

CATECHESIS SERIES

(An Education in the Catholic Faith)

FEATURING CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH,
THE HOLY BIBLE AND DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Catechism of the Catholic Church

100 - *“The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him.”*

God the Father sent Jesus among us with full authority to proclaim and establish God’s kingdom (or reign) on earth.

Jesus chose disciples, especially “the twelve” apostles, to carry on his mission and to act with the same authority that the Father had given him.

The apostles appointed other men to carry on their ministry and mission. Through prayer and the “laying on of hands,” the apostles called upon the Lord to give these new leaders the same authority to teach and lead the Church that they had received from Jesus himself. The early Christians believed

that the new leaders had indeed received this authority from God.

The Lord continued to confer authority to lead the Church upon the successors of the men appointed by the apostles to fulfill their ministry. Thus, there began an unbroken chain or succession of elders, beginning with the apostles and carried down to the present.

The development of basic offices of leadership in the local churches reached its final phase by the middle or late second century. By that time, every local Christian church was led by a single bishop who was assisted by presbyters (elders) and deacons (servants). This basic pattern was the only generally accepted model of local church leadership for hundreds of years. The Catholic Church has maintained it up to the present day in four levels of ministry: The Pope, bishops, priests, and deacons.

In his role as “chief shepherd” (the Pope) and bishops uniquely represent the single, unique headship of Jesus Christ over the universal Church. The Pope and bishops do not *replace* Jesus Christ but *represents* him; the Pope and bishops carries on Jesus’

shepherding role through the commission and authority that comes from Jesus alone. (The pope is Christ's special vicar or representative on earth to appoint bishops and to remove them from the exercise of their office if they seriously fail in their task of teaching, guiding, and governing the Church in Jesus' name.) The priests (or presbyters) and deacons assist the bishops in carrying on Jesus' mission and ministry.

Catholic Christians have such confidence in God's faithfulness and in his will to protect the Church from error that they recognize as "infallible" any official statement of the Pope along with any ecumenical ("worldwide") council of bishops which precisely and explicitly defines a doctrine of the Christian faith. Individuals, even individual bishops, may be wrong or deceived; groups of Christians may be wrong; but the successors of the apostles (the Pope and bishops) as a whole cannot be wrong about the Christian faith when they solemnly agree on a matter of faith or morals, and officially announce their teaching to all believers. They cannot be wrong in these circumstances because defining and protecting the faith is precisely the

responsibility Jesus himself gave his apostles and their successors.

Some examples of official teachings of ecumenical councils of bishops illustrate their importance. The Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 condemned Arius's denial that Jesus was fully God, equal to the Father in divinity. The Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381 affirmed that the Holy Spirit was fully God, to be worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son. The Council of Chalcedon A.D. 451 taught that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. Later councils clarified important issues concerning grace and free will, salvation, the sacraments, and the nature of the Church.

Not all statements or decisions of the ecumenical councils are considered by Catholics to be infallible or permanently binding. Only those teachings that the Pope and bishops explicitly present as "dogmas" or official doctrines of faith are considered infallibly true by Roman Catholics.

If the Catholic Church (which Protestants admit was the true Church of Jesus Christ before Luther's revolt) became doctrinally corrupt as alleged, it would mean

that the gates of Hell had prevailed against it. Catholics cannot see how the division of Christianity into hundreds of rival camps and doctrinal variations can be called a “reformation” of the Christian Church. In the Catholic mind, hundreds of conflicting interpretations of Christ’s teachings do not add up to a true interpretation of Christ’s teachings. By some estimates there are approximately 25,000 different Protestant denominations and sects. In the approximately 500 years since Protestantism’s origin with Martin Luther (usually dated at 1517), this number translates into an average of one new Protestant denomination or sect developing every week! Even the original “Reformers” – Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli – did not agree on doctrinal matters and labeled each other’s teachings heretical.

It is not denied here that a given passage from Scripture can have different levels of interpretation or that it may have different levels of meaning in terms of its application in the life of a believer. It is, however, denied here that a given passage can have more than one theological or doctrinal meaning. Take the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, for instance. If the first

person says that the bread and wine at Mass actually become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and the second person says that they do not, it is impossible for both views to be objectively true.

The so called worldly Popes of the Middle Ages – three in number – were certainly guilty of extravagant pomposity, nepotism and other indiscretions and sins which were not in keeping with the dignity of their high church office – but they certainly were not guilty of licentious conduct while in office, nor were they guilty of altering any part of the Church's Christ-given deposit of faith.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

1. **Read Jeremiah 3:15.** Church leadership is given to us by: a. God. b. the devil. c. religious denominations.

And I will give you pastors according to my own heart, and they shall feed you with knowledge and doctrine. (Jer. 3:15) (DOUAY-RHEIMS)

2. **Read Jeremiah 3:15.** Church leadership will feed us with: a. wisdom. b. doctrine (teaching). c. pizza.

And I will give you pastors according to my own heart, and they shall feed you with knowledge and doctrine. (Jer. 3:15) (DOUAY-RHEIMS)

3. Read John 10:14-15. Who is our good and Great Shepherd that we will know and follow? a. Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; and I know mine, and mine know me. ¹⁵ As the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father: and I lay down my life for my sheep. (Jn. 10:14-15) (DOUAY-RHEIMS)

4. Read John 21:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2. The role of the Pope is not to replace Jesus Christ but to represent Him. The Pope carries on Jesus shepherding role to:
a. feed His sheep. b. acquire wealth for himself.

¹⁷ He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved, because he had said to him the third time: Lovest thou me? And he said to him: Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee. He said to him: Feed my sheep. (Jn. 21:17) (DOUAY-RHEIMS)

²⁸ Be on your guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you the overseers, to feed the Church of God which he bought with his own blood. (Acts 20:28) (JERUSALEM BIBLE)

² *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking care of it, not by constraint, but willingly, according to God: not for filthy lucre's sake, but voluntarily: (1 Peter 5:2)* (DOUAY-RHEIMS)

5. Read Ezekiel 3:17. Church leadership helps us by: a. paying our bills. b. warning us of spiritual danger.

¹⁷ *Thus the word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall warn them for me. (Ezekiel 3:17)* (NEW AMERICAN BIBLE)

6. Read Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 2:1-3. We are to: a. ignore our Church leaders. b. obey our Church leaders. c. pray for our Church leaders.

¹⁷ *Obey your leaders and defer to them, for they keep watch over you and will have to give an account, that they may fulfill their task with joy and not with sorrow, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb. 13:17)* (NEW AMERICAN BIBLE)

¹ *First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone,*
² *for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.*
³ *This is good and pleasing to God our savior. (1 Tim. 2:1-3)* (NEW AMERICAN BIBLE)

7. Read Matthew 28:20. Church leaders are to teach us to: a. observer and do all of Jesus teachings. b. relax and take it easy.

²⁰ *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. 28:20) (DOUAY-RHEIMS)

8. Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26. Church leaders are used by God to help people come to their senses and repent. True or False

²⁴ *and a servant of the Lord must not engage in quarrels, but must be kind to everyone, a good teacher, and patient.* ²⁵ *He must be gentle when he corrects people who oppose him, in the hope that God may give them a change of mind so that they recognize the truth* ²⁶ *and come to their senses, escaping the trap of the devil who made them his captives and subjected them to his will.* (2 Tim. 2:24-26) (NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE)

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