

## A Study of the Catholic Church

Two things especially should be considered when studying Catholicism:

1. Is the material current? If it is not **after Vatican II** (1962-1965) then care should be taken that the positions stated have not been changed. If it has been changed, then that in and of itself may be of value, but one should avoid having to be corrected by the one he is studying with as to the current validity of a doctrine.
2. Does the material set forth the official teaching of the Catholic Church? One does not have to read very long to find claims made about Catholicism that are unsubstantiated. This is totally unnecessary, for there is plenty which Catholicism does officially set forth that is erroneous. You should check the material to see if it is from an official Catholic source. One of the most obvious indicators of this is the "Imprimatur." The word is Latin for "let it be written" thus indicating sanction or approval by the Catholic Church. Catholic works will usually have something akin to "Imprimatur: Joseph Cardinal Ritter, Archbishop of St. Louis" either preceding or following the work. This simply means that the work is officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church.

### I. ORIGIN OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. The Bible is plain on the origin of the church. It began on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 (cf. Matthew 16:16-18; Acts 2:37-47). From that time forward in the Bible record the church is spoken of as in existence. It is important to note the Biblical admonition against changing the "creed" of the church—the Word of God (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19). Thus we boldly speak of restoring New Testament Christianity—the church as it was built in the first century and intended by God to remain.
2. The Catholic Church likewise claims its origin in the first century.

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be nearly two millenia old. It is a faith with Jewish roots, Jesus as its founder, Peter as its first leader and the present pope as Peter's successor in our day. (What It Means 12)

History does not bear such out though. The Catholic Church as a distinctive body cannot be historically traced beyond approximately A.D. 606. One needs only note

(as we will do in this study) the Catholic Church's authority, organization, worship, etc. Then seek to find such in the Bible record. Contrary though to the Divine mandate against changing the church the Catholic Church has shown through its history and writings that change is an integral part of the Church and its authority.

Finally we must remember that the Church is a mystery—it is continually developing, unfolding, growing in its understanding of itself. It is not just a static institution. . . . This is why there will always be changes in the Church, new insight from various sources into its basic truths, new ways of expressing our beliefs . . . (Christ Among Us 420)

3. While the claim can be made as to a first century origin it cannot be borne out either by Biblical examination or by history.

## **II. AUTHORITY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

1. One of the first things one must establish in any type of study is that of authority. The Bible makes plain that it is the singular authority which can be used if we are to be pleasing to God (Matthew 15:9; Galatians 1:6-9; Colossians 3:17).
2. The Catholic Church has its own Bible, The New American Bible. Included in it are seven books (Tobit, Judith, 1&2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch) not recognized as being part of the inspired Word by other religious groups. They originated in the 1st to 3rd century B.C. They were never recognized by the Jews as part of the scriptures. They were never quoted by Jesus. They were not recognized by the early church as authoritative nor inspired. In A.D. 1546 the Catholic Church, in the council of Trent declared the books to be canonical.
3. In spite of having its own Bible, the Catholic Church makes plain its refusal to abide by the singular standard or authority God has given. In Christ Among Us, under the heading "The Church's Tradition Interprets the Bible" we read:

Christ did not leave his followers a religion in the sense of a "package" of clear, well-defined truths. His teaching was to be completed by the Holy Spirit and undergo development in the course of centuries. . . . The Holy Spirit guides each generation to add its own understanding to them [Christ's teachings-JHW]. (163)

While the bible contains God's original revelation, the bible cannot be understood alone. The Church's living tradition is necessary to understand it. (165)

None of the biblical authors had any idea of writing a book which would itself give us all of God's revelation. (165)

- 4. If one wonders why the Catholic Church would go to such lengths to deny the all sufficiency of the Bible, they reveal their motivation themselves:

So we cannot arbitrarily use biblical texts to "prove" a teaching apart from the Church's tradition. Through the centuries men have tried to "prove" almost everything by quoting biblical texts without regard for the living tradition of the Church. . . . "Sacred tradition and sacred scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God committed to the Church" (Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 9) (165)

- 5. When the Catholic Church convinces its adherents that the Bible cannot be used to determine teaching nor practice, then it is no hard task to change the teachings as needed. SOME of the Church's "traditions" by which scripture is interpreted and their approximate dates of origin:

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Prayers for the dead . . . . .  | A.D. 300  |
| Making the sign of the cross . . . . .                                  | A.D. 300  |
| Veneration of angels and dead saints, use of images . . . . .           | A.D. 375  |
| Beginning of the exaltation of Mary "Mother of God" first applied . . . | A.D. 431  |
| Priests dress differently than laymen . . . . .                         | A.D. 500  |
| Extreme Unction . . . . .   | A.D. 526  |
| Prayers to Mary and dead saints . . . . .                               | A.D. 600  |
| Title of pope, or universal bishop . . . . .                            | A.D. 606  |
| Kissing the pope's foot . . . . .                                       | A.D. 709  |
| Holy Water . . . . .  | A.D. 850  |
| Canonization of dead saints . . . . .                                   | A.D. 995  |
| Celibacy of the priesthood . . . . .                                    | A.D. 1079 |
| Rosary, invented by Peter the Hermit . . . . .                          | A.D. 1090 |
| Sale of indulgences . . . . .   | A.D. 1190 |
| Transubstantiation . . . . .  | A.D. 1215 |
| Confession to priests . . . . .   | A.D. 1215 |
| Purgatory proclaimed as a dogma . . . . .                               | A.D. 1439 |

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|--|-----------|
| The Seven Sacraments affirmed . . . . .                        | A.D. 1439 |
| Tradition declared equal in authority with the Bible . . . . . | A.D. 1546 |
| Apocryphal books added to the Bible . . . . .                  | A.D. 1546 |
| Immaculate conception of Mary . . . . .                        | A.D. 1854 |
| Infallibility of the pope . . . . .                            | A.D. 1870 |
| Assumption of Mary . . . . .                                   | A.D. 1950 |

**III. The Organization of the Catholic Church**

(While the Catholic Church upholds the idea of the Catholic Church being the same church begun by Christ in the first century, a study of the papacy can leave little doubt as to the origin of the Catholic Church)

1. The Biblical organization of the church is relatively simple:
  - (1) Christ is head over all things, thus no "headquarters" aside from heaven (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:29-36; Ephesians 1:22-23)
  - (2) There are those whose are to be in oversight of a congregation (elders, bishops, pastors -- Acts 20:17,28), if there are those found that meet the qualifications (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9)
  - (3) There are those who are to serve as deacons if there are those found who meet the qualifications (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
  - (4) cf. Philippians 1:1
2. The organization of the Catholic Church is much different. They admit that the organization found in the Catholic Church is not of Bible origin:

...there is evidence from other [extra Biblical sources - JHW] sources that the offices of bishop, priest, and deacon began very early to take on the characteristics we see in them today. (We Believe 118)

  - (1) The Papacy  
The United States has a president. College football teams choose captains. Civic groups elect chairpersons. Societies and organizations of every kind have leaders who are a sign of unity and purpose for each group. So it should not be surprising that the Catholic Church has a leader who is a sign of unity and purpose for its members. We call our leader the pope, a word which can be traced back to the Latin papa and the Greek pappas, both of

which mean "father."

The successor of Peter is not just the pope but our Holy Father: priest, teacher, leader, and sign of unity. (We Believe 123, 125)

The title "pope" means "father of fathers" and was once used for the heads of all important dioceses; it came to be used solely of the Roman bishop in the 11th century. The popes have rejected other titles such as "universal bishop" which might seem to derogate from the position of their brother bishops. "Pontif," which has been sometimes used, comes from Imperial Rome and means "bridge builder" or priest connecting God and man. (Christ Among Us 127-8)

(2) The Cardinals

Some bishops and archbishops are named cardinals by the pope. Usually these are leaders who are in charge of important dioceses or who have high administrative positions in the Church. There are about one hundred cardinals from all over the world. They meet in Rome after the death of a pope to elect a new one. (ibid 123)

(3) The Archbishops

On the regional level dioceses are grouped together around an archdiocese, which is presided over by an archbishop. (ibid 123)

(4) The Bishops

Bishops are the leaders of church communities called dioceses, which vary in size and in number of parishes (local churches) and members. The word came from the Greek episkopos, meaning "overseer." Bishops are the successors of the apostles, and have the "fullness" of the priesthood. By A.D. 100, bishops were overseeing local churches .... Bishops carry out many of the same duties as priests but on a diocesan scale ... The church of the bishop is called a cathedral, and his office the chancery. (ibid 122)

(5) Priests

The Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, saw the Eucharist as an offering of bread and wine, which became the body and blood of the great King and Priest, Jesus Christ. It has been the function of priests to continue this sacrificial mission of Jesus and to continue as well his prophetic mission of teaching and his kingly mission of teaching.

Priests continue the priestly ministry of Christ. They celebrate the sacraments

and lead others in worship. ... Priests baptize, confirm, hear confessions, witness marriages, anoint the sick, and bury the dead. . . . Priests are usually addressed as "Father." (ibid 119-121)

(6) Deacons

... the role of deacon disappeared except as the final step to the priesthood. It was revived as a ministry after Vatican II. Deacons, both married and single, assist the priest at the altar during Mass, read the gospel, preach, baptize, witness marriages, conduct funerals, and perform many other functions important to the life of the Church. (Ibid 119)

3. The authority for the beginning of the organization of the Catholic Church, the papacy, is supposedly found in several passages.

(1) Matthew 16:13-19

A. The Catholic Church believes that the papacy finds its origin in the mind of Christ and in the New Testament Church. One day Jesus asked the apostles, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ... Peter replied, "you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus was pleased with this answer, acknowledging that it had been inspired by God and that it indicated a special role for Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:13-19) (We Believe 123-124)

A rock is strong, permanent, the base which holds a structure together; to the Jews of Christ's time the rock was Mount Sion which according to legend shut off the underworld and therefore provided protection against the devil's powers. The keys given to Peter symbolize authority, power (cf. Isaiah 22,22; Revelation 1,18). To bind and loose means a law-making power. (Christ Among Us 133)

B. Some considerations of the passage and their assertions.

- a. Concerning the "rock." While it is clear that a rock serves the purpose for which they say, an examination of the passages shows there are two rocks under consideration. The word for "Peter" is the Greek word PETROS (Πέτρος) while the word for the "rock" upon which the church was to be built is PETRA (πέτρα). In the Greek language the endings have great significance. In this word they denote the difference between a "mass of rock [PETROS], as distinct from petros, a detached stone or boulder, or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved" (Vines Expository Dictionary 974). Thus the "rock" upon which the church was built cannot refer to Peter. Also 1 Corinthians 3:11 makes it clear that Christ is the one upon whom the church is built.
- b. Concerning the power to "bond and loose." A study of the phrase "whatsoever though shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ..." will show that the things "bound" and "loosed" have already been bound or loosed." Jesus was affirming that the apostles would be inspired of God and speak those things which God had decreed. Such concurs clearly with the promise of Jesus that they would be guided by the Holy Spirit into "all truth" (John 16:13; 14:26) and the actions on Pentecost when they spoke "as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). The affirmation of the Catholic church also conveniently overlooks the fact that in Matthew 18:18 the same promise is given to all the apostles.

(2) Luke 22:32 and John 21:15-17

- A. Luke describes Christ at the last supper telling Peter to strengthen the other apostles, and this despite the fact that Peter will deny him ... (Luke 21, 32). John portrays Christ after his resurrection making Peter the shepherd or leader over his flock, his followers: Read John 21, 15-17. (Christ Among Us 133)
- B. The command to "strengthen" (from the Greek word STERIZO - translated usually as "establish") is used of Paul (Romans 1:11), Timothy (1 Thessalonians 3:2), what Christians do for themselves (1 Thessalonians 3:13; James 5:8), to the church as a whole (Revelation 3:2). Does that mean each of these is the leader or "pope?" As to Peter being the "shepherd or leader over his flock" by virtue of being told to

feed them, what of the charge given to every elder in the Lord's body (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2).

- (3) ... Peter is also pictured as consulting the others and being sent out by them. Paul, on starting his ministry, visited Jerusalem to speak to Peter (Galatians 1, 18). (Christ Among Us 133)

One only need to read the text to see the fallacy of this. (Also Galatians 2:14).

4. An examination of the Biblical "proofs" for the papacy are clearly not supportive of the Catholic Church's position. They themselves admit there is nothing like the papacy of today found in God's Word: "Thus Peter's leadership, while evident, is nothing like the authority the popes would exercise several centuries later" (Christ Among Us 134).

#### **IV. Other Matters To Consider**

1. The Sacraments

A sacrament may be defined as a sign from Christ by which he comes to us and give us his life and love. The sign may be clearly expressed in Scripture, like the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Or it may be the result of the Church's experience and reflection, such as the exchange of vows in Matrimony. [emphasis mine - JHW] (We Believe 61)

These sacraments are "meetings with Christ," where he does today what he did in Palestine two thousand years ago. He gives eternal life through Baptism as he offered it to his contemporaries (John 17:2). He pours out the Holy Spirit in Confirmation as he sent the Spirit upon the apostles (Acts 2). He gives us himself in the Eucharist as he gave the apostles his body and blood at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-28). He forgives us through Penance as he forgave the sinful woman who wept at his feet (Luke 7:36-50). Through Matrimony he brings God's grace to husband and wife as he did at the wedding feast of Cana (John 2:1-11). He sends others to teach, lead, and sanctify in Holy Orders as he sent the apostles (Matthew 28:18-20). Through the Anointing he heals as he cured the sick who came to him, or he leads the dying to eternal life as he promised heaven to the thief on the cross (Mark 1:32-34; Luke 23:43). (Ibid 61)

2. Mary



- (1) "There are five traditional Catholic beliefs about Mary:  
that she is the Mother of God;  
that she was Ever-Virgin;  
that she was immaculately conceived;  
that she was assumed into Heaven and crowned Queen of Heaven and Earth;  
that she is Mediatrix of all Graces, Co-Redemptrix and Advocate for the People of God.

The first four of these have been defined as dogmas of the faith (ie, they have been infallibly defined by the Pope or by an Ecumenical Council). There is considerable impetus at the moment for the Holy Father to make an ex cathedra declaration of the infallible truth of the fifth and final Marian dogma." (Catholic Pages)

- (1) The rosary is a devotion meaningful to some Catholics, during which one meditates on the important events—or mysteries—in the life of Christ as experienced by Mary. There are fifteen mysteries divided into three sets of five each. During each meditation a decade (one Our Father and ten "Hail Marys") is said. [emphasis mine - JHW] (Christ Among Us 72)

The rosary is the devotion by which we meditate on Christ's life and ask Mary to bring us closer to him. During the months of May and October devotions to Mary are held in some places. [emphasis mine - JHW] (Christ Among Us 395)

- (2) Mary is particularly the model of our worship. We could say she is in the first pew, leading us by her example, directing us to her Son and our Brother . . . .. The devotion of the rosary has had a tremendous influence in helping hundreds of millions of Christians to pray. . . . The shrines of Mary have also had a great influence, particularly places like Lourdes in southern France where each year several million people come to strengthen their faith in the supernatural ... [emphasis mine - JHW] (Christ Among Us 394)

- (3) Mary (according to Catholic tradition) . . .

- A. Was conceived sinless (immaculate conception) (Christ Among Us 88)
- B. Was perpetually a virgin (Christ Among Us 64) (cf. Matthew 12:46-47; 13:55-56)
- C. Was taken to heaven like her son (assumption) (Christ Among Us 391)
- D. Is prayed to as an intercessor (Christ Among Us 392-3, 395) (Matthew

6:9)

3. Birth Control --

Contraceptive birth control as a means of preventing the generation of children is considered wrong in the Church's teaching. . . . One of the great purposes of the sex act is to bring into existence new human beings who will live forever; to interfere with this act unnaturally is to prevent life in an act meant to give life.(Christ Among Us 352)

### Sources Cited

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Another excellent source of materials one can write and ask for free materials is:

Catholic Information Service  
Knights of Columbus  
P.O. Box 1971  
New Haven, CN 06521