

# HART'S CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

## CHAPTER II

### NATURE, GROUNDS, AND RULE OF FAITH

#### Grounds of belief

We base our judgments and opinions on many grounds. Some truths, of their very nature, are **self-evident** and necessary: for example, when once we understand the meaning of the terms, we cannot conceive how 3 added to 7 could give us other than 10; or picture to ourselves a circle the radii of which were not equal; or consider the whole as anything but greater than its part. Other things we know to be true from **experience** — that is, from the evidence of our own senses: while, again, there are many things which we do not know of ourselves, but which we accept on the authority of other people. Now, if our belief rests on the testimony of man, who may err, it is **human** or **historical faith**; if it is based on the testimony of God, who cannot err, it is **Divine faith** or faith as a Theological Virtue.

#### Divine faith

Divine Faith, then, in the words of the Catechism, is "*a supernatural gift of God which enables us to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed.*" It is a virtue infused by the Holy Ghost into our souls at Baptism, by which we believe, firmly and without hesitation, all that God has revealed, and, through His Church, proposes for our belief. "*Faith is the evidence of things that appear not*" (Heb. xi. 1); and, consequently, knowledge gained by experience, or in any other way, is not Faith, but merely practical wisdom: "*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that, not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God*" (Eph. ii. 8).

#### Ground of Divine Faith

The ground or motive of our Faith is the Divine veracity; and what makes our Faith **divine** is believing the truths of Religion because God, who is Truth itself, and who cannot deceive us, has revealed them to us. What He has revealed, then, must be true whether we understand it or not.

#### Oneness of Faith

The truths of our Faith, as we gather from the words of our Lord Himself, we are to learn from the Church which He came on earth to establish: "*Going therefore, teach ye all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world*" (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). "*He that heareth you, heareth Me, and he that*

*despiseth you, despiseth Me*" (Luke x. 16). And as there is but **one** Lord, there can be but **one Faith**: "*One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism*" (Eph. iv. 5); whence it follows that there can be but **one true Church**, or exponent of that Faith: "*He that holdeth not this unity of the Church, doth he think he holdeth the Faith?*" asks St. Cyprian. And if at any time other faiths arise, then those who profess them begin by falling away from the one only Faith, and generally end in having no faith at all.

### **Necessity of Faith**

Moreover, to show us that Faith is a matter of supreme importance, and that we cannot afford to neglect it without the gravest consequences to ourselves, our Lord solemnly warns us: "*He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned*" (Mark xvi. 16). And St. Paul, writing to the Hebrews, tells them: "*Without faith it is impossible to please God*" (Heb. xi. 6). If what we believe, or whether we believe or not, were of no consequence, it would not have been necessary for God to reveal a Religion; but "*this is the judgment: because the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light*" (John iii. 19). "*He that believeth not the Son, maketh Him [i.e. God] a liar*" (1 John v. 10). From what has already been said we can now see the force of those simple words of the Catechism, "*I am to know what God has revealed by the testimony, teaching, and authority of the Catholic Church.*"

### **A Rule of Faith Necessary**

And since Faith is necessary for salvation, Christ must have left us a certain means of arriving at a knowledge of the Truth, a Rule which must enable all, without exception, to come infallibly to the Truth; for He Himself tells us: "*He that believeth not shall be condemned*" (Mark xvi. 16). And this Rule that He has laid down for us must be **plain**, that all may understand it; it must be **universal**, that is, it must extend to every revealed truth; and it must be **certain**, that all may follow it without hesitation or doubt.

### **Rule of Scripture not plain**

Our Rule of Faith is the teaching of the Catholic Church; and all other Rules of Faith, as we shall presently see, are unsatisfactory. The Catholic Church, which Christ came down from heaven to establish, must be the only true Church, since He, who is Truth itself, could not teach contradictory doctrines. But to take Scripture, or the Written Word of God,<sup>1</sup> as the only Rule of Faith, as

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<sup>1</sup> Holy Scripture consists of a number of writings, composed by different persons and at various times. Gathered together they form the Bible (Greek, *biblia*, the books), and they differ from all other books in that their authors were all inspired by the Holy Ghost. Those written before the birth of our Lord form the Old Testament, the others the New. The former contains the

some do, breaks the rule of **plainness**, since in all ages there have been countless numbers who could not read; while, even among the learned, many have, been unable to agree as to the true sense of some of the most important passages. St. Peter himself in Scripture tells us that in St. Paul's Epistles there "*are some things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction*" (2 Pet. iii. 16). How dangerous, then, is the position of those who rely on their own private interpretations of the Sacred Writings!

### **Rule of Scripture not universal**

Neither does the Rule of Scripture alone satisfy the second quality, that of **universality**, since the Scriptures do not include every revealed truth. Are we not in Scripture told to observe the **seventh day** of the week, or Saturday, as the day of rest? Yet all Christians observe the **first day**, or Sunday. Scripture commands us to abstain from things strangled and from blood (Acts xv. 20); but this command no longer binds. No mention is made in Scripture of infant baptism. The Scriptures do not tell us how many Sacred Books there are, nor what Books are authentic: we look to the Church for guidance in all these matters.

### **Rule of Scripture not certain**

Nor is the Rule of Scripture alone a **certain** rule. Those who follow this Rule often appeal to Scripture to prove contradictory doctrines; and each is satisfied that he alone has hit upon the genuine meaning: hence the innumerable sects that have arisen from following private judgment, exercised on Scripture, as their Rule of Faith.

### **Catholic Rule plain**

The Catholic Rule, on the contrary, is suited to all, both to those who cannot read and to those who can. Such passages in Scripture as are described by St. Peter as "*hard to be understood,*" and from which some wrest a meaning "*to their own destruction,*" are infallibly explained by the teaching of the Church. The

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history of the Patriarchs and of God's chosen people, the Israelites or Jews, as well as the Psalms, several books of moral teaching, and many, prophetic books. The latter consists of the four Gospels, or Lives of our Lord, written by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, the Acts of the Apostles by St. Luke, many Epistles or Letters, mostly by St. Paul, and the "Apocalypse" or Revelation of St. John. The books of the Old Testament were carefully preserved by the Jews, and the Catholic Church finally gathered together the books of both Testaments, and declared them to be the Written Word of God.

Rule, moreover, is in perfect keeping with the command of our Lord to His Apostles, "*Teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20).

### **Catholic Rule universal**

The Catholic Rule, too, comprises the **whole** Word of God, and includes all that God has revealed, whether by Angels, or by the Prophets, or by His own Divine Son, Jesus Christ. St. John the Evangelist himself tells us in his Gospel that it would require a great many books to record all the various doings and sayings of our Divine Lord: "*Many other signs did Jesus in the sight of His disciples that are not written in this book . . . which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written*" (John xx. and xxi). But all these things our Lord included in His injunction to His Apostles when He bade them teach the observance of whatsoever He had commanded them.

### **Catholic Rule certain**

Catholic Rule is also a **certain** rule. "*I will ask the Father,*" said our Lord to His Apostles, "*and He shall give you **another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever; the Spirit of Truth**, whom the world cannot receive . . . but you shall know Him because He shall abide with you, and shall be in you*" (John xiv. 16, 17). "*But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you*" (John xiv. 26). In the above words, then, we are promised by our Lord the **perpetual presence** of the Spirit of Truth in His Church; for it is evident that this Spirit of Truth was promised not only to the Apostles, but also to their successors through all generations. Hence it is that, in every age and clime, the Holy Ghost constantly watches over the Catholic Church, and preserves her both from the open and the secret attacks of her enemies. Now what the Apostles received from Christ they handed on to their successors in the ministry, and so on from generation to generation; and in this way has come down to us "*the Faith once delivered to the saints*" (Jude i. 3).

### **Tradition explained**

But to understand fully the nature of this Rule of Faith, we must first of all clearly grasp the meaning of the term **Tradition** as employed by the Catholic Church. By Tradition is meant the handing down of those revealed truths which the Apostles taught, but which are not contained in the Scriptures: "*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle*" (2 These. ii. 14). Hence we see, says St. Chrysostom, that the Apostles did not, by writing, deliver all the things that were to be believed, but many things by word of mouth only, which have been

perpetuated by Tradition; and these traditions (afterwards committed to writing), no less than the writings of the Apostles, are deserving of faith.

Indeed, the Apostles were not commissioned by Christ to write at all, but to go and **preach** the doctrine which He had taught them: "*Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature*" (Mark xvi. 15). And St. John: "*Many other signs did Jesus in the sight of His disciples, which are not written in this book*" (John xx. 30). The Bible, then, does not contain the whole revealed Word of God, nor does it anywhere tell us what Books are Divine, or their number. Indeed, were it not for Tradition, we should not have a Bible at all.

Divine Revelation, then, has come down to us **partly by writing**—that is, by the Holy Scriptures or the Bible; **partly by word of mouth**—that is, by Tradition. And this Tradition has been handed down by the Church without interruption from the time of the Apostles, who taught what they had received from Christ, and passed it on to their successors. This handing down, too, has been partly by word of mouth, and partly, though not written by the Apostles, by the writings of the Fathers, the Decrees of Councils, and the rites of the Catholic Church. "*And the things which thou hast heard of me by many witnesses, the same commend to faithful men, who shall be fit to teach others also*" (2 Tim. ii. 2).

### **The Catholic Rule of Faith**

Our rule of Faith, then, is **Scripture** and **Tradition**, both infallibly interpreted by the Catholic Church, "*the pillar and ground of truth*" (1 Tim. iii. 15). The Church tells us what truths God has revealed or made known to us, and we accept them on the authority of God. Nor does the Church ever make a new Article of Faith, but, whenever any of her doctrines have been seriously attacked or called in question, she has declared this or that truth to have been revealed from the beginning and taught in all the ages of the Church.