as the Church) as normative at all times, and not in any way, shape, or form opposed to each other at all. I believe that I have shown this above, in more than sufficient detail - allowing Holy Scripture to speak for itself. And it does so, in this instance, very loudly.

Protestants must, therefore, **deal with the very Scripture they place in an exclusive position**. Let Protestants show how we have misinterpreted the Scripture's teachings above. Let them render an alternative interpretation to every instance of the Bible mentioning "tradition." It's all biblical material, after all, and that is *supposedly* the "Protestant's territory." So I assume there is **some** answer (however insubstantial and insufficient in our eyes). We can hardly adopt an alternate view if our opponents fail to offer compelling answers to our biblical proof texts, as a matter of principle and intellectual honesty or duty.

We believe that public revelation ceased with the apostolic age and the completion of the Bible. We claim that the Catholic Church is the Guardian and Custodian of the apostolic tradition, or *apostle's teaching* (Acts 2:42), passed down ever since, through apostolic succession. The Church has no power to change this Tradition, only to teach it and to "oversee" its development (*not* evolution). *Sola traditio* is not a biblical doctrine any more than *sola Scriptura* is, and we desire to follow the biblical teaching, and its apostolic interpretation, as passed down faithfully for now 1970 years; preserved most fully in the Catholic Church (and incompletely to various degrees elsewhere). St. Paul did not indicate anywhere that either oral or written tradition were to cease, and -- again -- it was a simple-enough matter to underline if he had wished to emphasize such a teaching, supposedly so central and crucial for every Christian to understand.

The competing claims of the Orthodox Church are often brought up by Protestants as a disproof of the apostolic claims of either communion. Catholics accept the sacraments and ordination of Orthodoxy because it followed the same line of apostolic succession as the Western Church for the first 1000 years, then separated ecclesiologically (yet retained far more of the previous doctrines than the Protestants did when they split off). Therefore it can trace itself back to the common early Church heritage, just as feuding cousins can trace themselves back to the same grandparents, or great-grandparents, as the case may

be (i.e., common ancestry). Catholics have immense respect for our Orthodox brethren. Many of them reciprocate; some (so-called “traditionalists” and more exclusivistic jurisdictions) do not.

The difference is papal authority and the history in Rome of spotless orthodoxy through the centuries, over against all the hereies, which was not the case in the East, even before the split. Readers can peruse our arguments for the papacy if they so choose. But validity of apostolic succession through validly ordained priests and the presence of valid sacraments is a different question from who possesses the **fullness** of the apostolic deposit. Each side claims that they do, of course. I have plenty of dialogues with Orthodox and Catholic arguments on my Eastern Orthodoxy web page.

In the course of my own apologetic endeavors I have dealt with **all** the biblical arguments that have been thrown my way -- not ignoring a single one --, and I can testify that I have yet to see a single compelling biblical argument for *sola Scriptura*. Most were *immediately* and easily answerable, as they involved a simple logical fallacy or were part of a circular argument which was really no argument at all. Perhaps that is my Catholic bias (I sincerely acknowledge that possibility because I think all people have biases and presuppositions: both “good” and “bad” ones), but it is my heartfelt and firm opinion nonetheless. So I am not overly impressed by this so-called “abundance” of biblical support for this position. And -- as stated previously -- there are many biblical arguments **against** *sola Scriptura* which (in my humble opinion) are far more compelling than the “proofs” set forth in favor of this strange, peculiarly Protestant and a-historical idea.

The Protestant’s burden is to show precisely what Paul means by his *constant* (not merely one-time) usage of *tradition*, and its being *received* and *delivered*. I have shown, by much exegetical and linguistic biblical evidence, presented above (and directly below), that he and other New Testament writers mean by this *the gospel, the word of God, the faith*, etc. **They are all the same entity**. This can be clearly shown by a dozen of St. Paul’s statements to the Thessalonians *alone*:

- 1 Thessalonians 1:5 for our **gospel** came to you not only in **word**, but also in power . . .
- 1 Thessalonians 1:6 . . . *you received the word in much affliction* . . .
- 1 Thessalonians 2:2 . . . we had courage in our God to **declare** to you the **gospel** of God .
- ..
- 1 Thessalonians 2:8 . . . ready to **share** with you not only the **gospel** of God but also our own selves . . .
- 1 Thessalonians 2:9 . . . *we preached to you the gospel of God*.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:13 . . . *you received the word of God, which you heard from us*, . . .
- 1 Thessalonians 4:1 . . . *as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God* .
- ..
- 2 Thessalonians 1:8 . . . vengeance upon . . . those who do not obey the **gospel** of our Lord Jesus.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:14 To this he called you through our **gospel** . . .
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15 . . . *hold to the traditions . . . taught . . . by word of mouth or by letter*.



2 Thessalonians 3:1 . . . pray for us, that the **word of the Lord** may speed on and triumph  
. . .  
2 Thessalonians 3:6 . . . *the tradition that you received from us.*

Paul uses the words and phrases *gospel*, *tradition*, and *word of the Lord* interchangeably even in the space of just **five verses** (2 Thessalonians 2:14-3:1)!!! So it is quite biblical and Pauline to say, “we must proclaim the saving tradition,” since “tradition” and “gospel” and “word of God” are synonymous in Paul’s mind and that of the Apostles. Therefore, this broad application can’t be reduced to a single usage and limited in its meaning. A fundamental (characteristically Protestant) rule of hermeneutics is to compare Scripture with Scripture. I have done that, where *tradition (paradosis)* is concerned, and quite comprehensively.

We determine the complete extent of New Testament tradition by studying it as a whole. What Paul and Jesus teach in the New Testament books constitutes the tradition and gospel and word of the Lord. It is comprehensive; hence Jesus commands His followers, shortly before His Ascension, to baptize and make disciples, “teaching them to observe **all** that I have commanded you . . . “ (Matthew 28:20).

But beyond that, we also look to the early Church to determine what the gospel and tradition and “deposit of faith” was. The Apostles and other early Christians went out to preach to the world, and they didn’t *simply* stand and read Scripture to the crowds (though they certainly used it). What the early Church and early Fathers believed gives us a clue as to the whole extent of this New Testament tradition. They didn’t forget everything (at that early stage, they even had firsthand memory of what Jesus or His disciples had told them) as soon as the Bible was complete, c. 100. And memory was much better in that culture. It was an oral culture, where memory was cultivated from an early age. This has been documented time and again.

And of course we find virtually all the Catholic distinctives present from the beginning (episcopal church government -- bishops -- , a literal Eucharist, baptismal regeneration, a priesthood, infused - not imputed - justification, apostolic succession, adherence to Tradition as well as Scripture, penance, prayers for the dead, the papacy, the communion of saints, Mary as the ever-virgin, Mother of God, and New Eve, a visible Church with councils {Jerusalem Council of Acts 15}, etc.). Doctrines develop, but they are present in kernel or fuller form from the beginning, whereas dozens of Protestant distinctives are nowhere to be found until more than 1400 years later (which scarcely suggests that they were *apostolic*).

Three Protestant Bible Dictionaries agree with my basic contentions with regard to the *nature of biblical tradition*:

- Apostolic teaching - which included facts about Christ, their theological importance, and their ethical implications for Christian living - was described as tradition (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15). It had divine sanction (1 Cor 11:23; Gal 1:11-16) . . . Jesus rejected tradition, but only in the sense of human accretion

lacking divine sanction (Mk 7:3-9).

{Douglas, J.D., ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, rev. ed., 1978, pp. 981-982}

- Appeals to authoritative Church tradition are found already in the earliest New Testament writings, the letters of Paul. Occasionally explicit reference is made to some material as traditional, including a particular set of ethical instructions (2 Thess 3:6), a set eucharistic formula (1 Cor 11:23-6), and a standardized recital of the death, burial, resurrection, and postresurrection appearances of Christ (1 Cor 15:3-7). Also recorded are more generalized references to Church traditions (1 Cor 11:2; Phil 4:9; 2 Thess 2:15; cf. Rom 6:17; Gal 1:9). . . .
- The New Testament writings were first valued not as inspired Scripture but as deposits of apostolic tradition in fixed written form, to be interpreted authoritatively by the bishops and according to the rule of faith . . .
- Jesus did not totally reject the oral tradition . . . His own interpretation of the Torah in the Sermon on the Mount employs the scribal principle of ‘building a fence about the Torah’ - not simply by restricting external behavior more than the written law, but by pointing out that sinful interior urgings in themselves violate what the Torah seeks to control (Matt 5:21-2,27-8,38-9).

{Myers, Allen C., ed., *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987 ~English rev. of *Bijbelse Encyclopedie*, ed. W.H. Gispen, Kampen, Netherlands: J.H. Kok, rev. ed., 1975}, tr. Raymond C. Togtman & Ralph W. Vunderink, pp. 1014-1015}

- Christian tradition in the New Testament therefore consists of the following three elements: a) the facts of Christ (1 Cor 11:23; 15:3; Lk 1:2 . . . ); b) the theological interpretation of those facts; see, e.g., the whole argument of 1 Cor 15; c) the manner of life which flows from them (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6-7). In Jude 3 the ‘faith . . . once for all delivered’ (RSV) covers all three elements (cf. Rom 6:17).
- Christ was made known by the apostolic testimony to Him; the apostles therefore claimed that their tradition was to be received as authoritative (1 Cor 15:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6). . . This combination of eyewitness testimony and Spirit-guided witness produced a ‘tradition’ that was a true and valid complement to the Old Testament Scriptures. So 1 Tim 5:18 and 2 Pet 3:16 place apostolic tradition alongside Scripture and describe it as such.

{Douglas, J.D., ed., *The New Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962, p. 1291}

These sources are quite in accord with my viewpoint on what *tradition* **is** (not, of course, with regard to its particulars, or our claims that it contains what are now “Catholic

distinctives”). Presently, we are discussing *tradition generally*, or *generically*. What it *includes* in all its particulars is another entire discussion. That requires biblical examination of each and every doctrine, and I do just that on my website, which is called Biblical Evidence for Catholicism.

Christianity is intrinsically historical. Many Protestants seem to take this dim view of Church history and the Fathers. But Christianity is historical at its very core, as Judaism before it was. It was confirmed by eyewitness testimony of miracles, and Jesus’ Resurrection; very much historical criteria of proof, credibility, and plausibility. Without the Catholic Church and Tradition and Fathers we would not have the Bible we have today. Canonization (just like the authorship of the Bible) was a very human process.

The history of the Church is a continuation of Jesus’ Incarnation. God took on flesh and became man. After our Lord’s Ascension, the Body of Christ, the Church, continued the physical presence of Jesus on the earth, in a sense. God works with men; men are physical; the Church they belong to is physical in many ways (this gets into sacramentalism as well: another huge discussion, but see the many biblical proofs in my paper: Sacramentalism). Furthermore, it is common knowledge (with the slightest study on the subject) that in Catholic, and Orthodox theology, the Fathers are not regarded as individually infallible. Even popes are infallible only when they authoritatively proclaim, not always.

The Catholic Church is the Guardian and Custodian of the Bible and Tradition. It is not equal to it, nor does it have any right or power to change God’s Tradition, the Gospel, or the Bible. Protestants, on the other hand, thought nothing of overturning doctrines which had been continuously believed and passed-down for 1500 years. *This* is indeed the usurpation of Scripture and harmonious Apostolic Tradition.

Much is made in Protestant contra-Catholic polemics of the necessity of the Catholic to conform to Catholic dogma, thus making open-minded, fair-minded, truly biblical exegesis impossible. E.g., Dr. Eric Svendsen, a leading (published) anti-Catholic, wrote in a paper on his website (<http://www.ntrmin.org/cai3.htm> -- emphasis added):

**. . . The Roman Catholic “exegete” cannot engage in true exegesis of the text,** because not only does the plain reading of the Bible end up contradicting Roman Catholic teachings--which the Roman Catholic exegete is not allowed to do--but also because **someone who is committed to the teachings of Rome cannot be a true child of God, and cannot likely be a recipient of the Holy Spirit’s illumination.** For in order to uphold the teachings of Rome one must of necessity reject God’s truth as revealed in His word; and he who rejects God’s truth “makes Him a liar” (1John 5:9-10). A precarious position, to be sure; and one that I as an exegete do not envy. At the end of the day, . . . **apologists who attempt to defend Roman Catholic teachings do not--and cannot--engage in true exegesis of the biblical text;** rather they must devote their energies to finding ways that the plain reading of the Bible doesn’t really have to be taken at face value, and therefore doesn’t really contradict Roman Catholic teaching. That’s what they have to do; they have no other choice.

I've dealt with this sort of charge elsewhere. At the moment, I am interested in examining what the *Protestant* does in this regard. Well, oftentimes, Joe Q. Protestant is an atomistic individual who (when all's said and done) follows his own theological inclination wherever it may lead. There are plenty of "vortex's of error" (one of my correspondent's terms) in Protestant ranks. There must be, because the mere existence of contradiction and competing theologies and Christianities logically *requires* that someone is in error. At least individual Catholics consciously acknowledge and submit to an entity and Tradition far greater than one frail and fallible human being. At least Catholics acknowledge that the Holy Spirit has been talking to a lot of holy men and women for 2000 years (not just "me"), and that they may have learned a few things, a little bit in all that time that we can spiritually benefit from.

G.K. Chesterton stated that "tradition is the democracy of the dead." Protestantism, on the other hand, is more like the "dictatorship of the individual." The wheel (theoretically, following the principles of private judgment and *sola Scriptura*) could be re-invented with every Protestant. Every Protestant is his own pope, and assumes more authority for himself than any pope ever dreamt of in his wildest dreams.

The Catholic Church is concerned with guarding the apostolic deposit in its entirety, not requiring its members to believe a certain way about particular Bible verses. The Church declares infallible doctrines, not infallible interpretations of individual verses (there are very few of those).