Truth: Talk 1

**How can I know the Roman Catholic Church teaches the truth about God if I don’t trust the Church or its priests?**

Our topic tonight is two-fold. Rather than Robert and I taking two different tacks on the same huge topic, we are dividing the question into its parts. I will discuss “How can I know the Roman Catholic Church teaches the truth about God” and he will discuss the aspect how one’s lack of trust in the Church or its priests affects one’s belief in what the Church teaches.

Before I begin, I want to clarify one point. The topic is a bit misleading because the theme is Truth, but the question is really about credibility. The questions given are not “Why should I believe that there is absolute truth, but why should I believe what this particular institution tells me is truth? And especially, why should I believe when I don’t trust the institution in the first place? In my mind, this question is really about Faith, then, not truth.

This being said, I will NOT be addressing the question about whether there is truth, but about why I should believe the Church’s claims. There seem to be two parts to this question: 1) Why should I need someone to tell me what truth is (Why can’t I discover it on my own; shouldn’t it be obvious)? 2) Why should I believe in the Church in particular? What claim can it possibly have to possessing the truth?

So first: Why should I need someone to tell me what truth is? Why can’t I discover it on my own?

Let me begin with a distinction: natural truth and revealed truth.

Truth exists and is knowable through reason (this is the part I’m assuming given the questions of the evening. We can talk about that more if anyone wants[[1]](#footnote-1)). We see this most clearly, perhaps, when we study mathematics, or even when we read murder mysteries. Isn’t the fun of a mystery the fact that there is an answer? That the truth (who REALLY killed Mr. Greene in the library and how) can come to light, can be known by us?

But here’s the trouble: we are not big enough to grasp the entirety of truth through reason alone. Why? Because we have limited minds, as we have all found out one time or another. So why should I need someone to tell me what truth is? Because I’m not big enough to come to it myself! Who is? Who can fully comprehend truth? Who can speak with utmost reliability on the fullness of truth? Well, Truth himself. And our name for Truth Himself is God.

How does he reveal to us that part of truth our minds couldn’t reason to. The most obvious one is the direct way, as when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush. God speaks from on high: “I AM WHO AM”.

Well, this brings us to the second question I asked at the beginning: Why should I believe that what the Church says is true, especially when she is speaking about truth itself who is fully capable of revealing itself in the first place? Why would God, Truth itself, bother with any other way of communicating with us than the most efficient, direct way? Especially (as Robert will discuss) when the Church is so full of corrupt humans?

Well, this comes down to an issue of Faith. In other words, when Truth himself says things like

* “You are Peter and upon this Rock I will build my Church and **the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.** (Mt. 16:18)”
* “**And whatsoever** you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Mt. 18:18)”
* “you, therefore, must go out, making disciples of all nations, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, 20**teaching them to observe** all the commandments which I have given you. And behold I am with you all through the days that are coming, until the consummation of the world. (Mt. 28:19-20)”

We have, then, reasonable certainty that he meant us to have absolute assurance in the Church. But of course, this is not a mathematical, rational, certainty. If it were, we are back to our original problem of suddenly being able to entirely grasp the Truth, which makes us equal to that which is bigger than us.

But WHY should God insist upon revealing himself to us indirectly? Sure it might be reasonable, but isn’t it unnecessary? Yes. And this is the virtue of Faith. This is the part that is accepted on the reliability of Truth Himself. As St. Thomas says, “Truth Himself speaks truly, else there’s nothing true.” God has clearly stated that it is so, and we can’t fully understand why, but we assent to it. This is why we refer to the assent of Faith. Faith is not in opposition to reason, ignoring it, or stifling it. Faith and Reason, as Pope John Paul says are “two-wings of a dove on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth” (Fides et Ratio)

--5:15--

One final distinction must be made. It is important to make a distinction between discipline and dogma. I will explain why. Here is a clear explanation of the difference:

There are two…kinds of laws in the Church - those which Our Lord gave it and those which it made itself. Our Lord left His Church free to make certain laws, just as they would be needed. It has always exercised this power, and made laws to suit the "***circumstances of the place or times***. Even now it does away with some of its old laws that are no longer useful [for instance, having to fast the entire day before receiving communion], and makes new ones that are more necessary. But the doctrines, the truths of faith or morals, the things we must believe and do to save our souls, it never changes and never can change [that the bread and wine become the Person of Jesus]: [the Church] may regulate some things in the application of the divine laws, but the laws themselves can never change in substance (*The Baltimore Catechism, 1891:* 126).

Dogmas cannot change because they are true. They are the revelation of the fullness of truth; they complete what man can come to know rationally. Disciplines, obviously, can change, because they are merely circumstantial rules, if you will.

Reasonableness gives steadiness to one’s faith when you don’t feel religion.

--6:40--

-Faith journey for me was realizing that the Truth is a person. I don’t just owe intellectual assent. He wants my heart. P. 14 of “I Believe in Love”.

On a personal note, the reasonableness of the Faith has always reassured me when I came up against a teaching of the Church I didn’t understand. I know it is either accessible by reason directly (murder is evil) or it is reasonable (Our Lady was assumed into heaven). There is always an explanation for a dogma. I might not know what it is, but I know if I seek, I will find a reasonable explanation. The Church is reasonable because Truth himself protects her from error. Revelation is not in conflict with my reason, but supplements, completes, it.

1. Truth exists. How do I know this? Well, let’s take the opposite statement, “Truth doesn’t exist”, or “There’s no such thing as truth”. Here’s the problem: for this statement to be true, it would, well, have to be TRUE! In other words, the statement “There is no such thing as truth” is an impossibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)