

INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLICISM (PART I)

As we are introduced to the teachings of the Catholic Church, this initial study will provide information primarily from a Catholic viewpoint as Biblical refutation will take place in the remaining individual studies. Due to length, this introduction will be divided into two lessons; each addressing a portion of Catholic belief and followed by questions answered with a Catholic perspective.

“I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). These words, which came from the mouth of our Savior, pointed to the fulfillment of the “eternal purpose” of the God of heaven (Eph. 3:10-11). The church which Jesus promised to build would be very precious to Him. It was so precious that it cost nothing less than His life, and was purchased with His blood (Ac. 20:28). It is so precious that it is described as a body over which He is the head (Eph. 1:22-23), as His beautiful bride without spot or blemish (Eph. 5:22-32), and as a kingdom over which He is King (Col. 1:13; 1 Tim. 6:15).

When writing to a special young man named Timothy, his “son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2), the apostle Paul described a departure “from the faith” which would begin to lead many away from the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Further, in his epistle to the church in Thessalonica, there would come a “falling away,” and God would allow many to “believe a lie” which would lead to their destruction (2 Thess. 2:1-12). While it is debatable whether or not these verses are speaking specifically of the Roman Catholic Church, it must be recognized that the departure from the truth of God’s word led to all denominational groups, including the Roman Catholic Church.

Today, the world views “Christendom” as being divided into two large sections, Catholicism and Protestantism. The most current number of those who claim to be a part of the Roman Catholic Church is approximately 1.2 billion, while Protestants number approximately 800 million worldwide (as of May 2013). Both of these groups present a great deal of difficulty to genuine New Testament Christianity as found in the New Testament, but it is obvious that the Roman Catholic Church is the dominant religious organization that claims “Christianity.”

This study of the Roman Catholic Church is intended to accurately depict the Catholic Church, and show its deviation from the New Testament pattern. This particular lesson is intended to give a foundation of the beliefs of Catholics about the Catholic Church. In the Catholic Catechism, “priest” William G. Most gives a description of the Catholic position on the church.

“Speaking of full membership in the Church, Pius XII, in his Encyclical on the Mystical Body, said it is the society of those who have been baptized, and who profess the faith of Christ, and who are governed by their bishops under the visible head, the Pope, the Bishop of Rome.

The Church came into being when Christ died on the Cross, but it was formally inaugurated on Pentecost, when He sent the Holy Spirit as He had promised. St. Paul speaks of all Christians as members of Christ, so that with Him, they form one Mystical Body (Cf. 1 Cor 12:12-31; Col 1:18; 2:18-20; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19; 4:13). St. Paul did not use the word Mystical. It was developed more recently to bring out the fact that this union is unique, there is no parallel to it. It is not the same as the union of a physical body, nor that of a business corporation.

The Church, the Mystical Body, exists on this earth, and is called the Church militant, because its members struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil. The Church suffering means the souls in Purgatory. The Church triumphant is the Church in heaven. The unity and cooperation of the members of the Church on earth, in Purgatory, in Heaven is also called the Communion of Saints. When St. Paul uses the word "Saints" in opening an Epistle, he does not mean they are morally perfect. He has in mind Hebrew qadosh, which means set aside for God, or coming under the covenant. Being such means of course they are called to moral perfection. But of course, not all have reached it in this world.

The word "Saint" in the modern sense means someone who has been canonized by the Church in recent times, or was accepted as such by the Church in earlier times. If a person is shown to have practiced heroic virtue--beyond what people in general do - in all virtues, the title "Venerable" is given; with two miracles by that one's intercession, the title is "Blessed"; two more miracles can lead to canonization and the title of Saint". (<http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/church1.htm>).

Mr. Most continues to give a description of what they believe are the identifying characteristics, or marks, of the church.

“We often speak of the four marks of the Church: one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic. We do not mean that these are distinctive enough to prove the Catholic Church is the only Church of Christ. But they do help.

Christ established only one Church. "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). Presently we will speak of the relation of members of other churches to the Catholic Church.

We say the Church is holy, not in the sense that all members are holy--far from it. But her Founder gave it all the needed means to make people holy.

The Church is Catholic because it is universal: "God wills all to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). It aims to take in all persons, in fulfillment of the command of Christ in Matthew 28:19.

We say the Church is apostolic because it goes back to the Twelve Apostles chosen by Christ Himself. The Pope and Bishops have their authority in succession from the Apostles. The Pope is the visible Head as Vicar of Christ, Christ is the invisible Head. We know Christ intended His Church to last until the end of time, because He explicitly said: "Behold, I am with you all days until the consummation of the world" (Matthew 28:20). Again, many of His parables make this clear, such as the parable of the net in which the good will be separated from the evil at the end, or the parable of the weeds in the wheat, with the same idea.

There can be, and are, bishops validly ordained who are not in union with the Pope. These are called schismatics, and lose many graces by their rejection of the Head of the Church.

Vatican II taught that just as Peter and the Apostles formed a sort of college, with Peter as the head, so in a somewhat similar way, the Pope and the Bishops also form a college (LG chapter 3). This relationship is called collegiality. However Vatican II also taught in that same chapter that the Pope can even, if he so wishes, give a solemn definition of doctrine without consulting the Bishops, and that He has immediate authority over everyone in the Church, including each Bishop.

The Church is also called the People of God, that is, those who come under the new and eternal Covenant (cf. Exodus 19:5; Jeremiah 31:31-33). St. Paul in Romans 11:17-18 pictures Christians of his day--and so also today--as being engrafted into the tame olive tree, which stands for the original People of God, into places left empty by the fallen branches, Jews who rejected Christ". (<http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/chura2.htm>).

Supplemental Questions and Answers about the Catholic Church

(Taken from EWTN Global Catholic Network)

The below Questions and Answers are from a Catholic perspective and not a Biblical perspective.

136. What is the Church?

The Church is the congregation of all baptized persons united in the same true faith, the same sacrifice, and the same sacraments, under the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff and the bishops in communion with him.

(a) Since Baptism, according to the ruling of Christ, is the gateway to the Church, a person becomes a member of the Church on receiving this sacrament. To remain a real

member of the Church after Baptism a person must profess the one true faith and must not withdraw from the unity of the body of the Church in schism or heresy or be excommunicated by legitimate authority because of serious sins. Even schismatics, heretics, and those excommunicated are subjects of the Church and are obliged by its laws unless exempted by the Church.

(b) Sacred Scripture refers to the Church as the Body of Christ, as a sheepfold, as the kingdom of God, and as the kingdom of heaven.

137. Who founded the Church?

Jesus Christ founded the Church.

(a) Christ completed the founding of His Church just before His Ascension, when He commissioned the apostles to make disciples of all nations. Earlier in His public ministry He had instituted the sacraments, chosen the twelve apostles, instructed them by word and example, and conferred on them the power of teaching, ruling, and sanctifying.

(b) The Gospels show that Christ founded the Church in the form of a visible, hierarchical society, that is, one made up of subjects and superiors who rightfully rule subjects. The Roman Pontiff and the bishops under him are the ruling hierarchy of the Church. The Church is also a monarchical society in which the Pope rules with full power, that is, with jurisdiction over the entire Church. Peter was the first head of the Church founded by Christ.

(c) After Pentecost Sunday the apostles began to carry out their mission, which through them and their successors continues and will continue until the end of time.

138. Why did Jesus Christ found the Church?

Jesus Christ founded the Church to bring all men to eternal salvation.

(a) The Church instituted by Christ is the only way to eternal salvation. Christ gave the Church the means whereby man can be sanctified and saved.

139. How is the Church enabled to lead men to salvation?

The Church is enabled to lead men to salvation by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, who gives it life.

(a) Although the work of salvation is the result of the operation of all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, it is especially the result of the Redemption by Christ, and because this work is one of divine love it is attributed to the Holy Ghost, who is the soul of the Church, of which Christ is the Head.

140. When was the dwelling of the Holy Ghost in the Church first visibly manifested?

The dwelling of the Holy Ghost in the Church was first visibly manifested on Pentecost Sunday, when He came down upon the apostles in the form of tongues of fire.

- (a) The word "Pentecost" means fiftieth and is applied to the fiftieth day after Our Lord's Resurrection.
- (b) The apostles were sent by Christ to preach His doctrines to all men.

141. How long will the Holy Ghost dwell in the Church?

The Holy Ghost will dwell in the Church until the end of time.

- (a) Christ foretold that the Holy Ghost would dwell in the Church until the end of time.

142. Who sent the Holy Ghost to dwell in the Church?

God the Father and God the Son sent the Holy Ghost to dwell in the Church.

- (a) It is a matter of faith that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son and is sent by Both to dwell in the Church.

143. What does the indwelling of the Holy Ghost ennoble the Church to do?

The indwelling of the Holy Ghost enables the Church to teach to sanctify, and to rule the faithful in the name of Christ.

- (a) The Church must teach because otherwise men would not know the truths of divine revelation taught by Christ.
- (b) The Church must sanctify, that is, bring grace to the world through the sacraments, because otherwise men could not be saved.
- (c) The Church must rule because it was established by Our Savior as a society, which is inconceivable without authority.

144. What is meant by teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in the name of Christ?

By teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in the name of Christ is meant that the Church always does the will of its Divine Founder, who remains forever its invisible Head.

- (a) The will of the Founder of the Church is expressed in the commission He gave to His apostles to teach all nations, to baptize them, and to have them observe all the things He had commanded. This commission, as well as the guarantee that Christ would be with His Church until the end of time, is related in the Gospel.

145. To whom did Christ give the power to teach, to sanctify, and to rule the members of His Church?

Christ gave the power to teach, to sanctify, and to rule the members of His Church to the apostles, the first bishops of the Church.

(a) That Christ gave His apostles the power to teach, to rule, and to sanctify is evident from the Gospels, the inspired account of Our Lord's life written by Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Christ gave the apostles the power to bind and loose, to baptize, to forgive sin, and to offer the sacrifice of the Mass.

(b) The power to teach and to rule is the power of jurisdiction; the power to sanctify is the power of orders. The power to sanctify sometimes requires jurisdiction, as in the sacrament of Penance.

146. Did Christ intend that this power should be exercised by the apostles alone?

No, Christ intended that this power should be exercised also by their successors, the bishops of the Church.

(a) Christ founded the Church to last until the end of time. The apostles lived for a short time only. Christ must, then, have intended that the apostles provide duly authorized successors to carry on the work of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling.

(b) The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Saint Paul contain references to the work done by the successors of the apostles.

147. Did Christ give special power in His Church to any one of the apostles?

Christ gave special power in His Church to Saint Peter by making him the head of the apostles and the chief teacher and ruler of the entire Church.

(a) The power of the keys was promised to Saint Peter and was actually conferred on him.

(b) Saint Peter was recognized by the early Christians from the beginning as the head of the Church.

148. Did Christ intend that the special power of chief teacher and ruler of the entire Church should be exercised by Saint Peter alone?

Christ did not intend that the special power of chief teacher and ruler of the entire Church should be exercised by Saint Peter alone, but intended that this power should be passed

down to his successor, the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who is the Vicar of Christ on earth and the visible head of the Church.

(a) A successor to Saint Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, was required as chief teacher and ruler for the same reason that successors were required for the other apostles. From the very beginning it was acknowledged by the Church that the successor of Saint Peter as Bishop of Rome was at the same time the head of the entire Church. This successor of Saint Peter is called the Pope.

(b) The bishops of the Church are the successors of the apostles because they have received their power of orders by valid consecration through an unbroken line of successors of the apostles, and have received their power of jurisdiction through their union with the Pope, the successor of Saint Peter.

(c) The Pope is now elected by the College of Cardinals.

149. Who assist the bishops in the care of souls?

The priests, especially parish priests, assist the bishops in the care of souls.

(a) Although all priests assist the bishop of a diocese in the care of souls, parish priests especially are given the definite care of a section of a diocese, which is called a parish and is of ecclesiastical institution.

150. Who are the laity of the Church? The laity of the Church are all its members who do not belong to the clerical or to the religious state.

(a) The clerical state includes all priests and all aspirants to the priesthood who have received tonsure, which is the initiation into the ecclesiastical state. Students of minor and major seminaries are aspirants to the priesthood.

(b) The religious state includes men and women who embrace a community life and make the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Those who are preparing to embrace the religious state are called aspirants, postulants, or novices.

(c) Religious and clerics enjoy special canonical privileges and have many more obligations than lay people have.

(d) Among the laity are secular persons who have embraced the state of celibacy or virginity, or the matrimonial state.

151. How can the laity help the Church in her care of souls?

The laity can help the Church in her care of souls by leading lives that will reflect credit on the Church, and by co-operating with their bishops and priests, especially through Catholic Action.

- (a) The lay people can assist in a special way by prayer.
- (b) Catholic Action is the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy of the Church. There can be no Catholic Action without an episcopal commission.

Review Questions

Question 1) What two groups make up “Christendom” and how many members does the Catholic Church claim?

Question 2) How can one obtain the title Venerable, Blessed, and Saint?

Question 3) What is a schismatic?

Question 4) Who does the pope have immediate authority over?

Question 5) As defined by Catholic Doctrine, who is the authority that all members of the church are under?

Question 6) According to Catholic doctrine, who was the first “head” of the church? Discuss this in light of Ephesians 1:22-23 and the thought of a body with 2 Heads.

Question 7) Based upon Catholic teaching, do the Apostles of the New Testament have successors? Discuss this in response to Acts 1:22 and 1 Corinthians 15:8.

Question 8) According to Catholic tradition, who was given the position of and recognized as the “head of the Church” from the beginning? Discuss this as Daniel 2:44 is read and considered.

Question 9) Who is the pope elected by and is this body of officers found in scripture?

Question 10) Who especially assists the Catholic Bishops in the care of souls?

Question 11) What does the term laity mean?

Question 12) What is the clerical state?

Question 13) What is “Catholic Action” and how can such be implemented?

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Additional Resources

EWTN: Global Catholic Network: < <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/churmenu.htm> >. Web. 12 May 2013.

