

INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLICISM (PART II)

As we continue the introduction to Catholicism, we will next notice the Catholic Churches teaching about their source of authority. Mr. Most explains the position on the authoritative teaching ability of the Catholic Church:

By the Magisterium we mean the teaching office of the Church. It consists of the Pope and Bishops. Christ promised to protect the teaching of the Church : "He who hears you, hears me; he who rejects you rejects me, he who rejects me, rejects Him who sent me" (Luke 10. 16). Now of course the promise of Christ cannot fail: hence when the Church presents some doctrine as definitive or final, it comes under this protection, it cannot be in error; in other words, it is infallible. This is true even if the Church does not use the solemn ceremony of definition. The day to day teaching of the Church throughout the world, when the Bishops are in union with each other and with the Pope, and present something as definitive, this is infallible. (Vatican II, Lumen gentium # 25). It was precisely by the use of that authority that Vatican I was able to define that the Pope alone, when speaking as such and making things definitive, is also infallible. Of course this infallibility covers also teaching on what morality requires, for that is needed for salvation.

A "theologian" who would claim he needs to be able to ignore the Magisterium in order to find the truth is strangely perverse: the teaching of the Magisterium is the prime, God-given means of finding the truth. Nor could he claim academic freedom lets him contradict the Church. In any field of knowledge, academic freedom belongs only to a properly qualified professor teaching in his own field. But one is not properly qualified if he does not use the correct method of working in his field, e.g., a science professor who would want to go back to medieval methods would be laughed off campus, not protected. Now in Catholic theology , the correct method is to study the sources of revelation, but then give the final word to the Church. He who does not follow that method is not a qualified Catholic theologian. Vatican II taught (Dei Verbum # 10): "The task of authoritatively interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on [Scripture or Tradition], has been entrusted exclusively to the living Magisterium of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ" (<http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/chura4.htm>).

In addition to what has already been stated, Mr. Most goes on to summarize the Catholic position on the church and Salvation.

The Church is sometimes called the universal sacrament of salvation. That use of the word sacrament is broad, not strict. It is true in as much as the Church is the divinely instituted means of giving grace to all. But the Church is not a visible rite - it rather confers these visible rites which we call the seven Sacraments.

From the fact that the Church is God's means of giving grace, it is clear that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church. This truth has even been defined by the Church more than once, e.g., in the Council of Florence in 1442. However we must take care to understand this teaching the way the Church understands it. We just saw that the Church claims the exclusive authority to interpret both Scripture and Tradition. So one like Leonard Feeney who interprets the teaching on the necessity of the Church his own way is not acting like a Catholic theologian at all. The Holy Office, on August 8, 1949, declared that L. Feeney was guilty of this error. Because of his error, he rejected several teachings of the Magisterium, saying they clashed with this definition - but they clash only with his false interpretation, given in private judgment.

Pius IX (*Quanto conficiamur moerore*, August 10, 1863) taught: "God... in His supreme goodness and clemency, by no means allows anyone to be punished with eternal punishments who does not have the guilt of voluntary fault." Vatican II (*Lumen gentium* # 16) taught the same: "They who without their own fault do not know of the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but yet seek God with sincere heart, and try, under the influence of grace, to carry out His will in practice, known to them through the dictate of conscience, can attain eternal salvation." Pius XII had said (*Mystici Corporis Christi*) that one can "be related to the Church by a certain desire and wish of which he is not aware", i.e., by the desire to do what God wills in general.

Precisely how does this work out? We saw on our very first page that St. Paul insists (*Romans 3:29*) that God makes provision in some way for all. We saw that one of the earliest Fathers, St. Justin Martyr (*Apology 1:46*) said that some, like Socrates could even be Christians because they followed the divine Word. Now St. Justin also said that the Divine Word is in the hearts of all. Then we notice in St. Paul's *Romans 2:14-16* that "The gentiles who do not have the law [revealed religion] do by nature the things of the law; they show the work of the law written on their hearts." And according to their response, they will or will not be saved.

Clearly, it is this Divine Word, or the Spirit of Christ, the Divine Word, that writes the law on their hearts, i.e., makes known to them what they should do. If they follow that, although they do not know that that is what they are following, yet objectively, they do follow the Logos, the divine Word. And so St. Justin was right in calling them Christians. We can add that St. Paul in *Romans 8:9* makes clear that if one has and follows the Spirit of Christ, he "belongs to Christ." But, to belong to Christ is the same as being a member of Christ, and that is the same as being a member of the Church. Not indeed by formal adherence, but yet substantially, enough to satisfy the requirement of substantial membership. Indeed, Vatican II even wrote (*LG # 49*): "All who belong to Christ, having His Spirit, coalesce into one Church."

So, St. Paul was right: God does take care of them; St. Justin was right too: they can be Christians without knowing it. Otherwise, God would be sending millions upon millions to hell without giving them any chance at all, if they lived far from places where the Church was known, e.g., in the western hemisphere before 1492.

That fact that salvation is possible in this way does not mean that there should be no missions or attempts to bring back the Protestants. Richer and more secure means of salvation are to be had with formal explicit adherence to the Catholic Church. Therefore we need to make every effort. In regard to Ecumenism, it is good to keep in mind a rule from Vatican II, in its Decree on Ecumenism (# 11): "It is altogether necessary that the complete doctrine be clearly presented. Nothing is so foreign to true Ecumenism as that false peace-making in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss, and its true and certain sense is obscured". (<http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/chura5.htm>).

It is important to note that these positions which have been given, using the words of the Catholics themselves, are in contrast to the Biblical teaching on the church and authority. During the following lessons, these points, and others, will be placed under the microscope of God's Word to see their truthfulness.

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.

152. Which is the one true Church established by Christ?

The one true Church established by Christ is the Catholic Church.

- (a) Many churches which claim to be Christian have broken away from the one true Church established by Jesus Christ. These churches were founded by men who had no authority from God to found a church.
- (b) Christ intended that there should be only one true Christian Church, for He always spoke of His Church as one.

153. How do we know that the Catholic Church is the one true Church established by Christ?

We know that the Catholic Church is the one true Church established by Christ because it alone has the marks of the true Church.

154. What do we mean by the marks of the Church?

By the marks of the Church we mean certain clear signs by which all men can recognize it as the true Church founded by Jesus Christ.

(a) Jesus Christ willed that the true Church should have these marks, which would distinguish it from all false religions.

155. What are the chief marks of the Church?

The chief marks of the Church are four: It is one, holy, catholic or universal, and apostolic.

(a) Sacred Scripture teaches that the one true Church of Christ must have these marks.

(b) The marks of the Church are themselves an indication that God guides the Church.

156. Why is the Catholic Church one?

The Catholic Church is one because all its members, according to the will of Christ, profess the same faith, have the same sacrifice and sacraments, and are united under one and the same visible head, the Pope.

(a) Our Divine Savior prayed explicitly that His Church might be one, and He made it one; thus men can recognize it as the true Church.

(b) Only the Catholic Church possesses this mark of unity. Various sects, having only fragments of Christianity, are divided in doctrine and practice and recognize no authority but their own judgment, which can easily lead them into error.

(c) There are many religious sects which claim to be Christian, but are separated from the unity of Christ by their rejection of the authority invested by Him in the Roman Pontiff, the successor to Saint Peter.

(d) Catholics accept all the doctrines of faith and morals which were taught by Our Lord and the apostles and are proposed by the Church for belief and practice. A person who deliberately denies even one of the doctrines of the Church cannot be a Catholic. The Church is one in faith.

(e) Catholics take part in the same sacrifice of the Mass and accept the same sacraments, although the same language and the same ceremonies are not used by all in the offering of Mass and in the administration of the sacraments. Everywhere the essential parts of the ceremonies are the same and substantially the same words are used in offering Mass. Hence the Church is one in worship. What Christ determined, the Church cannot change. Since Christ, however, did not determine many points of worship in non-essential matters, the Church has the authority to do so.

(f) Catholics are subject to their respective bishops who rule them. They must recognize the supreme authority of the Pope in matters of religion. A person who deliberately refuses to accept the legitimate and supreme authority of the Pope and the bishops in matters of religion cannot be a Catholic.

157. Why is the Catholic Church holy?

The Catholic Church is holy because it was founded by Jesus Christ, who is all-holy, and because it teaches, according to the will of Christ, holy doctrines, and provides the means of leading a holy life, thereby giving holy members to every age.

(a) Holiness is a mark of the Church according to the will of Christ, as is evident from the prayer of Christ for His apostles.

(b) Even some of the enemies of the Church recognize the holiness of the doctrines which the Church teaches. The efforts of others to prove that the Church is not holy show that they acknowledge holiness as a mark of truth.

(c) The lives of the saints, of the martyrs, and of good Catholics prove how effective are the means of grace with which the Church is endowed. Moreover, God has always favored the Catholic Church with miracles.

(d) Bad Catholics do not disprove the holiness of the Church since they do not use the means of grace at their disposal. Christ foretold that there would be good and bad members of His Church as we read in the parables of the fishes in the net and the cockle among the wheat.

158. Why is the Catholic Church catholic or universal?

The Catholic Church is catholic or universal because, destined to last for all time, it never fails to fulfill the divine commandment to teach all nations all the truths revealed by God.

(a) Catholicity is a mark of the Church because Christ commissioned His apostles to go forth and make disciples of all nations, and to teach all that He had commanded. Christ further promised to be with them all days, even to the end of time.

(b) The Church today teaches the same doctrine it received from Christ. It has existed uninterruptedly since the day it was established down to the present time. The Church exists in a more flourishing condition in some nations than in others. It is always trying to preach the gospel to all races and in all places and sends its missionaries to the most remote places on earth.

(c) Christian sects began later and for the most part exist in only some sections of the world. In trying to accommodate themselves to the changing conditions of the time, they have made changes in the doctrines of Christ without any divine authorization.

159. Why is the Catholic Church apostolic?

The Catholic Church is apostolic because it was founded by Christ on the apostles and, according to His divine will, has always been governed by their lawful successors.

(a) The true Church is apostolic because it is the Church Christ founded upon the apostles, and especially upon Peter whom He called the Rock on which the Church would be built. The supreme power of Saint Peter in the Church has been passed down through the unbroken line of his successors in the see of Rome.

160. How do we know that no other church but the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ?

We know that no other church but the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ because no other church has these four marks.

(a) All other churches lack essential unity. They recognize no authority in religious matters vested in an individual who is the vicar of Christ. In the worship of God many Christian sects are guided more by sentiment and personal conviction than by the objective truths given to the world by Our Lord.

(b) The founders of Christian sects were not saints and generally were not holy or edifying men. The sects have not given saints to the world. Their truths are but fragments of the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The holiness of their members is due to the means that the sects have salvaged from Catholic worship. Moreover, these sects cannot point to miracles wrought in their favor.

(c) Not one of the Christian sects is universal or catholic; that is, not one has universality such as that of the Catholic Church.

(d) Not one of the Christian sects can trace its origin to the apostles.

(e) The Greek Orthodox or Schismatic Church began in the ninth century with its rejection of the authority of the Pope. From it have come various national churches, subject in some degree to civil authority. The Protestant churches began in the sixteenth

century when their founders, rejecting certain doctrines of faith, broke away from Catholic unity. Many Protestant denominations are offshoots of the earliest sects. The Lutherans were founded by Martin Luther, the Presbyterians by John Knox, and the Methodists by John Wesley.

161. What are the chief attributes of the Catholic Church?

The chief attributes of the Catholic Church are authority, infallibility, and indefectibility. They are called attributes because they are qualities perfecting the nature of the Church.

162. What is meant by the authority of the Catholic Church?

By the authority of the Catholic Church is meant that the Pope and the bishops, as the lawful successors of the apostles, have power from Christ Himself to teach, to sanctify, and to govern the faithful in spiritual matters.

(a) Christ Himself gave this authority to Saint Peter and the other apostles when He bestowed the power of binding and loosing, of teaching and baptizing. He implicitly guaranteed the same power to the successors of the apostles when He promised to be with them all days, even to the consummation of the world.

(b) Outside the Church there generally is no real recognition of authority in spiritual matters and this disregard for spiritual authority has lessened the respect for civil and domestic authority.

(c) The Church has authority over temporal matters which are closely connected with spiritual matters, as the administration of Church property.

(d) The Pope, as the supreme head of the Church, cannot rightly be made a subject of any temporal power on earth. The present position of the Pope, as head of the Vatican City, shows to the world that he and his household are not the subjects of other temporal powers. When we speak of the temporal power of the Pope, we do not mean thereby merely to classify him with earthly rulers. The Pope's temporal power is a means to an end, guaranteeing that freedom of word and action which he must rightfully enjoy as the supreme spiritual ruler of the Church.

163. What is meant by the infallibility of the Catholic Church?

By the infallibility of the Catholic Church is meant that the Church, by the special assistance of the Holy Ghost, cannot err when it teaches or believes a doctrine of faith or morals.

(a) Infallibility, especially papal infallibility, is a doctrine often misunderstood and derided by those outside the Church. The term "infallibility" is often distorted to mean

impeccability, that is, freedom from all sin. The Church has never held that the Pope cannot sin.

(b) It is unthinkable that an institution established by God for the salvation of souls could lead men into error and turn them away from God. If the Church could and did err in matters of faith or morals it would not be a true teacher; it would fail in its ministry of sanctification and would not lead men to salvation but would be responsible for their condemnation. (c) A doctrine of faith or morals is a truth revealed by God dealing with what we must believe or what we must do in order to be saved.

(d) The Church cannot change its defined teachings on faith and morals though it may restate them more clearly and more completely.

(e) We know that the Church is infallible in matters of faith or morals because Christ promised that He would be with the apostles and their successors in their work of teaching until the end of time. It would be impossible for Christ to be with the official teachers of the Church and permit them to teach error.

164. When does the Church teach infallibly?

The Church teaches infallibly when it defines, through the Pope alone, as the teacher of all Christians, or through the Pope and the bishops, a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by all the faithful.

(a) The Holy Father must intend to use his supreme, apostolic authority when he teaches infallibly.

(b) The Pope can teach without speaking infallibly; for example, he does this in his encyclical letters. Catholics must accept such teachings, not on faith, but in obedience to the authority of the Pope and in respect for his wisdom.

165. What is meant by the indefectibility of the Catholic Church?

By the indefectibility of the Catholic Church is meant that the Church, as Christ founded it, will last until the end of time.

(a) This indefectibility of the Church is in conformity with the will of Christ, who promised to be with His Church until the end of time.

166. Are all obliged to belong to the Catholic Church in order to be saved?

All are obliged to belong to the Catholic Church in order to be saved.

(a) The principle, "It makes no difference what religion a person practices so long as he leads a good life," is deceptive because it attaches the same importance to the teaching

and practice of a false religion as it does to the teaching and practice of the one, true religion revealed by Christ and taught by His Church. No one can be saved without sanctifying grace, and the Catholic Church alone is the divinely established means by which grace is brought to the world and the full fruits of Our Lord's Redemption are applied to men.

167. What do we mean when we say, "Outside the Church there is no salvation"?

When we say, "Outside the Church there is no salvation," we mean that those who through their own grave fault do not know that the Catholic Church is the true Church or, knowing it, refuse to join it, cannot be saved.

(a) "Outside the Church there is no salvation" does not mean that everyone who is not a Catholic will be condemned. It does mean that no one can be saved unless he belongs in some manner to the Catholic Church, either actually or in desire, for the means of grace are not given without some relation to the divine institution established by Christ.

168. Can they be saved who remain outside the Catholic Church because they do not know it is the true Church?

They who remain outside the Catholic Church through no grave fault of their own and do not know it is the true Church, can be saved by making use of the graces which God gives them.

(a) Those who are outside the Church through no fault of their own are not culpable in the sight of God because of their invincible ignorance.

(b) Persons who make use of the graces God gives them, even though they are not members of the true Church, actually have the desire to become members inasmuch as they wish to use all the means ordained by God for their salvation.

(c) We should pray and try to persuade others to investigate the teachings of the Catholic Church because charity obliges us to do all we can to lead others to salvation. We should also pray for Catholic missionaries and help them in their work of bringing the faith to those outside the Catholic Church.

169. Why is the Catholic Church called the Mystical Body of Christ?

The Catholic Church is called the Mystical Body of Christ because its members are united by supernatural bonds with one another and with Christ, their Head, thus resembling the members and head of the living human body.

Review Questions

Question 1) What is the Magisterium?

Question 2) According to Catholic tradition, is the pope infallible and if so, when?

Question 3) Based upon Catholic instruction, can the lost, as defined by Catholic doctrine, actually not be lost at all, but saved? Explain and note the sources used by Catholicism to try and substantiate such a position and consider them in regard to Romans 1:20; Matthew 7:7; 13-14.

Question 4) Discuss the “marks of the church” according to Catholicism. Consider these marks comparing them with scripture, giving special attention to how Catholics define the church as “Apostolic” compared to what John states in 1 John 1:1-7.

Question 5) Discuss the stance that the Catholic church is the one true church established by Christ and that it’s continuance in authority is a result of Roman papal authority. Consider this in light of Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Revelation 2:5.

Question 6) Discuss how the following explanation motivates or demotivates the evangelizing of the world (cf. Mark 16:15-16): “They who remain outside the Catholic Church through no grave fault of their own and do not know it is the true Church, can be saved by making use of the races which God gives them.”



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Additional Resources

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

