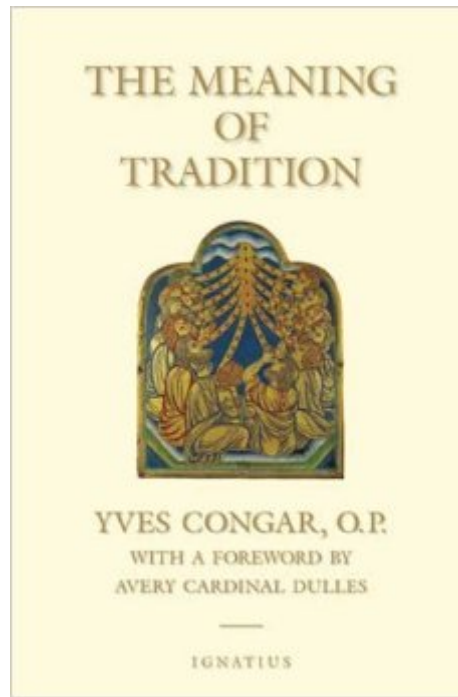


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The Meaning Of Tradition



Synopsis

Some Christians claim to reject Tradition in preference to a supposedly "Bible only" Christianity. Catholics, on the other hand, venerate Tradition, yet often without adequately understanding it. In this masterful book, the great theologian Yves Congar explains why Tradition is an inescapable aspect of a fully biblical Christian faith. He explores the various forms of Tradition and discusses the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, as well as the role of the Magisterium of the Church. *The Meaning of Tradition* clears up misconceptions held by many Evangelical Christians and even some Catholics on this important subject. Congar's study of Tradition greatly contributed to the teaching of Vatican II and to a deeper appreciation of the Church Fathers.

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Customer Reviews

As the Catholic Church in the 20th century has rebounded from its Reformation-induced four-century hunkered-down posture, one of the things it has done is to recover a gracefulness of apologetics that has become one of its greatest attributes. The works of such authors as Jean Guitton (e.g., *The Church and the Gospel* and *The Problem of Jesus*), Rene Girard (*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*), Jean-Luc Marion (*God Without Being*), Hans Urs von Balthasar, Romano Guardini, and Louis Bouyer (e.g., *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism and Word, Church, and Sacrament in Protestantism and Catholicism*)--not to mention those of John Paul II and Benedict XVI--have positioned the Church more in the stance of dialog partner than of antagonist even as she has maintained the integrity of her position as bearer of the fullness of the faith. This great little book by Yves Congar, long out of print but now once again, thankfully, available, solidifies the

Church's well-deserved reputation as a gentle warrior for truth even in relation to those who find themselves, largely through no fault of their own, outside its precincts. In my thirty-year journey to Catholicism from evangelical Protestantism, I don't ever recall encountering a formal delineation of the Catholic understanding of Tradition. Even though I had come to a position where I felt I could substantially affirm Catholic self-understandings, I can't remember ever coming face to face with the Catholic position on Tradition.

I must admit that I came to this text a Protestant with just a little knowledge of the Roman Catholic view of Tradition. However, I am a frustrated Protestant since I firmly believe that my fellow Protestants have either ignored tradition or have dismissed it altogether simply because it is a "Roman Catholic teaching." Congar's book is a very well written text, quite easy to follow and can be read by anyone from a simple lay person with no background knowledge to a well educated individual who has studied the issues for years. Having read this book I now have a much better understanding of Tradition and a better understanding where Roman Catholics and Protestants differ in this issue. Let me summarize a few of these differences in this review. At the end of chapter three Congar summarizes Tradition by declaring, "Tradition signifies, then, the Catholic spirit together with the living manner in which the whole apostolic deposit, whose subject is the Church, is transmitted." This is clearly a summation of Congar's overall view of Tradition, but is very telling and important for Protestants to grasp. Congar teaches that all the essential elements or features of Tradition are norms for the Church to in fact be the Church. This means Catholics begin with the reality in which Christianity is presented in history from Christ to the present day and how this reality is manifested in and through the Church is the underlining factor of the overall deposit presented to the Church by the apostles. Therefore, Scripture and Tradition are of equal authority.

"Tradition is memory, and memory enriches experience. If we remembered nothing it would be impossible to advance; the same would be true if we were bound to a slavish imitation of the past. True tradition is not servility but fidelity." Yves Cardinal Congar "For Congar, Tradition is a real, living self-communication of God. Its content is the whole Christian reality disclosed in Jesus Christ. It is transmitted not only by written and spoken words, but equally by prayer, sacramental worship and participation in the Church's life." Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J. Tradition and Traditions: The process and content of the transmission of beliefs, doctrines, rituals, Scriptures, and life of the Church. As a process, tradition constitutes the modern sense of the whole life of the Church. Nor does it refer to traditions as a collection of traditions, that is, ecclesiastical customs. Rather "Traditions" refer to

apostolic traditions, what is essential to faith. examples of traditions (in the Tridentine sense) would be the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist." Susan Wood, Encyclopedia of Catholicism
On Tradition:"There is a sense in which the very notion of tradition seems inconsistent with the idea of history as movement and change. For tradition is thought to be ancient, hallowed by age, unchanged since it was first established once upon a time. It does not have a history, since history implies the appearance, at a certain point in time, of that which has not been before....Upon closer examination, however, the problem of tradition and history is seen to be more complex. Even the most doctrinaire traditionalist must be concerned with such questions as the authenticity of works ascribed to an ecclesiastical writer or of decrees ascribed to a council;...

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