

WHAT DO CATHOLICS BELIEVE?

*Explained in Terms That
Protestants Can Understand*

Contents

The Truth about Protestants & Catholics	p. 4
Vatican II Opens the Door	p. 6
Understanding the Catholic Faith	p. 7
God Manifest in the Flesh	p. 8
The “Good News” of the Gospel	p. 12
Conversion	p. 16
A Personal Commitment to Jesus Christ	p. 18
The Work of the Cross	p. 22
Justification & Sanctification	p. 25
The Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper	p. 37
Baptism	p. 42
Are Catholics “Born Again”	p. 49
Baptized with the Holy Spirit	p. 52
Miracles	p. 56
Mary and the Saints	p. 57
Catholic Confession	p. 60
Statues and Relics	p. 61
Is the Pope Infallible?	p. 62

The Holy Bible	p. 64
Tradition and Scripture	p. 71
The Antichrist and the End of Days	p. 78
Catholics Ask Forgiveness	p. 80
Common Catholic Prayers	p. 82
The Apostle's Creed	p. 83
The Nicene Creed	p. 84
Helpful Websites	p. 86
Bibliography & Sources	p. 87

The Truth about Protestants and Catholics

Both Protestants and Catholics use religious terms and language that need to be explained to be properly understood by one another.

Protestants have an emphasis on adult conversion which brings a rich blessing of rebirth, regeneration and justification. Protestants emphasize the study of Scripture that brings strength and understanding to their lives.

Catholics have a unity of faith that takes them back to the earliest days of Christianity. 1.2 billion Catholic Christians all speaking the same thing. Worship is not so much informational as transformational through the

receiving of Christ in the sacraments. Accountability and clearing of the conscience is offered through confession of sins (to God) through the priests. The Catholic Church has a presence of God in their churches unlike what you might find elsewhere.

Catholics are also some of the most misunderstood Christians from a Protestant perspective.

Protestants and Catholics both believe “*by grace we are saved*” (Eph. 2:5, 8).

Both Catholics and Protestants emphasize some truths that could help one another. Jesus said, “*I am the way, I am the truth...*” (Jn. 14:6). We should look for the truth wherever it can be found.

I pray that this booklet will bring some clarification and oneness of faith to all those who have been called by His Name (Acts 4:12).

Vatican II Opens the Door

Pope Benedict XVI has issued an apostolic letter in which he declared October 11, 2012, through November 24, 2013, a Year of Faith. Fifty years ago, on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII formally opened the Second Vatican Council. This Council welcomed input from other Christians such as Anglicans, Orthodox, Lutherans, Pentecostals, etc. to sit in as observers and offer their suggestions. The Council Fathers taught that other Christian groups “have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers [and

sisters] by the children of the Catholic Church (Decree on Ecumenism, 3).

The Council Fathers recognized that there are still significant differences. But they committed themselves to doing everything they could to heal the divisions among Christians, including admitting that Catholics bore some share of responsibility for the divisions and schisms (The Word Among us, Daily Meditation for Catholics, p. 15).

Understanding the Catholic Faith

The Catholic Church is the world's largest, and Christianity's oldest, religious body. Her 1.2 billion members cannot see how the division of Christianity into hundreds of rival camps and doctrinal variations can be called a "reformation" of the 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.¹

+ 1 Cor. 1:10; Acts 2:42; 2 Jn. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:15

Catholics believe that their Church and her teachings are genuinely Christian, and, in fact, the fullest expression of Christianity. Catholic Christians believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and does not in any way contradict what they believe, but contains and reflects what they believe.²

God Manifest in the Flesh The Incarnational Principle

Catholics believe that the Incarnation, God becoming human in Jesus Christ, reveals an important truth about the way God chooses to relate to humanity. God could have

continued to reveal himself to the human race solely through visions, voices, or angelic messengers. Instead he chose to “empty himself” (Phil. 2:6-8) and stoop down to our level by taking on our humanity – appearing in human form as a man that we could see, hear, and touch. Jesus himself used ordinary physical objects, human gestures, and even other people to reveal God’s presence and love. He used water, bread, wine, fish, his touch, and even mud made with his spit, to manifest the love and power of the Father working through him. He gave his apostles, who were ordinary men, the very power and authority that he had to heal, and expel demons, and to use the same physical things or signs that he used (water, bread, wine, touch, etc.) to make the presence and power of God visible.

Why did Jesus choose ordinary men and use the ordinary objects and gestures to show forth and transmit the power of God? Why? Because God knows that human beings are earthly, physical creatures who experience reality through their bodies, and their five senses, and not just through their “spirits”. Humans are *embodied* spirits, and God stoops down to our level because he knows that we need to relate to him through what is physical, visible, and tangible. Yes, God also calls humanity to have faith and hope in things that are unseen, which are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). But he graciously uses the things we can see, feel, hear, and touch to reveal his presence and love, and even to give himself to us and share his life with us fully.

Catholics believe that since the Incarnation, God has continued to relate to

humanity (revealing his love and giving his life to us) in a human way – using physical objects, human gestures, and men and women whom he has set apart to be his representatives through the commission of Jesus Christ. Catholics believe that God intended there to be effective, visible signs of God’s presence and power, which Catholics call “sacraments.” These are physical things such as water, oil, bread, and wine, which make visible God’s presence, power, and blessing. Catholics also believe that God can use pictures, statues, medals, and other objects to remind us of him, and of his work in holy men and women whom he has raised up for us to imitate. Catholics believe that God uses certain human beings to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world, as successors of his original apostles. All these things are related to the “incarnational” principle. This principle affirms that the

Church, like Jesus, is not only a spiritual reality, but also a human and earthly one. There is nothing human or of the earth that God cannot and does not use to reveal and communicate his love for us. Hence Catholics believe that we are called to recognize that God uses the spiritual, material, physical, and human dimension of life to direct our attention and love to him (Jn. 1:14).³

+ Jn. 1:14; Heb. 10:5; 1 Jn. 4:2; 1 Tim. 3:16

The “Good News” of the Gospel

Catholics believe that God created the first human beings (Adam & Eve) with the gift of original righteousness and eternal life. He planned for them to live with Him forever in Heaven (Gen. 1 & 2).

Because of their disobedience to God's plan, our first parents forfeited this gift of eternal life. They were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the gates of heaven were shut by God, and their relationship with God was shattered, both for themselves and their descendants (Gen. 3).

In Adam *all* human beings have sinned and so inherit the original sin of our first parents and, because of this sin, we would have all been doomed to eternal death (Ps. 51:7; Rom. 5:15), but for the salvation promised to our first parents in Genesis 3.

God the Father sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to save mankind from the eternal death that was the result of their sin. Jesus would "redeem" us by His Blood shed on Calvary (*return to us the possession of eternal life that*

was forfeited by the sin of our first parents). In dying for our sins on the cross, Christ reconciled us with the Father and re-opened the gates of Heaven so that the faithful could join our Father after their bodily death (Eph. 1:7; 2:13).⁴

“No one comes to the Father except through [Jesus]” (Jn. 14:6). His redemption alone is effective in saving us.⁵ Salvation is by the grace of God (Eph. 2:5, 8).

The Catholic Church does not teach, nor has it ever taught, a doctrine of salvation based on “works righteousness”. This is a common distorted representation raised by some non-Catholics, especially Fundamentalists and Evangelical Protestants. In fact, the notion of someone earning salvation is a heresy the Catholic Church has repeatedly condemned.

Rather, the Catholic Church has always upheld the apostolic teaching that we are, as St. Paul emphasized in Ephesians 2:8, saved “*by grace through faith*”.

In response to the question, “Have you been saved?”, Catholics and all other Christians can equally respond with these truths in Scripture, saying: I have been redeemed and saved by God’s grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), I am being saved and am working out my salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:8-9), my salvation is nearer now than it was yesterday (Rom. 13:11; Heb. 9:28). I am trusting solely in God’s grace (Eph. 2:5).⁶

Assurance of salvation for both Catholics and Protestants comes through walking in the light. “*We know that we have*

come to know him if we obey his commands”
(1 Jn. 2:3).

+ Matt. 7:20-21; 1 Jn. 2:3-5; 1Jn. 3:5-10; 1 Jn. 3:14; 1 Jn. 4:6, 8; 1 Jn. 5:2; 1 Jn. 5:18-19.

Conversion

Conversion refers to a *change* (a moral change, a turning or returning to God).⁷ The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: (in paragraph **1432**) “The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart. Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him: *Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!* God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear

offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced: 'Let us fix our eyes on Christ's blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation, it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.' (St. Clement of Rome).⁸

For Catholics, conversion and repentance is not a one-time act but is a continual *turning* to follow the Master. The following Scriptures and Greek text attest to this fact:

Acts 26:20 – But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent (*present tense: and continue in repentance*) **and turn** (*present tense: and continue to turn*) **to God, and do** (*present tense: and continue to do*)

works meet for repentance (*works, or deeds, that prove your repentance*).

Mark 1:15 – And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye (*present tense: i.e., repent and continue to repent as often as the situation or need arises*), **and believe** (*present tense: i.e., believe and continue to believe*) **the gospel.**

Luke 15:7 – I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth (*present tense: and continues in repentance*), **more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.**

A Personal Commitment to Jesus Christ

The faith that leads to salvation is an act of acknowledging our utter dependence on God and committing our lives totally to him. When Jesus spoke about faith, proclaiming, “... *believe in God, believe also in me*” (Jn. 14:1),

He meant, “give your whole life to Me; follow Me; obey Me; become My disciple.” True Christian faith means entrusting your whole life to God. It is a commitment to put God first and to do whatever He commands or asks. As the Second Vatican Council explained: *By faith, man freely commits his entire self to God, making the full submission of his intellect and will to God ...*⁹

Many Christians today equate “faith” with a “decision for Christ” – a conscious, personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of your life. This terminology is used mostly by evangelical Protestants, but Catholics agree that all mature Christians must make a conscious choice to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and to commit themselves to follow him. Catholics make such a public profession of faith every Sunday by reciting the Nicene Creed together, and in a

special way every year when they renew their baptismal promises during the Easter liturgy. The practice of regular, even daily, personal “acts of faith” in Jesus Christ is a part of Catholic tradition.

Unfortunately, some Catholics neglect to live this profession of a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Catholics sometimes assume that persons who are baptized, attend Mass, and receive the sacraments regularly have obviously accepted Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of their lives. Pastoral experience with U.S. Catholics shows that this is often not the case; many Catholics have not yet made a deliberate , adult decision to believe in Jesus Christ and give their lives fully to him. In response to this, the Catholic Church has placed a strong emphasis in recent years on evangelization (even of the baptized), on continual conversion to Christ, and on spiritual

renewal. The goal of all of these is to lead all Catholics (and eventually all people) to a full personal faith in Jesus Christ.

It is also part of Catholic teaching to consider “faith” as a *way of life* rather than a major decision that happens once, twice, or a few times in one’s life. Catholics realize the importance of the initial conversion and commitment to Christ, but they also emphasize the challenge of living out faith in Jesus Christ every day, by God’s grace and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God provides the power (or grace) to live out our faith through many channels through daily prayer, the sacraments, and our life and fellowship with other Christians. Thus, these means of God’s grace are also significant, since they enable us to persevere in our faith and live it out day by day.

Catholics do not sharply separate “faith” and “good works” or charity. By “good works” Catholics do not mean the “works of the law” that Paul condemns, but rather the “works” (of faith, charity and love) that flow from living faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, Catholics believe that true faith will express itself in a person’s “works” – the way the person actually lives (Jas. 2:14-17).¹⁰ A Catholic priest once said, “I am not interested in faith or works, but in faith that works” (Jas. 2:18).

The Work of the Cross

In 1547 the Church convened the Council of Trent, which issued a proclamation on justification. In Canon 1 the Catholic council declared: *Canon 1. If anyone saith that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature or that of the*

law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ; let him be anathema (accursed).

Canon 111. If anyone saith that without the prevenient inspiration of the Holy Ghost and without His help man can believe, hope, love, or be penitent as he ought, so as that the grace of justification may be bestowed upon him; let him be anathema.¹¹

In his *Doctrinal Catechism* Stephen Keenan makes this presentation of basic Catholic doctrine:

Q. *What is justification?*

A. It is a grace which makes us friends of God.

Q. *Can a sinner merit this justifying grace?*

A. No, he cannot; because all the good works which the sinner performs whilst he is in a state of mortal sin, are dead works, which have no merit sufficient to justify.

Q. *Is it an article of the Catholic faith, that the sinner, in mortal sin, cannot merit the grace of justification?*

A. Yes; it is decreed in the seventh chap. Of the sixth sess. Of the Council of Trent, that neither faith, nor good works, preceding justification, can merit the grace of justification.

Q. *How then is the sinner justified?*

A. He is justified gratuitously by the pure mercy of God, not on account of his own or any human merit, but purely through the merits of Jesus Christ; for Jesus Christ is our only mediator of redemption, who alone, by his passion and death, has reconciled us to his Father.

Q. *Why then do Protestants charge us with believing, that the sinner can merit the remission of his sins?*

A. Their ignorance of the Catholic doctrine is the cause of this, as well as many other false charges.¹²

How central is the work of the cross to the Catholic Christians? Take note that the central religious symbol for Catholics – found everywhere in Catholic churches, schools, and hospitals – is the *crucifix* – the image of Jesus Christ dying on the cross and shedding his blood for our salvation.¹³ “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified”, the words of Saint Paul the Apostle.

Justification and Sanctification Belong Together

The words *sanctify*, *sanctification*, *holiness* and *holy* translate Hebrew and Greek words which basically mean “to set apart” or “to separate” (*Sanctification*, p. 12, Robert D. Brinsmead). (1) It means separation *from*. The Church is called to separate from the

world (2 Cor. 6:17). (2) The Church is called to separate from apostate doctrine (2 John 1:10). (3) The Church is called to separate from sin (2 Cor. 7:1). (4) The Church is to be separated *to* a new life. Those that are justified become servants of righteousness (Romans 6:18) and serve in the new way of the Spirit (Romans 7:6).

The New Testament often uses other expressions to describe *sanctification* such as: Following after righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11). Being transformed (Romans 12:2). Pressing toward the mark (Philippians 3:14). Partaking of the divine nature and escaping the corruption that is in this world (2 Peter 1:4). Cleansing ourselves from filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1), etc.

It was the whole man that sinned, and it is the whole man whom God wants sanctified (1 Thess. 5:23).

Any view of sanctification that does not include the whole man falls short of Christian sanctification, to which Scripture gives witness. The Greeks taught that the body was a prison to temporarily incarcerate the human soul, Paul taught his Grecian converts that their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). But the Corinthian church did not easily abandon the Grecian outlook. They were prone to interpret the Christian message in terms of Grecian philosophy. They thought sanctification was only a thing of the spirit so that what they did with the body was a matter of indifference.¹³ One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. A

central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. It reasoned that, since the body (matter) was evil, bodily acts such as fornication and even the marital act and eating all equally belonged to that evil dimension and could not affect the goodness of the spirit, which remained good no matter what the body did. The reasoning was that, since matter – and not the breaking of God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4) – was considered evil, breaking his law was of no consequence. In Colossians and in John’s letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1, 2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter and perhaps 1 Corinthians. John’s readers (in 1 Jn.) were confronted with an early form of Gnostic teaching of the Cerinthian variety. This heresy was also libertine, throwing off all moral restraints. Consequently, John wrote the letter of 1 John with two basic purposes in mind: (1) to expose false teaching

and teachers (1 Jn. 2:26) and (2) to give believers assurance of salvation (1 Jn. 5:13). In keeping with his intention to combat Gnostic teachers, John specifically struck at their total lack of morality (1 Jn. 3:8-10).¹⁴

Obedience to God's commandments cannot be separated from our love for Him in either the Old Testament or the New Testament (See John 14:15, 21). Righteousness is both relational and ethical. Righteousness can be defined as right relationship that is reflected in right conduct (see Matt. 25:37-40). The concern is not whether a man or his deeds are ethically sinless but whether those deeds are evidence of his faith and loyalty to God. Sanctification is not optional for believers. Since believers are saved *to* holiness, a stranger to holiness may

very well be a stranger to salvation (See 2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 2:14).¹⁵

The following Scriptures show that “saving faith” will be seen; it will give evidence of its reality:

Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? If people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. That kind of faith can't save anyone. Jas. 2:14, NLT; CEV¹⁷

This is the way to talk to people of that kind: “You say you have faith and I have good deeds; I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds – now you prove to me that you have faith without any good deeds to show. Jam. 2:18, Jerusalem Bible

For by grace you have been saved through faith ... (a faith that works by love). Eph. 2:8, NAB¹⁶

For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. Gal. 5:6, NAB

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. Heb. 12:14, NASV¹⁸

¹² Wherefore, my dearly beloved, (as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but much more now in my absence), with fear and trembling work out your salvation. ¹³ For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will. Phil. 2:12-13, Douay-Rheims.¹⁹

⁷ Make no mistake: God is not mocked, for a person will reap only what he sows, ⁸ because the one who sows for his flesh will reap corruption from

the flesh, but the one who sows for the spirit will reap eternal life from the spirit. ⁹ Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. Gal. 6:7-9, NAB

⁵ Your stubborn refusal to repent is only storing up retribution for yourself on that Day of retribution when God's just verdicts will be made known. ⁶ He will repay everyone as their deeds deserve. ⁷ For those who aimed for glory and honour and immortality by persevering in doing good, there will be eternal life. Rom. 2:5-7, New Jerusalem Bible.²⁰

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." Matt. 7:21, NAB

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous. 1 Jn. 3:7 RSV²¹

¹⁰ My friends, you must do all you can to show that God has really chosen and selected you. If you keep on doing this, you won't stumble and fall. ¹¹ Then our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will give you a glorious welcome into his kingdom that will last forever. 2 Pet. 1:10-11, CEV²²

¹² So then, my brothers, there is no necessity for us to obey our unspiritual selves or to live unspiritual lives. ¹³ If you do live in that way, you are doomed to die; but if by the Spirit you put an end to the misdeeds of the body you will live. Rom. 8:12-13, JB²³

¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Gal. 5:19-21, NASV

²² *But now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit that you have leads to sanctification, and its end is eternal life. Rom. 6:22, NAB*

³¹ *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne,*

³² *and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*

³³ *He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

³⁴ *Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

³⁵ *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me,*

³⁶ *naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’*

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

³⁹ When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

⁴⁰ And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

⁴¹ Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

⁴³ a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'

⁴⁴ Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?'

⁴⁵ He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31-46, NAB

You will know them by what they do. Thorn bushes do not bear grapes, and briars do not bear figs.
Matt. 7:16, Good News Translation

They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. Titus 1:16, NRSV²⁴

In Summary: For Catholics there is no contradiction between believing and doing. A faith that has no works is dead, whereas saving faith is active and alive. A faith without corresponding actions is demons’ faith (Jas. 2:19). Salvation that is by grace is through a

faith that is alive (Eph. 2:8, 10). We are discussing here “saving faith,” not “works of the law” which were condemned in Canon 1 & 111 by the Council of Trent and also by the Apostle Paul and Peter (Gal. 2:16; Acts 15:7-11).

The Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper

Most Protestant worship services revolve around the pastor and his sermon. For Catholics their worship services revolve around receiving Christ and nourishing their souls through the Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion. The word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving” and is truly the worship of God.

Jesus said, “*unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you*” (Jn. 6:53). Catholic Christians accept this challenging teaching at its face

value, and believe that when they receive the bread and wine of the Eucharist, they are actually partaking in the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

This understanding is also affirmed by the apostle Paul, who wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake in the one bread” (I Cor. 10:16-17). Further on in this letter, after restating Jesus’ “words of institution”, Paul concludes: ²⁷ *Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.* ²⁸ *A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup.* ²⁹ *For anyone who eats*

and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

The most straightforward interpretation of these passages is that Paul considered the Eucharistic bread and wine to be literally the body and blood of Christ.

How did the early Christians understand the Bible's teaching about the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper? To summarize a vast amount of literature, nearly every notable writing of the early Church that mentions the Eucharist either implies or directly states that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper is truly the body and blood of Jesus Christ. These include the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (c. A.D. 110), Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150), Irenaeus of Lyon (c. A.D. 185), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. A.D. 250), St. Augustine (c. A.D. 400), and many others. I can find no reliable early

Christian writer who did not believe that the bread and wine of the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ. Hence, the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist as truly the body and blood of Christ is supported by both the New Testament and the primitive Church.

Thus, Catholics speak of the “real presence” of Jesus Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. If they are his body and blood, Jesus is “really present” there. This presence of Jesus can only be accepted in faith, since the outward appearance of the bread and wine does not change. Thus, in Eucharistic adoration Catholics do not worship a wafer of bread, but worship Jesus Christ, true God, whom they discern by faith in Jesus’ words to be really present in the Eucharist.

Catholic Christians consider the second part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, as a representation or perpetuation of Jesus’

one sacrifice of himself on Calvary for the sins of all people. However, the term “sacrifice of the Mass” is confusing and even scandalous to many Christians. The letter to the Hebrews states clearly that Jesus Christ has been sacrificed *once* for our sins and now stands interceding for us in the presence of the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24-28).

The Catholic Church has never taught that in the Mass that Jesus is “re-sacrificed” or offered up to suffer again. The Catholic Mass is called a sacrifice because it “re-presents,” “re-enacts,” or presents once again before us, the one sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. Jesus Christ was sacrificed once, but God, in his mercy, makes present to us once again the sacrifice of Christ through the Mass so that we human beings can enter more deeply into the reality and significance of the sacrifice. Catholic Christians believe that Jesus is not

“re-sacrificed” in the Mass, but that his one sacrifice at Calvary is made real and present to us by God, so that we enter into this central mystery of our faith in a new way. The apostle Paul said, “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes*” (1 Cor. 11:26).²⁵

If a Catholic is in the state of serious sin, he should not receive the Lord’s body and blood. To knowingly do so would entail sacrilege.²⁶

Baptism

Many Evangelical Protestants invite people to receive God’s forgiveness through a personal decision to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. This invitation usually results in the reciting of a prayer in which one commits oneself to Jesus Christ. The popularity of evangelist Billy Graham has brought much

recognition to this form of evangelism. As we study the Scripture we see Christ's invitation includes much more: discipleship (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 11:26), personal faith (Rom. 10:14; Jn. 3:16; Mk. 2:3-5), calling on the Name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13; Luke 18:13-14), repentance towards God (Acts 3:19), water baptism (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21), confession of sins (1 John 1:9), the anointing of oil (Jas. 5:14-15), forgiving others (Matt. 6:14), etc. All of these are modes and expressions in which one may find the grace of God's forgiveness.

For Catholics and some Protestants, baptism is normally the first step in accepting God's salvation.

+ Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21

The Greek word for "baptize" is *baptizo* and means "the introduction or placing of a

person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition.” This is its usage in Romans, chapter 6. God invites the sinner into a vital union with Jesus Christ, in order that the power of the sinful nature will be broken and the divine nature will be implanted through their identification with Christ (Wuest Word Studies in Greek, p. 97). Vine’s Greek Lexicon states, “The phrase in Matthew 28:19, ‘baptizing them into the Name’ would indicate that the baptized person was closely bound to, or became the property of, the one into whose Name he was baptized.”

Baptism places one into Christ (Rom. 6:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:11-13). Baptism is always believers’ baptism, for faith is always exercised whether by parents (infant baptism) or by the person individually (adult baptism).

The New Testament Sacrament of Baptism replaced the Old Testament ordinance of circumcision (Col. 2:11-12). In the days before Christ, circumcision was performed predominately upon infants – eight day old boys. The ritual of circumcision was performed on a baby who could not have had even the slightest understanding of the covenant his parents were making with God on his behalf. Even so, the covenant was valid in the eyes of God. So, too, when Catholic parents bring their infant son or daughter to be baptized, they are covenanting with God on behalf of that child, and the grace that comes from the sacrament is infused into that child’s soul in spite of his unawareness of what is happening.²⁷

The “repent” and “believe” command is binding on all who have the ability to do so (adult baptism) (Acts 2:38; Mk. 16:15-16).

The most common question about infant baptism is “How can a parent or guardian’s faith substitute for the faith of the child?”

It is noteworthy that Jesus did not pose this question. When Jairus asked Jesus to raise his young daughter from the dead (Mk. 5:22-23, 35-43) or another father asked Jesus to expel a demon from his son (Mk. 9:17-27), Jesus acted with power because of *their* faith, not the faith of their children. How much more would Jesus desire to free children from an even worse bondage, the bondage of sin and eternal death, in response to the faith of their parents and of the whole Christian community? The Catholic Church believes that Jesus does respond in this way when infants and children are baptized.

But the Catholic Church also teaches that the parents of the baptized child must commit themselves to providing an

environment for the child to grow in faith. This will prepare the child to make a personal faith commitment to Jesus Christ upon reaching maturity. This personal faith commitment is absolutely necessary. One way that the Catholic Church stresses the necessity of this personal commitment to the Lord is by calling upon each person to renew their baptismal covenant each year at the Easter liturgy.

During the first 1500 years of Christianity, not one important Church leader, nor even any major heretical group, denied the validity of infant baptism. Many outstanding leaders of the early Church testify, either directly or indirectly, to the Church's practice of infant baptism. These leaders include Polycarp of Smyrna (A.D. 69-155), Justin Martyr (died c. A.D. 165), Cyprian of Carthage (died A.D. 258), Irenaeus of Lyons (c. A.D. 120-202), Origen (A.D. 185-254), Hippolytus of

Rome (A.D. 170-236), and others. St. Augustine explained the importance of baptizing infants for the remission (forgiveness) of original sin. Apparently, the Holy Spirit led Christians to baptize their children because they desired their salvation.

Many passages in the Acts of the Apostles emphasize that baptism was the first step in becoming a Christian in the early Church (see Acts 2:36-41; Acts 8:12; Acts 8:26-39; Acts 10:43-48; Acts 16:14-15. Acts 16:30-34; Acts 22:16).

Two effects of baptism that Peter mentioned are the forgiveness of sins and reception of the Holy Spirit. Also, the baptized person enters into the fellowship of the body of Christ, the Church (See Acts 2:41-42).²⁸

Are Catholics “Born Again” and “Spirit –filled?”

Many Christians today say that a person must be “born again,” “Spirit-filled,” or “baptized in the Holy Spirit” in order to be saved. Catholics and other Christians often ask what the Catholic Church teaches about this because these terms do not originate in Catholic teaching and theology. The simple answer is that the Catholic Church basically affirms the reality and truth of what these phrases point to. Catholics believe that a person who has been validly baptized has been “born of water and the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5). Catholics also believe that this grace only begins the work or mission of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Catholics do not believe that a one-time experience secures salvation. Paul stresses that it is those who *live* according

to the Spirit of God who secure salvation. “ ... *for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*” (Rom. 8:13-14).²⁹ This is not perfection, but a new direction that is followed throughout life. In his letter to the church in Galatia, the apostle Paul indicates that the mark of truly “born again” Christians is that they do not live according to “the flesh” (wordly desires that are opposed to God’s will), but according to the Spirit (Gal. 5:24). So as to avoid any confusion, Paul lists the “works of the flesh” that lead to death (Gal. 5:19-21), and contrasts them with the “fruit of the Spirit” that leads to life (Gal. 5:22-25). Jesus stressed that Christians must persevere in the faith (Matt. 24:13; Jas. 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; 2 Pet. 3:17). “[8] *For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but*

he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. [9] And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:8-9).

Thus, Catholics believe the person who is truly “born again” and “Spirit-filled” is not necessarily the one who has had an extraordinary *experience* of the Holy Spirit at some point (though this is a blessing), but the person who lives and “walks” by the Holy Spirit; who has put to death the “works of the flesh” and manifest the “fruit of the Spirit.” This is what it means to be a “new creation” in Christ Jesus – “the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Catholic tradition has always emphasized that the Holy Spirit clearly manifests his presence in the life of the truly “born again” Christian through the fruit of the Spirit, and a life that is faithful to God.³⁰

Baptized with the Holy Spirit

Catholics have often associated being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” with water baptism. However, the Catholic Church has never claimed that the work of the Holy Spirit is limited exclusively to baptism. Again, the Bible, especially The Acts of the Apostles, implies that it may be necessary to pray that a baptized person receive a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic understanding of the sacrament of confirmation affirms this. Confirmation is the Catholic Church’s official prayer for the Holy Spirit to empower a person to spread the gospel, to live a fervent Christian life, and to share more fully in the mission and ministry of the Church.

The Catholic Church also teaches that the Spirit of God can enter a person’s life in a new way if the person simply prays for this with

expectant faith. The receiving of the Holy Spirit in a new way, is usually as a result of earnest, expectant prayer, in what many Christians today call being “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Nothing in official Catholic teaching denies the possibility or the importance of this. On the contrary, some of the greatest Catholic saints have urged Christians to continually ask God for a fuller outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Both Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II have endorsed and warmly supported the various movements in the Catholic Church that have focused on the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in lives of Christians.³¹

Many of these Catholics have been regularly receiving the sacraments and striving to live uprightly, but they experience “something missing” – the desire and need for more of God and his Holy Spirit. Hence, they are right to pray to God and seek the prayers

of others to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit.” They open themselves to receive the full range of gifts (charisms) and other manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Certainly it is a biblical truth that the Holy Spirit’s mission is not to exalt himself but to direct us to Jesus Christ and through him to the Father.

The Acts of the Apostles records numerous instances in which the Holy Spirit entered the lives of believers in a new way, and testified to his presence in them by spiritual gifts, boldness in witnessing to Jesus Christ and his gospel, guidance for their lives, and even healings and miracles. All this is portrayed in the New Testament as the normal experience of Christians. Many Christians today (including Catholic Christians) are rediscovering this normal Christian experience when they earnestly pray to God to send his

Spirit into their lives in a new way and expect that he will do this. They pray to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit,” and in this prayer open themselves to whatever gifts or manifestations of the Spirit that God wishes to give them.

The first sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence is that he leads people to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord and to commit their lives to him.

The second sign, is that the Holy Spirit empowers people to lead holy lives – to manifest the “fruit of the Spirit” and to put to death the “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:25).

Third, the Holy Spirit reveals his presence through the gifts he bestows on us.³²

The Second Vatican Council, insisted that *these charismatic gifts are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the church.*³³

Miracles

Unlike many Protestant churches who believe that miracles ceased with the completion of the New Testament canon, Catholics have always believed that miracles have never ceased. Hundreds of the saints (St. Francis, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Clare, St. Anthony, St. John of the Cross, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Elizabeth, St. Vincent Ferrer, etc.) have been estimated to have performed through Christ at least 40,000 miracles.³⁴

+ Heb. 2:3-4; Mk. 9:39; Mk. 16:17; Acts 2:22; Acts 6:8; Acts 8:6, 13; Acts 15:12; Acts 19:11; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28; Gal. 3:5.

Mary and the Saints

When Catholics speak to Mary and the other Saints in Heaven they are not bypassing Christ, whom they acknowledge as the sole Mediator between God and man. They are going to Christ through Mary and the other Saints. They are asking Mary and other Saints to *intercede* for them before the throne of Christ in Heaven (just as you would ask a friend to agree with you in prayer here on earth). James says, “*For the continual prayer of a just man availeth much*” (James 5:16). Paul asked fellow Christians to intercede for him: “*Brethren, pray for us*” (2 Thess. 3:1). And again: “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the charity of the Holy Ghost, that you help me in your prayers for me to God*” (Rom. 15:30).³⁵

Catholics believe Saints in Heaven will intercede for us before the throne of Christ if petitioned. There are the records in primitive Christianity that the first Christians eagerly sought their intercession.³⁵

Catholics believe that if we ask our fellow saints on earth to pray for us, we should also be able to ask for prayers from the saints who are already united with the Lord.

Jesus spoke of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being alive to God (Mk. 12:26-27) and he himself conversed with Elijah and Moses on the mountain (Matt. 17:3). The book of Revelation frequently mentions the twenty-four elders (representing all the saints in heaven) gathered around God's throne engaged in exuberant praise. In one passage, Revelation 5:8, John mentions that these elders possess "*golden bowls full of incense, which are prayers of the saints.*" The New

Testament usage of “saint” usually refers to Jesus’ disciples on earth, so here we have a beautiful image of intercession: the twenty-four elders (the “saints” in heaven) offering the prayers of the “saints” on earth before the throne of God like sweet-smelling incense. Christ, which includes his Body (in heaven and earth) ever liveth to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).

Catholics venerate and honor saints but do not worship them. The saints in heaven can pray or intercede to God (through Jesus) for us, and we can ask them to pray for us, just as we can ask a fellow Christian to pray for us. The intercession of the saints and of Mary on our behalf does not detract from the unique mediation of Jesus, any more than asking someone here on earth to pray for us would.

However, worship is due only to God. All Christian prayer, whether the prayer of the

saints in heaven or of Mary, the mother of the Lord, or of us saints here on earth, is directed to the Father through Jesus Christ, who is the “*one mediator between God and men*” (1 Tim. 2:5).³⁶

Why Catholics Confess their Sins to Priests

To the Apostles, Christ said: “*Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*” (Jn. 20:23). When Catholics confess their sins to a priest they are, in reality, confessing their sins to God, for God hears their Confessions and it is He who, in the final analysis, does the forgiving. If their Confessions are not sincere, their sins are not forgiven.

Furthermore, Catholics DO confess their sins directly to God as Protestants do: Catholics are taught to ask God to forgive their

sins each day (Matt. 6:12). Catholics are also taught to repent and pray if they should have the misfortune to commit a serious sin (called a “mortal sin” by Catholics, 1 Jn. 5:16-17).³⁷

Statues and Relics

Catholics do not worship pictures and statues of great saints and holy people any more than they worship pictures of departed family members on the walls and tables in their homes. There have been exaggerations and abuses of these things among Catholics, but, when used properly, these images lead Catholics to praise God more (not less) because they reflect the richness and diversity of God’s work through his people.

Relics are remains of saints such as bones, ashes, clothing or even writings or belongings left behind. Miracles were

frequently reported by those who came in contact with these remains. This should not be surprising. After all, a man was raised from the dead after touching Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:21), people had been healed by touching Jesus' garments (Mk. 5:25-34), and the Acts of the Apostles reported that healings and exorcisms occurred when people touched handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched Paul's body and were brought to the sick (Acts 19:11-12). Of course, there is a danger of lapsing into superstition here. Catholics must avoid it, remembering that it is God's power alone that brings about all healings and miracles (Catholic & Christian, p.170-171).

Do Catholics Believe the Pope is Infallible?

The doctrine of papal Infallibility does not mean the Pope is always right in all his

personal teachings. His infallibility is limited to – the Faith of Jesus Christ. He must be speaking *ex cathedra* ... that is “from the Chair” of Peter, or in other words, *officially*, as head of the entire Church. The decision must be for the *whole* Church. It must be on a matter of faith or morals. The Pope must have the intention of making a final decision on a teaching of faith or morals, so that it is to be held by all the faithful. It must be interpretive, not originative; *the Pope has no authority to originate new doctrine*. Infallibility is limited strictly to doctrinal interpretation, and it is used quite rarely. *His ex cathedra decisions are not the result of his own private deliberations*. They are the result of many years – sometime hundreds of years - of consultation with the other bishops and theologians of the Church. He is, in effect, voicing the belief of the *whole* Church. No Pope has ever used his infallibility

to change, add, or subtract any Christian teaching. Protestant denominations, on the other hand, freely change their doctrines.³⁸

The Holy Bible

The very first Christian Bible was produced by the Catholic Church – compiled by Catholic scholars of the 2nd and 3rd century and approved for general Christian use by the Catholic Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397). The very first printed Bible was produced under the auspices of the Catholic Church – printed by the Catholic inventor of the printing press, Johannes Gutenberg. And the very first Bible with chapters and numbered verses was produced by the Catholic Church – the work of Stephen Langton, Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury.³⁹

Biblical scholars tell us that the last book of the New Testament was not written until the end of the 1st century A.D., that is, until around the year 100 A.D. This fact would leave roughly a 65 – year gap between Our Lord’s Ascension into Heaven and the completion of the Bible as we know it. “Who or what served as the final, infallible authority during that time?”

Since the Church existed for a time without the entire written Word of God, there would have been situations and doctrinal issues which could not have been resolved with finality until all of the New Testament books were complete.

This issue is of particular importance, as the first several decades of the Church’s existence were tumultuous. Persecutions had already begun, believers were being martyred, the new Faith was struggling to grow, and

some false teachings had already appeared (Gal. 1:6-9). If the Bible was the Christian's only rule of faith, and since the Bible was not fully written – much less settled in terms of its canon, how did the early Church possibly deal with doctrinal questions without an authority on how to proceed?

The Catholic position says that the teaching authority of the Church is the direct ultimate authority – deriving her authority from Christ and her teaching from Scripture and Tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the Gospel began as an *oral* tradition (Lk. 1:1-4; Rom. 10:17). It was not until later on that some of the oral tradition was committed to writing – becoming Sacred Scripture – and it was later still that these writings were declared to be inspired and authoritative.

The Bible was not available to individual believers until the 15th century. The Bible was not able to be mass-produced and readily available to individual believers until the advent of the printing press (15th century). Even then, it would have taken quite some time for large numbers of Bibles to be printed and disseminated to the general population. Until the mid-19th century (mid-1800s) books were still very expensive and most people could not read until quite recently with the advent of universal education.

The predicament caused by this state of affairs is that millions upon millions of Christians who lived prior to the 20th century would have been left without a final authority, left to flounder spiritually, unless by chance they had access to a hand-copied Bible and could read.

God did not abandon His people and make them rely upon the invention of the printing press (and the ability to read) to be the means whereby they would come to a saving knowledge of His Son. Instead, he gave us the Church, to provide us with the means to be informed of the Good News of the Gospel of Christ.

Protestant denominations claim to have the Bible as its only guide. They claim that they differ only in non-essentials. The fact is that many Protestants cannot agree on major doctrinal issues such as salvation, and justification – to name a few.

Most Protestant denominations teach that Jesus Christ is only symbolically present in the Eucharist, while other (such as Lutherans and Episcopalians) believe the he is literally present, at least to some extent. Some denominations teach that once you are “saved”

you can never lose your salvation, while others believe it is possible for a true Christian to sin gravely and cease being “saved.” And some denominations teach that justification involves the Christian’s being merely *declared* righteous, while others teach that the Christian must also grow in holiness and actually *become* righteous.

Our Lord categorically never intended for His followers to be as fragmented, disunited, and chaotic, as it has been in the history of Protestantism. Each Protestant has become his own final authority – or, if you will, his own “pope.”

Being a Protestant for many years, one thing that troubled me was the failure of the Protestants to embrace all the Scriptures. Although they claim that they do, in reality they don’t. I can totally relate to David B. Currie as he states in his book “*Born Fundamentalist*,

Born Again Catholic”, “Since attending (a Protestant) seminary I had looked for, but had never been able to find, a systematic theology that dealt with all the data of Scripture. Every single one had fudged certain verses or ignored others in order to make its system work. This had bothered me immensely.” If you investigate the Catholic Church you will find they embrace all the Scriptures.

By some estimates there are approximately 34,000 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.⁴⁰

Doesn't the Bible declare the Church to be the pillar and ground of the truth by which the gates of hell will not prevail against it? (1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 16:18). Each time we appeal to the Bible as our authority we must remember that the Catholic Church, led by the Holy Spirit, chose which books are part of inspired Scripture.

Tradition and Scripture

Biblical scholars tell us that the last book of the New Testament was not written until the end of the 1st century A.D., that is, until around the year 100 A.D. This fact would leave roughly a 65-year gap between our Lord's Ascension into Heaven and the completion of the Bible as we know it. Therefore, "Who or what served as the final, infallible authority during that time?" It was the *oral* tradition

received from Christ and given to the Apostles that gave the directive at that time (See Acts 2:42; Acts 15:1-2, 6).

From the beginning of Christianity the teaching of Jesus' apostles was the most reliable source of the truth about him. At first, the teaching of the apostles was passed on by word of mouth from believer to believer, community to community. There was no need to write anything down since people were used to remembering important stories accurately. Besides, Jesus' followers expected that he might return at any moment to establish the fullness of his kingdom. This passing on of the Good News of Jesus by word of mouth is called *oral* tradition. "Tradition" is a term that simply means something that is handed over, passed on, or transmitted from one person or group to another.

The preaching of the Gospel began as *oral* tradition. It was not until later on that some of the *oral* tradition was committed to writing – becoming Sacred Scripture (see Lk. 1:1-4) - and it was later still that these writings were declared to be inspired and authoritative. The authoritative list of exactly which books are part of inspired Scripture was not settled and fixed until the end of the 4th century. Until that time, there was much disagreement over which Biblical writings were considered inspired and Apostolic in origin. The Biblical canon varied from place to place: some lists contained books that were later defined as non-canonical, while other lists failed to include books which were later defined as canonical (i.e. inspired to be Scripture). It was not until the Synod of Rome (382) and the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) that we find a definitive list of canonical books being drawn up, and each

of these Councils (Catholic Councils) acknowledged the very same list of books. From this point on, there is in practice no dispute about the canon of the Bible (the only exception being Protestant Reformers who entered the scene 11 centuries later).

How can one know with certainty which books belong in the Bible? The unadulterated fact is that one *cannot* know unless there is an authority outside the Bible which can tell him. It was the Catholic Church which eventually identified and ratified the canon of the Bible naming the very same list of 73 books that had been included in the 4th century. The fact is that the Church came before the Bible, and not the other way around. It was the Church, in effect, which wrote the New Testament under the inspiration of Almighty God. Since the Church produced the Scriptures, it is quite biblical, logical and reasonable to say that the

Church has authority to apply and interpret them correctly.

A good illustration of this point is the case of Arius, the 4th century priest who declared that the Son of God was a creature and was not equal with the Father (a doctrine that is still taught by Jehovah's Witnesses today). A Council, under the authority of the Pope (325 A.D.), declared Arius' teachings to be heretical and made some decisive declarations about the person of Christ, and it did so based on what Sacred Tradition had to say regarding the Scripture verses in question. A majority of bishops at that time fell for the Arian heresy. It was the teaching authority of the Catholic Church which stepped in and declared Arius was wrong.

The Catholic Church holds that the immediate or direct *rule of faith* is the teaching

of the Church; the Church in turn takes her teaching from divine Revelation – both the *written Word*, called Sacred Scripture, and the oral or *unwritten Word*, known as “Tradition.” The teaching authority of the Catholic Church (headed by the Pope), although not itself a source of divine Revelation, nevertheless has a God-given mission to teach and interpret both Scripture and Tradition. One must differentiate between Tradition (upper-case “T”) that is part of divine Revelation, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Church traditions (lower-case “t”) that, although good, have developed in the Church later and are not part of the Deposit of Faith. An example of something that is part of Tradition would be Baptism; an example of a Church tradition would be the Church’s calendar of feast days of Saints. Anything that is part of Tradition is of divine origin and hence

unchangeable, while Church traditions are changeable by the Church.

The Catholic Church teaches that Sacred Tradition contains nothing whatsoever that is contrary to the Bible. For some doctrines, the Church draws more from Tradition for its understanding, but even those doctrines are often implied or hinted at in Sacred Scripture.⁴¹

Sacred Tradition - *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

74 – “*God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations.*”

78 - *“This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. The Church transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes. The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition.”*⁴²

The Apostle Paul exhorted the church in Thessalonica to *“Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours”* (2 Thess. 2:15, NAB).

The Antichrist and the End of Days

As an Evangelical Protestant I was taught that at the end of time the Antichrist would arise from the Catholic Church. I

was somewhat surprised that Catholics are looking for the same Antichrist to appear on the scene but not from the Catholic Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, approved and promulgated by Pope John Paul II, states: *“Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the ‘mystery of iniquity’ in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.”*

Catholics Ask Forgiveness For Their Sins

When you think about it, a priest has given up a lot to serve Christ and the Church. Usually 6-8 years of study to prepare for the priesthood. They have given up family, marriage, sexual relations, most of the normal comforts of life to serve the Lord.

Humans fail and from time to time it is true also of the priesthood. The so-called worldly Popes of the Middle Ages 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.

The priest sexual abuse scandals in the United States in the early twenty-first century, actually involved only about one half of one percent of active priests. This only confirms the point that the sins of Catholics and Catholic leaders should not destroy the credibility and honor of the Church, nor shake the faith of the Church. Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), and priests and bishops are among them! It also confirms the Church's teaching regarding the urgency of ongoing repentance and conversion (*conversion* means a turning to God).⁴⁴

COMMON PRAYERS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

OUR FATHER

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us,

and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the

power and the glory are yours, now and

forever. Amen. **Matthew 6:9-13.**

HAIL MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed are thou among women, and blessed

is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary,

mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. **Luke 1:28; Luke 1:42.**

THE APOSTLE'S CREED

(Latin *credo* means “I believe.” A Christian statement of belief attributed to the 12 apostles. This creed comes from the first century A.D.).

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED

(The *Nicene Creed* was the fruit of the Council of Nicea, which convened in A.D. 325 to condemn the heresy of Arianism and to affirm the doctrine of the divinity of Christ).

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, Of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, The only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father.

Through Him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation, He came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, died and was buried. On the third day, He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son, He is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness

of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

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